

BAPTIZED IN THE SAME WATER
February 19, 2012 John 1: 19-34
The Church of the Covenant

In seminary we were taught to baptize babies in a sound proof studio that both recorded what went on but also could pipe music and sound into the room. So we would stand up there with a Betsey-Wetsy doll and attempt to say all of the words of the baptism liturgy by memory, while balancing Betsey and trying our best to get a good grade. About every third seminarian would get Betsey loaded up with water –merely a distraction, merely a minor distraction. But about every third seminarian would get the sound of a crying baby piped into the sound studio –louder and louder and louder until finally all one could hear was the ear-piercing, screeching sounds of an infant in mortal fear for their lives. Some would quite literally “drop the baby”. In 25 years I’ve never dropped the baby; I’ve developed “The Broberg relaxation technique” –if the parents relax and the preacher relaxes, the baby will relax also and, i.e., there will be no crying. The baby gets their “vibes” from their parents. People make fun of me after a while, the bachelor preacher who is so good with little babies. But, of course, I remember the last baby I baptized in my church in Virginia, after an unbroken string of more than 150 successful, non-crying baptisms, what would you guess happened that day, when baptizing my last baby? Yep, a crying Betsey-Wetsy all over again!

The water we use today comes from the Jordan River in Israel. My Great Aunt and Uncle retrieved it from the river in 1953 and brought it home to have me baptized in water from the River Jordan, the same river in which Jesus was baptized some 2,000 years ago by John the Baptist. And over the years I have doled it out sparingly and about once a year we again baptize with water from the River Jordan. So the water I baptize your child with today is the same water the I was baptized with and is the same water that Jesus was baptized with, and now for the confusing part, and is the same water that EVERY believer in every time and place has been baptized with. Now wait a minute, Stu, how can this be? Everyone is not baptized quite literally with water from the River Jordan, right?

It has been said, that you cannot ever step in the same place in a river at the same spot twice. Exactly. The water moves from that spot, flows ever downward, some is evaporated, some makes it to the sea, where it is evaporated up into the clouds, where it falls to earth again as rain, where it trickles down into little rivulets, that then become streams, that then become rivers, that then make their way to the sea again, over and over and over again, ad infinitum. But it is NEVER the same water. Never. And in the act of baptism there is nothing “magical” about the water; it is not “HOLY Water”; it is not somehow special; most of it is always just tap water. The water doesn’t convey to the child what God conveys *spiritually* to the child. *The water is an outward sign of an inward reality*; God conveys something spiritually to the heart of a little one; the Holy Spirit comes; the Holy Spirit takes up residency in this little heart; the Holy Spirit, always in scripture metaphorically represented by WATER, by *LIVING* Water, comes today and comes to this little child and comes into the life of this family. But the water is not what is special; what is special is the Holy Spirit...the water is not special; JESUS is special...

The story we just read of Jesus’ baptism at the hand of John the Baptist is instructive. First to note is the incredible humility of Jesus, the Son of God, submitting Himself to baptism, submitting Himself to be baptized by John the Baptist. Second, John the Baptist is clear; he baptizes with water. *“I baptize with water”, he says (John 1: 26)* But there is someone coming who will baptize with something else, *“the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” (John 1: 27)* See, nothing special about the person placing the water on the head of baby, either. Third, John the Baptist baptizes with water in order to prepare the way for the One who is to come who will baptize with something else; the first act of

baptism is the confession of our sinful nature, our repentance of all we have said and done, and a spiritual turning to God in Jesus Christ. *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* No repentance, no Jesus; no Jesus, no Holy Spirit; no Holy Spirit, no baptism. See how it all fits together? John the Baptist then sees the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven *“and remain on Him (Jesus)”* (v. 32) Lastly, John notes that GOD had spoken to him and in charging him to baptize with water had literally said to him: *“He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”* (John 1: 33)

