

How was your 2024? Was it a year of glory, peace, and joy? A year you would like to live over and over again? Or was 2024 a year that crashed and burned - a year you never want to live over, a year you want to forget? Or someplace in between? I imagine, for most of us, it was all the above. Some days great, some days awful, and some days in-between.

I'm hoping for better in 2025. Better than crash and burn, better than in-between. I'm hoping for better. Not just better health, not just better, more fun. I'm wanting to be better. To be more purposeful. To be more useful. To be smarter, wiser. To be kinder, gentler, more patient. To be stronger, more insistent and persistent. To be more godly. To be better.

That could sound so like Peter - **“Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being [useless] in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** “This year I want to be better” - that can sound like Peter. Or it can sound like New Year's blather - blah, blah, blah - “This year I resolve to be better, blah, blah, blah.”

Which will it be? I could dip and drown us in Ecclesiastes - **“there is nothing new under the sun”**: no matter what I do, under the sun, my life will splat. I could leave you there in

Ecclesiastes. Or I can baptize you as the new you God is promising that you are. I almost said, "I can baptize you to be the new you God is making you to be." That would be true, but God has better for us than "he is making us to be new." God is already promising us, me and you, that "you are new." And that's the way I get to think and live; that's the way you get to think and live - like we are new. Why? Because God has made us new.

Why? It's not because we've done such a great job of thinking and living new in the past. Paul writes: "**At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.**" Time and again that was me in 2024. And my 2024 crash and burn days, so many of them can be directly related to my sin and guilt days. So many, but not all. Some of my crash and burn days are just because God loves me; he knows what I need. But even though I have crashed and burned so many times, even though I have taken my eyes and ears off Jesus and his Word and have steered myself toward sin and hell, that's right, even though I have steered myself into crashing and burning, what has our God done for me, for us? "**He saved us.**" Why? Not because we steered ourselves back to him. Not because we put the brake on our sin. Not because of righteous things we have done, not because of the good we have done, but he saved us because of his great mercy.

He saved us. Don't you love the "d" at the end of that word "saved"? Paul doesn't just say that God will save us or might save us or will save us if, if, if No, Paul says that God

saved us. How? Paul could take us to the cross, like he did just verses earlier, pointing to Jesus **“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”**

That’s cross-talk - Jesus gave himself, he paid the price to set us free from all wickedness; he gave himself, shedding his blood to purify us to be his own people. You get to see yourself set free from sin and washed clean for God. Why? Because Jesus gave himself for you - that’s cross-talk.

But now in our lesson, when Paul explains how God saved us, Paul doesn’t take us to the cross (he’s already done that); instead Paul points us to Jesus and takes us to our baptism. God saved us with a washing, not just a washing away of our sin, but a washing of rebirth, a washing that makes us born again. You know how you step into the shower feeling dirty and tired and old, and then step out of the shower feeling clean and new? Baptism is so much more than that. In baptism, we don’t just have water washing us clean, soothing us, invigorating us. In baptism, we have the Holy Spirit of God at work - washing us, soothing us, invigorating us. In baptism, we have the Spirit of God making us new.

In baptism, through water and the Word - **“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”** you have the Promise of the Father’s love, the Promise of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Promise of the Holy Spirit - all applied to you. Through water and the Word, we are loved by God, washed clean and spotless for God, made alive with God as the children of God.

That's sounds so good, doesn't it? Clean and spotless, alive and new as the children of God! But Paul doesn't stop there. Paul can't stop there. I need more. Paul can tell me I'm alive and new, but in my heart and my head, it's too easy for me to see and hear my old self and what my old self has going here and now. And what my old self has going here and now isn't clean or right. So what does Paul do? He points me away from myself; he points me away from my here and now. He points us to Jesus and what Jesus did for us long ago, and then he points us to heaven. I'm not just washed and made new; in Jesus, we are justified by God's grace. This is a done deal - in God's courtroom, God has declared you to be right, right by him and right for heaven. And that's not all. This is a done deal - God has written you into his will to be an heir of eternal life.

The blessings of baptism aren't just a one-day truth, only true on the day you are baptized. The blessings of baptism aren't just a "while the water is wet" truth, only true for as long as the water is still wet on you, or as long as you live clean and think clean. No, Paul doesn't talk about your new birth and new life as a past and gone truth. Paul talks about your new birth and new life as a past, present, and future truth. On Sunday, March 24, 1963, I was washed clean for God; that means on every day, I am washed clean for God. On Sunday, March 24, 1963, I was made new and alive with God; that means on every day I am reborn, every day made new and alive with God. On Sunday, March 24, 1963, I was declared to be an heir of eternal life; that means on every day I am declared to be an heir of eternal life. That's not just a Kevin Raddatz truth; that's God's truth. God's truth for me and God's truth for you. On the day you were baptized, and

every day after, you have God calling you clean, God calling you new, God calling you his forever.

I don't always feel that way. I don't always think or act that way. Here's a neat thing about God's truth. My feeling, my thinking, doesn't determine God's truth. God's Truth is true no matter how I think or feel. So now I have a choice. Every morning I have a choice. Every moment I have a choice. Do I go with my old thinking, my old feeling, my old way of living? Or do I think and live according to God's Truth - I am washed and clean, new and alive with God - today and forever!

It's so easy to go back to the old, so easy to go with our feeling and thinking. So Paul doesn't stop. Instead he passes the baton. **“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”** With an exclamation point - **“this is a trustworthy saying,”** Paul passes the baton to Titus - **“I want you to stress these things.”** And the Holy Spirit passes the baton to us: **“This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things.”**

Why? Not just so we can feel better about ourselves. But so this year and this day we can live better for God and better for each other.

