

Baptism

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Preacher: Rev. Jeff Simpson

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, and welcome to Church of the Advent. My name's Jeff, and I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new or this is your first time, thanks for joining us.

I would love to meet you at the front steps after the service. Before we get to the sermon this morning, we just want to create some space briefly this morning to pray about the events of last weekend, specifically the attempted assassination of President Trump.

We didn't get, because of the timing, we didn't get a chance to pray about this in the worship service last Sunday, but we wanted to pray about it this Sunday. Of course, we always grieve and lament any act of violence that brings about injury or loss of life of people made in the image of God.

But the reason why we want to pray about it this morning is we recognize that many of us might be feeling a particular kind of anxiety or dread with this particular event, wondering about what comes next in our national life, knowing that this was committed against a president and all of the implications that follow that in the midst of what is already an extremely heated and divided political moment in our country.

So we just want to take a couple moments and do what the church does best and take a couple minutes to pray for our nation, for our church, and our world. So join me in prayer together. Amen. Lord, first we grieve and lament this act of violence and the loss of life and injury that occurred.

[1 : 3 1] Every person is first and foremost made in your image, regardless of their title or position. And we mourn whenever that image is threatened, and we know that you mourn as well. We pray for comfort for those grieving the loss of a loved one, and we pray for healing for all those who were injured in body or mind, including President Trump.

We pray for our country as a whole, that you would preserve our common life together as a nation and sustain us in peace. We pray that this act would not beget any further acts of violence, but rather we pray that it would lead to a humbler discourse in our politics, a more gracious tone in our debates, and a more generous spirit toward those with whom we disagree.

We pray this especially for those who speak publicly or hold elected office, including President Biden, Mayor Bowser, the D.C. City Council, and all those who represent us and serve us in public office.

Give them courage to live lives of moral character, even when it's inconvenient. And give them wisdom to lead in the complexity of this moment in ways that bear the fruit of unity, peace, virtue, and the common good.

We also pray for our church using the words of the Book of Common Prayer. Increase, O God, the spirit of neighborliness among us, that in peril we may uphold one another, in suffering tend towards one another, and in homelessness, loneliness, or exile befriend one another.

[3 : 1 3] Grant us brave and enduring hearts that we may strengthen one another until the disciplines and testing of these days are ended and you again give peace in our time through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen. And I can think of few things to transition to and to talk about next than baptism. In a moment, we are gonna have the joy and opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of baptism and to hear the story of a changed life, of God's power to save and to redeem and to transform.

And so, we thought that on a day when we're celebrating a baptism, we would reflect together for a few minutes on God's word and what God's word has to teach us about baptism and what it means for our lives.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a Christian or you haven't been baptized or you're still trying to figure out what you believe. I hope that this can bring some clarity this morning on what baptism is and what it means and what is offered to you should you choose to respond to the good news about Jesus Christ.

Maybe perhaps you've been following Jesus for a long time. I hope that this is an encouraging reminder about the significance of your own baptism and how it continues to shape our discipleship to Jesus and our life together as a church.

[4 : 40] So we're gonna briefly look at a couple things about baptism. We're gonna look at the story of baptism and we're gonna look at the meaning of baptism and look at what baptism is and why we practice it.

So first of all, the story of baptism. The story of baptism. The easiest answer to why we do this thing called baptism is that because Jesus commanded us to.

In Matthew chapter 28, the Great Commission, he says, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And on one hand, this would be sufficient. If the Lord Jesus has commanded us to do something, then we should obey and follow him. But of course, Jesus is not speaking in a vacuum here.

There's a background. There's a greater story behind this command and there is a greater story behind baptism. And it's the story of God's covenant relationship with his people.

[5 : 47] God's covenant relationship with his people. A covenant is that special kind of relationship where people willingly bond themselves to one another, bind themselves to one another in a sacred bond of love and trust and obedience.

And the thing about covenant relationships is that covenant relationships always involve a covenant promise and a covenant sign. A covenant promise and a covenant sign. So marriage, for example, is an example of a kind of human covenant relationship.

There are covenant promises, the vows that husband and wife make to each other and then there's a covenant sign, normally rings. And we see throughout scripture that the story of redemption is a covenantal story.

And you can only really understand baptism through that covenantal story. It's a story that begins all the way back with Abraham in the book of Genesis. After Genesis 3, when things go wrong with the rebellion and the fall of humanity in the garden, there's this question looming in the background from Genesis 3 to Genesis 12.

And it's this, how is God going to restore his creation back to its original goodness? And so, beginning in Genesis chapter 12 through Genesis chapter 17, God begins to answer this question in the story of Abraham.

[7 : 11] And he begins to answer this question by giving Abraham a promise, a covenant, and a covenant sign. A promise, a covenant, and a covenant sign.

In Genesis 12, God gives Abraham a gracious promise that through Abraham's family, he is going to bless all the nations of the earth. That though all people are alienated from God and that creation is fallen and broken, God is committed to bringing his salvation and his blessing to every nation, all of creation.

