

## **“Something in the Water” (Sermon for the Baptism of Our Lord)**

I don't listen to a lot of pop music or country music but recently I read that there's a song that's popular on the airwaves that makes some references to baptism. That caught my attention, naturally, so I looked it up and listened to it online. It's a song called "Something in the Water," by singer Carrie Underwood. I don't know if you've heard it or not. But it does have to do with baptism. Now very likely it's coming from a theological perspective on baptism we wouldn't agree with entirely, but even so, it's surprising that a song about baptism would even make it on the charts, much less be a big hit.

Let me tell you a little about this song, in case you haven't heard it. Miss Underwood starts out by singing about a conversation she had with someone who, in the midst of his frustrations, had followed a preacher man down to the river and now, he says, he's changed, he's stronger, "there must've been something in the water." Then Carrie herself, the singer, says that one night, when she was out of hope, cried out to God and felt his love pouring down. So she then "got washed in the water, washed in the blood." And now, Carrie says, "I'm changed, I'm stronger, there must be something in the water." And so the song proceeds.

Well, good. It's refreshing to see a song that at least alludes to the Christian faith make it big on the airwaves. While this song "Something in the Water" doesn't use the word "baptism," and it doesn't mention Christ by name, the song is nice as far as it goes, I suppose. But it only scratches the surface. I don't know, can you scratch the surface of water? In any case, today I would like to take us deeper into the water of

Holy Baptism. Yes, there is “Something in the Water”—a number of things, actually—so let’s find out what they are.

But before we can talk about “something” in the water, first we need to talk about “someone” in the water. And that, of course, is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the one who gets in the water first, and it is only because of him that there is something in the water to bless us and give us life.

Today is the festival of the Baptism of Our Lord, the First Sunday after the Epiphany every year when the Holy Gospel reading is the account of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan at the start of his ministry. This year we have the account from Mark’s gospel. It reads as follows: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”

If not for Jesus embarking on this course that would take him to the cross, there would be nothing in the water. No forgiveness, no salvation, no washing in the blood. We would still be stuck in our sins. Oh, we might have moments of regret and desperation and make our way down to the river and have a dramatic experience, but unless this particular man Jesus gets in the water first and then makes his way to the cross, there would be nothing in the water to make a real difference.

It all depends on who this Jesus is. Christ’s baptism tells us that he is

indeed the very Son of God come in the flesh, come to do the will of his Father, who voices his approval of his beloved Son. The baptism of our Lord tells us that this Jesus is the very Messiah, the promised deliverer, the Christ, the one anointed with the Holy Spirit to carry out his messianic ministry.

And so, you and I, when we are baptized, we are baptized in the name of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are joined to Jesus in our baptism. The heavenly Father becomes our Father, calling us his beloved children for Christ's sake. The Holy Spirit is given to us in Holy Baptism, so that we believe, not just in "someone bigger than me," as the song suggests, but that we believe in the one true God, the Holy Trinity, as revealed in Holy Scripture.

There must be something in the water? Yes, there is. The name of the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What else is in the water? Forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins. By being joined to Jesus, we are joined to everything he has done for us. And this Jesus went to the cross, for you! It was your sins he carried on his shoulders, taking them to the cross, to suffer and die in your place.

Yes, realize first of all that you have sins that need forgiving. You cannot pay for them yourself. You cannot dig your way out of your sinful condition. You have sinned against God, in thought, word, and deed. Your good intentions are not enough to overcome this mountain of sin, to lift this heavy load. Christ must do it for you. And he does! He is the very Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He paid for all your sins, apart from anything you do. It's a free gift, no strings attached.

And this forgiveness is what is put in the water of Holy Baptism. All your sins are washed away. Your filthy robes are washed clean and white in the blood of the Lamb. Now you have the righteousness that will avail at the judgment seat of God, because it is the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is yours by faith, as a gift.

There must be something in the water. There is. There is forgiveness in the water, by virtue of the shed blood of Christ.

And with that forgiveness comes something else in the water. Life. Resurrection life, both now and for eternity. It is new life now and eternal life forever. You heard it in the reading from Romans: “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.” Yes, the resurrection life of Christ is in the water.

There must be something in the water. There is. There is God’s mighty, creative activity in that water. You heard in the reading from Genesis how God created the heavens and the earth: water, Spirit, word. Same thing in the new creation that happens in Holy Baptism: water, Spirit, word, all combined to make a new you. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation!”

So much is packed into the water of Holy Baptism! The name of the triune God, and all that comes with it. Forgiveness of sins. New life. The resurrection of the body

and life everlasting. A new creation. Yes, there is so much in the water, such great things!

How? How does this happen? By God's word. God attaches his word of promise to the water of Holy Baptism. Luther answers the "how" question in the Small Catechism: "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."

There must be something in the water. There is. The life-giving, active, creative Word of God, which God attaches to just this water of Holy Baptism. This is something you can count on. This is something much more solid than how you feel that you've changed and that you're stronger now. Those feelings may come and go, but the word of the Lord remains forever. That's something in the water that will not change. Thank God for that! Amen.