

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Remember Your Baptism and Be Thankful****Lesson: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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."

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² 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."

(Slide 1) Water is something we are very familiar with—it's important and essential in our lives. Every morning, as we begin the day, we wash our faces or take a shower. By washing with water, we not only wake ourselves up but also cleanse our bodies of the waste accumulated overnight, enabling us to start the day feeling refreshed. Before eating, we wash our hands to eliminate germs and safeguard our health.

Moreover, we cannot live without water. Drinking water keeps us hydrated and quenches our thirst. On hot summer days, farmers and plants alike desperately await the cool rain that will relieve their thirst. In a dry desert, the value of fresh water cannot be compared to its worth elsewhere. Recently, we've heard about the wildfires in Southern California that started on Tuesday and have continued due to strong winds. Let us pray that God sends refreshing rain to extinguish the fires swiftly, purify the air, and prevent further harm to human lives.

Throughout history, God has worked powerfully in our lives through water. At times, He parted the sea to create a new path for His people. At other times, He provided living water to quench our deepest thirst.

(Slide 2) Today, I want to talk about baptism, which is also deeply connected with water. About 2,000 years ago, there was a man named John. He was a remarkable individual whose appearance alone set him apart. As the son of a respected priest, he could have lived a comfortable and privileged life. However, while living in the wilderness, John received a divine calling from God. He chose to lay down his privileges and live a life of repentance, fully devoted to God.

John lived in the desert, wearing clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey—a simple and

humble lifestyle that reflected his dedication to serving God rather than pursuing worldly success. Everywhere he went, John called people to repent, seek God's forgiveness, and return to Him. Baptism was a ritual symbolizing this repentance and commitment to God. Because of his practice of baptizing people, John became known as "John the Baptist."

John's distinctive appearance and message drew people's attention. Many wondered if he might be the Messiah they had been waiting for.

Think of how, during the 2024 election, many people paid close attention to the promises and political influence of various candidates, hoping their chosen leader would positively impact their lives and communities. Similarly, 2,000 years ago, the common people, including laborers, were yearning for a Messiah who could bring transformation to their lives.

Aware of the growing expectations, John made it clear that he was not the Messiah. Instead, he humbly declared that someone far greater was coming—someone so great that John was unworthy to untie the straps of His sandals, a task typically reserved for servants. John explained that while he baptized with water, the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Baptism with water signified people seeking forgiveness, but true entry into God's kingdom could only come through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire brought by the Messiah.

While John was baptizing people, Jesus came to the scene. Baptism was for those seeking God's forgiveness, and Jesus, being sinless, had no need to seek forgiveness. However, Jesus understood His mission—to be the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world. Just as the sacrificial lamb was cleansed before being offered, Jesus received baptism to prepare Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for all humanity.

Friends, baptism is a crucial part of our faith. By His grace, God took the first step toward forgiveness. He sent His Son, Jesus, to bear our sins and die on the cross like a sacrificial lamb. Through His blood, we have been cleansed, and through Jesus, God has already given us the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. God's forgiveness was extended to us even before we sought it. However, just as forgiveness must be sought to be fully received, so must we seek God's forgiveness to be cleansed.

(Slide 3) Let's consider an imagined example. Imagine person A wronged person B, causing their relationship to become strained. Although person B decides to

forgive person A, the relationship can only be restored if person A seeks forgiveness. Without repentance, the relationship remains broken.

Friends, baptism is our way of seeking God's forgiveness and experiencing His grace. Is baptism important? Absolutely.

Some of you may have been baptized as infants, others as children or teenagers, and still others as adults. Some of you may not have been baptized yet. The timing of baptism is not what matters most. Jesus Himself was baptized at the age of 30. What truly matters is how we live as Christians after our baptism. If you haven't been baptized yet, please reach out to me. Because God loves you unconditionally, you can be baptized without any requirements. If you have family or friends who haven't been baptized, connect them with me. It doesn't matter whether they are members of this church or not. We can arrange their baptism within this year.

I was baptized as a baby, without my consent, and one thing that saddened me was that I don't remember my baptism. But now, I realized that we live our lives forgetting not only our baptism but many other things as well. We learn many things in life, but we also forget many things along the way. Some things we frequently forget is that we are loved by God, that we are His children, and that we are precious and worthy of love simply because of who we are.

In learning, review is essential because we forget without it. Similarly, we will now take this moment to remind and reflect on our baptism and participate in God's grace. If you haven't been baptized yet, you are still welcome to participate, but this is not baptism. Please reach out to me soon to receive the sacrament of baptism:

(Slide 4-) Brothers and sisters in Christ: Through the reaffirmation of our faith, we renew the covenant declared at our baptism, acknowledge what God is doing for us, and affirm our commitment to Christ's holy church.

I present the whole congregations of the Willow River Parish to reaffirm their faith.

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as your Lord,

in union with the Church which Christ has opened
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

I do.

According to the grace given to you,
will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church
and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?

I will.

Do you, as Christ's body, the Church,
reaffirm both your rejection of sin
and your commitment to Christ?

We do.

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life
and include these persons now before you in your care?

**With God's help we will proclaim the good news
and live according to the example of Christ.**

**We will surround these persons
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their trust of God,
and be found faithful in their service to others.**

**We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.