

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

My kids call it “magic water” You’ve often seen it used to do great and wonderful things. In any sport, be it football or hockey, or real football (better known as soccer), when a player is injured, lying on the field or on the ice, the trainer or the coach runs to their aid with the magic water bottle. A quick swallow of this water or a little splash of it on the injury seems to bring a marvellous cure that is effective in about 85% of all cases.

Now we know there is nothing miraculous about the water. It may be that the player just needed a second to catch their breath. Maybe the cool water does help take the sting from an injured muscle. Maybe it is just a ploy to change the rhythm of the game. Regardless of exactly what it is, it never ceases to amaze us how this water bottle can make such a difference to an injured athlete.

There are other so-called ‘miracle waters’ in our world. Ponce de Leon, the Spanish explorer, travelled to Florida, looking for the fountain of youth. In Lourdes, France, there is a shrine to “Our Lady of Lourdes”, a term for the virgin Mary, who apparently appeared 18 times to a 14 year-old peasant girl in a small grotto. It has become a major pilgrimage site for many people, and there are those who claim that the water from the grotto has healing powers. There was a pool in Bethesda during Jesus’ time, that supposedly had curative powers. An unreliable verse that is not found in the best and oldest manuscripts of the gospel of John notes that by the pool *“lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.”* (John 5:3-4, NKJV) There is no evidence in Scripture that this happened, and we believe that this verse was added much later. Years ago televangelist Peter Popoff offered people the opportunity to receive a bottle of Miracle Spring Water: use it properly, and you will receive a blessing that he referred to as a “divine transfer” Popoff boasted that if you listen to him as God’s prophet, and use the water as he tells you, then you will experience God’s power. But there is nothing more miraculous about the water Popoff sells unwitting people than the water the sports trainer uses on the soccer field.

People keep looking for miracle waters. Many of the mineral waters of our world are said to work miracles; at the very least they may work health benefits as you drink them. There is no denying that water itself is essential to life. We can live without food for a much longer time than we can live without water. Water is important, but it can’t give new hair growth; it can’t make a person young again; it cannot heal diseases. It doesn’t matter if that water comes from a special grotto in Lourdes or from some deep underground spring. It doesn’t make any difference if it comes from the Jordan River, or if it has been blessed by some great religious leader. Water is just water.

But if you take ordinary water by the command of God and add to it the Word and promise of God you do have miracle water. You have the water of Holy Baptism. Luther says: *How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: “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. This is a trustworthy saying.”* (Titus 3:5-8 - ESV) (SC, Baptism 3)

We remember the miracle of our Baptism today, as we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. We rejoice that God, in His grace, has given us this ‘miracle water’ that brings a complete and total change to our lives. Paul tells us in our text: ***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*** Through God’s grace and power at work in Baptism we die to sin so that we may live to God, honouring Him in our lives and enjoying the blessings of our fellowship in Him and with Him, both now and forever.

There is a great miracle that takes place when water is used in accordance with the command and promise of God. Yet, how sad it is that we often fail to see that miracle at work for us and in us. I love the words of that simple baptismal hymn by Jaroslav Vajda, “*See This Wonder in the Making*”. I have often used this hymn at Baptisms: *See this wonder in the making; God Himself this child is taking as a lamb safe in His keeping, His to be, awake or sleeping. Miracle each time it happens, as the door to heaven opens and the Father beams, “Beloved, Heir of gifts a king would covet!”* (LSB 593, st. 1-2) We sing about a great miracle, but do we always realize what has happened? Paul says that through Baptism we were crucified with Christ, united with Him in His death for our sins, so that we can also be united with Him in His resurrection to life. Because we are baptized into Christ, Paul tells us that we ***also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.***

There’s the miraculous change that is at work in us—we die to sin so that we don’t live in it any longer. But, as one of my dear seminary professors reminded us: “Gentlemen, as the Catechism teaches us, we are to drown the old man in us through daily contrition and repentance so that we are not living in our old, sinful desires. But gentlemen, it is hard to drown the old man, because the dirty blighter can swim.” We struggle with the fact that, even as the baptized children of God, we are still led into those things that are wrong in God’s sight. Every time we pass on that little bit of gossip about someone else, we see the old man swimming, not drowning. Every little lie, even those we call “white lies” shows that the old man in us can swim. When you were thinking that nasty thought about the driver next to you, because they seemed to be encroaching on your lane, your old self was doing a marvellous breast-stroke. When you joined in that off-colour story at the office, or when you looked with lustful thoughts at the cute guy or girl who passed you at the mall, your old self was setting records in the butterfly stroke. In so many of our words, our actions, and yes, even our thoughts, we show that our old, sinful nature not only can swim, but wants to set Olympic records in each and every pool-related event.

But in the miracle water of Baptism we find the help and strength we need to resist the devil and His evil ways. We learn to put off that sinful nature with its lusts and desires. We draw on the strength that Christ gives to us, as He takes His place beside us. That is why Christ came to the Jordan to be baptized and why we take time to remember His Baptism for us. John knew that this didn’t make sense. Why would the sinless Son of God come to partake of a baptism of repentance, which was what John was administering? In our Gospel lesson today we are told us: ***John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”*** (Matthew 3:14 - ESV) But Jesus said: ***“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.*** (Matthew 3:15 - ESV)

Jesus puts Himself and all His power, promise and blessing into the waters of Baptism as He is baptized for us. In 1965, Dr. Robert Cade, a professor of medicine and physiology at the University of Florida—and also a lifelong Lutheran, by the way—created a drink for the school’s football team. He added sucrose, citric acid, sodium chloride, potassium, (and a few other things that none of us really can pronounce) to water, to create a drink that would re-hydrate and replenish the carbohydrates and electrolytes depleted during aerobic exercise. He named it after the university’s mascot, the Gators. In our world today, many athletes cannot imagine going through the rigours of a difficult game or intense race without the benefit of Gatorade.

For all the good it may do, Gatorade still isn’t miracle water. But by His Baptism at the Jordan, and by His Word of power and life, Jesus has put into Baptism a true miracle of life. Even though we sin, we can be sure that God, in His mercy, has forgiven us through the death and resurrection of Christ. Even though the devil still works to lead us more and more into the worldliness that seems to be growing so strong all around us, we know that Christ is at work to lead us into the life we have through His resurrection. As Luther says in his *Large Catechism*: <sup>41</sup> *In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings — victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.* <sup>42</sup> *In short, the blessings of Baptism are so boundless that if timid nature considers them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true.* <sup>43</sup> *Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man’s door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men.* <sup>44</sup> *To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our*

*sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, “But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body....No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.” (LC, Baptism, 41-44, 46)*

You probably haven't thought a great deal about your baptism for a long time. Luther taught that people should make the sign of the cross each morning and each evening, in remembrance of their Baptism. God wants us to remember that we are baptized, and given forgiveness, life and salvation in this precious gift. This miracle water has been poured upon you. It does more than revive a tired body. This miracle water brings you new life through the Christ who died and rose for you. Amen.