It's a gracious promise. And then in Genesis chapter 15, God makes a covenant that confirms this promise to Abraham. And if you have a chance to read it later this afternoon, Genesis 15, or if you've read it before, is this strange to us, kind of strange to modern ears, but this beautiful story where God tells Abraham, not only am I going to keep my side of the covenant relationship, but I'm also going to keep your side of the covenant relationship too because one day you and your descendants are going to break my covenant, but I have already made a provision for that.

So God makes a covenant that confirms his promise to Abraham. And then in Genesis 17, which was our Old Testament passage that we read earlier, God then gives Abraham a sign of this covenant, and it's the sign of circumcision, a sign that involves the shedding of blood.

And God says to Abraham, I want you and your family to remember the promise and the covenant that I made to you. And so I'm going to give you a sign that you belong to me, that you're my people, and all of my promises I have made to you are yours if you embrace me, if you embrace this covenant relationship from the heart.

[9 : 02] And those who receive that covenant sign, Abraham received it, most of them received it before they expressed covenant faith.

And this is a key detail that we'll come back later to in the sermon. But to summarize, in the story of Abraham, we see that God's story of redemption, to redeem a fallen world, to restore his creation, unfolds in the story of Abraham through a promise, a covenant, and a covenant sign.

And this is crucial to unlocking the meaning of the whole Old Testament because these realities defined and shaped the story and identity and the mission of the people of Israel.

And it's also crucial to unlocking the meaning of baptism because it's this story that's in the background in Matthew 28 when Jesus gives us the sacrament of baptism in the Great Commission.

Jesus says, I am the author and the hero in the fulfillment of this story. All the promises to Abraham and the people of Israel, the covenant that confirms those promises and the sign of that covenant are all fulfilled in me.

[10 : 14] In Jesus, a new and better covenant is here. And it's a covenant that both fulfills and expands God's covenant with Abraham.

As Galatians chapter 3 tells us, we, all of the nations of the earth, we are the nations and we are grafted into Abraham's story and Abraham's covenant through Jesus.

And because now the new covenant in Christ is greater and more expansive and the promises are greater and more expansive, we therefore now have a new and greater covenant sign.

And Colossians 2, 11 through 12 shows us that baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the new covenant. Listen to Colossians 2, 11 through 12.

In him, that is Jesus, you were circumcised, but not with a circumcision made, with a circumcision made without hands, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism.

[11 : 21] Paul links circumcision to baptism because both circumcision and baptism point to the same reality. The everlasting covenant that God makes with his people through the blood of Christ shed on the cross.

And because the blood of Christ shed on the cross fulfilled the sign of circumcision, in the new covenant we now have the sign of water. Water, something that pictures washing and cleansing and rebirth and renewal.

And so this is the story of baptism. It's the story of a gracious God who makes a promise to bless all the nations of the earth and who confirms those promises by dwelling in covenant relationship with his people and who gives them a sign that they belong to him and that his promises belong to them.

And so in light of this covenant story, a question comes to the surface and it's this. In light of this covenant story, what are the specific promises that the new covenant sign of baptism signifies?

What is the meaning of baptism in particular? That's what we're going to look at next, the meaning of baptism. At its core, baptism is about union with Christ.

[12 : 43] Union with Christ. That's what we see clearly in places like Romans 6, 3 through 5. Romans 6, 3 through 5 says, don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will also certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. In baptism, the Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus in a way that his story becomes our story.

His life becomes our life. His death becomes our death. His resurrection becomes our resurrection.

His ascension becomes our ascension. And someone who has helped me understand this well is not a pastor or a theologian or a scholar, but an NBA player by the name of Jack Haley.

[13 : 57] Jack Haley is an NBA player that probably most of you have never heard of. Almost no one has ever heard of him except if you follow the NBA closely. Jack Haley was a member of the 1996 Chicago Bulls.

And the whole 1996 season, Jack Haley played a grand total of seven minutes the whole season. The whole season he had five points, two rebounds, zero assists, zero steals, zero blocks.

His season performance was negligible. But amazingly, at the end of the 1996 season, Jack Haley got a championship ring. Why?

Well, if you know anything about the 1996 Chicago Bulls, you know that although they did have a good team, there is really only one reason why Jack Haley got a championship ring.

And that reason is Michael Jordan. And I can almost guarantee you have heard of that name. Michael Jordan. Jordan's exemplary, unrivaled, stellar performance on the basketball court carried the Bulls not to just one championship in 1996, but to six NBA titles.

[15 : 26] And even though Jack Haley contributed nothing to the Bulls' performance that year, he was united to, he was grafted into, he was credited with the story and the performance of an amazing player named Michael Jordan.

Our baptism is Jesus Christ placing his championship ring on our finger. It's the covenant sign that the Holy Spirit takes the performance of Jesus Christ and applies it to us.

And all of the covenant promises made to us in baptism flow from our union with Christ. Listen to some of the promises that the New Testament tell us that we receive in baptism through union with Christ.

We are washed and cleansed and forgiven from sin. we are justified before God and have peace with him.