How will you stress these things for your self? How will you pass the baton for those around you? That's what we're talking about in Family Bible Hour today. Amen.

January 4 & 5, 2025

GATHERING RITE FOR BAPTISM


IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... people bounce back and forth between a New Start and the same old same-old.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we get to start new as we are made new in Baptism!

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.



Bap - tized in - to your name most ho - ly, O Fa - ther,
I claim a place, though weak and low - ly, A - mong your



Son, and Ho - ly Ghost,
saints, your cho - sen host, Bur - ied with Christ and dead to



sin. Your Spir - it now shall live with - in.

M: I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

C: **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 3:5,6)**

M: Surely we were sinful at birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us. (Psalm 51:5)

C: **But we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)**

My lov - ing Fa - ther, there you took me To be hence -
 My faith - ful Sav - ior, there you let me The fruit of

forth your child and heir.
 all your sor - rows share. O Ho - ly Spir - it, com - fort

me When threat - 'ning clouds a - round I see.

M: As baptized children of God, we confess our sins.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

My faith - ful God, you fail me nev - er; Your pro - mise
 Oh, cast me not a - way for - ev - er If words and

sure - ly will en - dure.
 deeds be - come im - pure. Have mer - cy when I come de -

filed; For - give, lift up, re - store your child.

M: Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**



All that I am and love most dear - ly— Re - ceive it
Let me con - fess my faith sin - cere - ly, And help me
all, O Lord, from me.
your own child to be! Let noth - ing that I am or
own Serve an - y will but yours a - lone.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Keep us who are baptized into Christ faithful in our calling as your children, and make us heirs with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Titus 3:4–7

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.
Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 3:15–17, 21, 22

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It”

Hymn 679

God’s own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!
He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price.
Do I need earth’s treasures many? I have one worth more than any
that brought me salvation free, lasting to eternity!

Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ!
I have comfort even stronger: Jesus’ cleansing sacrifice.
Should a guilty conscience seize me since my baptism did release me
in a dear forgiving flood, sprinkling me with Jesus’ blood?

Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ!
Drop your ugly accusation, I am not so soon enticed.
Now that to the font I've traveled, all your might has come unraveled,
and, against your tyranny, God, my Lord, unites with me!

Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ!
When I die, I leave all sadness to inherit paradise!
Though I lie in dust and ashes faith's assurance brightly flashes:
Baptism has the strength divine to make life immortal mine.

There is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure!
Open-eyed my grave is staring: even there I'll sleep secure.
Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising:
I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise!

SERMON

Titus 3:4-7

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Loving Father, lead us to rejoice every day as we remember our baptism. When we sin against you and others, give us power to put down the sinful nature that was drowned in the water of baptism. When we doubt your love, cause us to remember the promises you made when we came to the font. When we feel weak, invigorate us with the hope of eternal life that awaits all who are baptized and believe in you.

Keep in your care all our brothers and sisters who are suffering in sickness, enduring hardship, carrying a cross, or mourning the death of someone they love. Let them also return to their baptism and remember the blessings you bestowed on them through the water and the Word. Keep all the baptized in your care and bring us at last to the river of the water of life in heaven.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people. Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

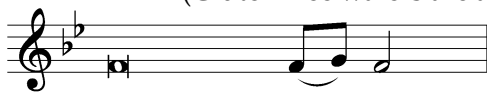
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



The Lord be with you.



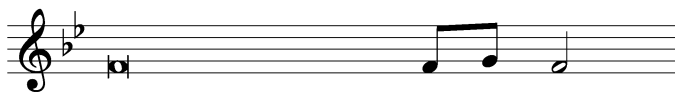
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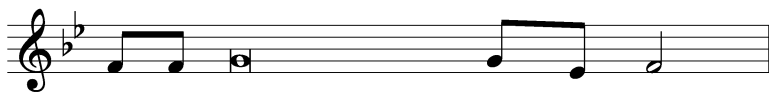
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whose wonderful and mysterious birth you have opened our eyes to the glory of your grace and renewed in our hearts the fervor of your love. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"To Jordan's River Came Our Lord"

Hymn 377

To Jordan's river came our Lord, the Christ, whom heav'nly hosts adored,
the God from God, the Light from Light,
the Lord of glory, pow'r, and might.

The Savior came to be baptized — the Son of God in flesh disguised —
to stand beneath the Father's will and all his promises fulfill.

As Jesus in the Jordan stood and John baptized the Lamb of God,
the Holy Spirit, heav'nly dove, descended on him from above.

Then from God's throne with thund'rous sound
came God's own voice with words profound:
"This is my Son," was his decree, "the one I love, who pleases me."

The Father's word, the Spirit's flight anointed Christ in glorious sight
as God's own choice, from Adam's fall to save the world and free us all.

Now rise, faint hearts: be resolute! This man is Christ, our substitute!
He was baptized in Jordan's stream, proclaimed Redeemer, Lord supreme.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you
have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith,
nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“All Who Believe and Are Baptized”

Hymn 692

All who believe and are baptized shall see the Lord’s salvation;
baptized into the death of Christ, they are a new creation;
through Christ’s redemption they shall stand
among the glorious, heav’nly band of ev’ry tribe and nation.

With one accord, O God, we pray: grant us your Holy Spirit;
help us in our infirmity through Jesus’ blood and merit;
grant us to grow in grace each day
that by this sacrament we may eternal life inherit.

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