See, the reason why in the end we ARE INDEED baptized with the same water is that the water that we are really baptized in is not physical water it is the spiritual water of the Holy Spirit. The preacher, no more than John the Baptist, can baptize in anything more than literal, physical water, ah, but it is Jesus Christ Himself who comes today, in all His fullness and in all His power, to baptize with a SPIRITUAL water, to baptize with the Holy Spirit. That is the self-same “Living Water” in which every true believer is baptized; that is the water in which this little one is baptized today. Jesus Christ Himself comes this day to baptize with the same water that HE was baptized in, at the River Jordan 2,000 years ago, the waters of the Spirit of the Living God!

Are you washed, are you baptized, are you filled with the Living Water of the Holy Spirit of the Living God today?????????

Something on the inside of a parent’s heart that wants their little one to be baptized and to be placed into the arms of Jesus and to be filled with the presence of the Living God is here today. Something on the inside of your heart has brought you here today. Something nudging you to act and to be here; Something moving in your heart and in your faith and in your life has brought you here today. Same Spirit nudging your heart and drawing you here today, same Spirit filling this sanctuary with the living presence of Jesus Christ, same Spirit filling your child’s little heart with the Living Presence of Jesus, same Spirit that descended upon Jesus is the same Spirit that is descending upon us today. Same Spirit. Same Savior. Same spiritual water.

In the questions we ask parents I had always thought the second one was the “blow off line”. The first question, “Do you believe Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior”, means that the same Savior is here; Jesus is present and it is HE who is baptizing today. The third question, “Do you intend your child to be His disciple?”, means that you choose to model strong active discipleship by your active participation in the life of the church, means that just like Betsey-Wetsy it is true that children pick up the truest “vibes” from their parents, if it is not really important to you then it will not really be important to them, don’t take them to Sunday School, don’t take them to church, unless you take yourself there also. The last question is like the third question, “Will you be a faithful member of the church giving of yourself in every way?” Faith is caught not taught; your child will only get to heaven if you have set your heart to get there as well. Here is the repentance that precedes baptism; here is where we all realize we have fallen short of the glory of God; here is how ineffective we admit we have been in modeling the faith and sharing the nudge of the Holy Spirit with others, the same Spirit that has brought us all here today. Lord, for all I could have done and should have done over the years, I now repent, I admit how unworthy I truly am. Just remember that your child always gets their spiritual “vibes” from you...

But it is the second question, the question I always used to sort of blow off and think unimportant, that is now the one I believe most important. The question is simple; it is this: *“Do you trust in Him?”* Do you trust in Jesus? Do you trust Jesus with this most important person in your entire life? Do you believe that indeed the Holy Spirit has come this day and taken up residency in the heart of your child?

Do you believe that Jesus will walk with your child every step along the way in life? Do you believe that when in adolescence your child wants nothing to do with you? Do you believe that when your child somehow falls away from faith? When they stubbornly refuse to go to church and you drag them there anyway? Do you believe that you can trust in Jesus during the hard days as well as in the sunny days? Do you believe that Jesus' presence through the baptism and seal of the Holy Spirit is able to walk with your child even better than you can through everything in this life? Do you believe that Jesus can get your child to faith and to new life and finally to heaven? Do you TRUST in HIM??????

Do you really, really TRUST in Him that much??????????

Then you believe and know that indeed this day the Spirit has descended as a dove, that the Holy Spirit has come in all its fullness, and that Jesus has claimed your child to be His own. It is not what I do, says John the Baptist, it is what JESUS does that's important.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come and claim this little one, fill their heart with love and faith and the Holy Spirit, never let them go, and lead them from this day onward, every step of their way, through life and to glory, in Jesus' name we ask it.

When you **trust** in HIM then it is indeed the same water and same Spirit that baptizes today as baptized Jesus there by the River Jordan, there by the hand of an unworthy preacher, there some 2,000 years ago... 'Cause He can do what we cannot do...

And amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!