We are adopted as God's beloved sons and daughters. We are joined to God's new covenant family, the church. We are made members of his own body, his bride, his beloved.

[16 : 42] We are filled and sealed with the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and gives us new hearts. And we are given an inheritance of eternal life and the resurrection of the body.

And as a result, what the Father says over his Son, Jesus Christ, at his baptism in the gospel reading that we read earlier, Matthew 3, the same thing that the Father says over the Son in his baptism, he says over you and me.

This is my beloved Son. This is my beloved daughter with whom I am well pleased.

The meaning of baptism is nothing less than all the spiritual blessings that we have through union with Christ by faith and all of the privileges that flow from it. We are grafted into the championship story of Jesus.

And from all of this, I just want to draw out two brief implications about baptism, about the story and the meaning of baptism. I want to talk about two implications. One, about baptism as a sacrament and about how baptism impacts our discipleship.

[18 : 09] So first of all, what do we mean when we say that baptism is a sacrament? There's a lot of things we could say.

Sacramental theology is a deep well. But one of the things we mean when we call baptism a sacrament is related to the covenantal story of Scripture.

The covenantal story of Scripture shows us that as a sacrament, baptism is not primarily about the promises that we make to God, but about the promises that God makes to us.

Let me repeat that. As a sacrament, baptism is not primarily about the promises that we make to God, it's about the promises that God makes to us. Just like with Israel and circumcision under the old covenant, baptism as the new covenant sign is about a gracious covenant-keeping God who always fulfills the promises that he makes to his people.

Yes, we respond in faith and trust and obedience. But the covenant sign is not primarily about our faith or our trust or our obedience, but the eternal unfailing promises of God offer to us by grace.

[19 : 24] Baptism isn't about the quality of our faith. Baptism is about the quality of the object of our faith. And this is why baptism is something that is done to us.

We are baptized by someone else. This is also why the great tradition of the Christian church, Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic churches have baptized children of believers who have not yet expressed covenant faith.

If you're like me, maybe you grew up in a tradition or you're familiar with a tradition that did not practice infant baptism. And so it might be, if you're like me, this might be something new or unfamiliar or unusual to you.

But what I hope you've seen this morning is that the covenantal story of Scripture shows us that the promises of God always precede our faith. Whether the covenant sign is applied to us as a three-month-old or as a 30-year-old.

Yes, we respond in faith and obedience, but our faith is always a response to God's gracious initiative that goes before us even before we've been born. In fact, it's God's gracious initiative that makes our faith even a possibility.

[20 : 39] That's part of what we mean when we talk about baptism as a sacrament. It's not primarily about the promises that we make to God, but about the promises that he makes to us.

Secondly, if Christian discipleship had a theme song, the title of that theme song would be Remember Your Baptism.

Remember Your Baptism. What's striking about Paul's letters in the New Testament is how often he repeats the same message to different churches who are dealing with all different kinds of issues and problems.

He says, remember who you are in Christ because of your baptism. You've been buried with Christ in his death. You've been raised with him in his resurrection. You've been seated with him in his ascension. Now, therefore, be who you are in him.

Live out of that identity. Obey God's commands out of that identity. Fight sin out of that identity. Worship relates to your brothers and sisters in Christ out of that identity.

[21 : 47] And I think even as we think about what we prayed about at the beginning of the sermon, about the anxiety around the political division in our country, I can think of few things more needed in the church today than the need to remember our baptism.

what if Christians in the church today, particularly the American church, what if we related to one another more on the basis of our baptism than on the basis of our politics?

What if our church family, the church of the advent, related, what if we related to one another more on the basis of our baptism than on the basis of our opinions on any number of issues?

It would change the church and it might even possibly change things outside the church. Remember your baptism is the theme song of the entire Christian life.

If you are struggling with sin, remember your baptism. If you feel tempted towards gossip and slander, remember your baptism.

[23 : 06] If you feel yourself isolating from Christian community and corporate worship, remember your baptism. If you're in the middle of a conflict with another brother or sister in Christ or wrestling with unforgiveness, remember your baptism.

If you're doubting your faith, if you're overwhelmed with shame and self-criticism, remember your baptism. Why? Because in baptism we trust in a gracious covenant-keeping God who promises us every spiritual blessing through union with Christ, who confirms those promises with his own blood shed for us and who gives us a covenant sign that we belong to him and he will never let us go.

In our baptism we have the assurance that our faith is not rooted in the promises that we make to God but in the promises that he makes to us not in the quality of our faith but in the quality of the object of our faith.

And in baptism we see that being grafted into the story of Jesus means that we are joined to his body, to this covenant community, to this new family called the church.

And that regardless of our politics or our opinions or our race or class, who we are as disciples and who we are as a church is that we are his.

[24 : 34] We are his sons and daughters. We are his bride. We are his body. We are dead and buried in him. We are raised in him, ascended in him, seated in him, hidden in him.

We are secure in him. We are forgiven in him. We are accepted in him.

We are known in him. We are beloved in him, in Christ. Let's pray together.