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WHEN, WHY, AND HOW TO BAPTIZE MORMONS

Katie Langston

I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) when I was eight years old. It took place on a crisp Saturday afternoon in October 1989 in the Mormon meetinghouse adjacent to my family's backyard in our working-class Salt Lake City neighborhood. My father, an ordained elder¹ in the Mormon church, baptized me by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Immediately following the ordinance, he and a circle of men from my family and ward² laid their hands on my head and confirmed me a member of the Mormon church.

I remained a devout Mormon throughout my adolescence and young adulthood, meeting all the typical milestones. I served an eighteen-month proselyting mission to Bulgaria when I was twenty-one. I married my husband “for time and all eternity” in the Mormon temple when I was twenty-three. We had our first child, a daughter, when I was twenty-five.

I never planned on doubting Mormonism. But a crisis of faith arose anyway, spurred by the collision of my hypersensitive conscience with Mormonism's high-demand, works-based theology. The Book of Mormon teaches that we are saved by grace “after all we can do” (II Nephi 25:12), a passage that is commonly interpreted to mean that we must perform our very best before God's grace kicks in to make up for what we lack. By the time I reached my mid-twenties, I was in the throes of crippling despair over the realization that I would never be able to say I'd done “all” I could and incessantly anxious about the state of my eternal soul.

But then something unexpected happened: I heard the gospel. I attended a lecture by an Evangelical scholar, Jerry Root, who spoke eloquently of God's grace and how he'd received healing and hope despite his deficiencies—because of Jesus Christ. His words affected me deeply; for the first time in years, I felt as if I could breathe. In that moment I was converted to Christ—though I scarcely understood what it meant or how it would impact my life and vocation.

I remained in Mormonism for ten more years, trying to make Mormon teaching fit a grace-based worldview (spoiler alert: it doesn't) and dabbling restlessly with other churches. Then in 2014 I encountered the Lutheran tradition. Luther's battles with scrupulosity and his critiques of the medieval Catholic church mirrored my own experience in Mormonism, while Lutheranism's unflinching emphasis on grace resonated with the insights I'd gained since my conversion. I began attending an ELCA congregation in my neighborhood and felt at home almost immediately.

Shortly after I joined the congregation, my pastor and I discussed whether I should be baptized. The conversation was brief. She asked me about Mormon baptism, and I explained that it was done by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

“Well,” she said, “that sounds about right. It's not a magic trick.” And that was that.

We decided that I should be confirmed instead. So on Easter Sunday 2015 I stood in front of the congregation and reaffirmed my Mormon baptism. I felt

comfortable with the decision and didn't give it a second thought—until I went to seminary.

In the fall of 2016, I entered candidacy in the ELCA. As I immersed myself in the study of Scripture, history, and theology at Luther Seminary, the depth of the differences between orthodox Christianity and Mormonism became much clearer, and I found myself reconsidering the question of baptism. I decided to spend the summer of 2017 researching whether Mormon converts to Christianity should be baptized.

At the heart of the issue is this question: does Mormon baptism accomplish, or intend to accomplish, the same thing as Christian baptism?

At face value you can make an argument that Mormonism's conception of baptism has much in common with theologies of baptism that emerged during the Radical Reformation. Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, was

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influenced by the Anabaptist notion of an “age of accountability” and taught that children should be baptized at the age of eight.³ Baptism is done for the remission of sins⁴ and is considered essential for salvation, though the atonement of Jesus Christ is believed to “cover” children until they are old enough to choose it. Further, baptism is performed in a traditionally orthodox way: by immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

While these are important similarities to baptismal practices that are generally viewed as acceptable by the global church, there are a number of significant differences.

First is Mormonism’s rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. Though the words “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” are used in Mormon baptism, Mormons have a radically different understanding of what this means from orthodox Christians. They believe that Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost have literal, physical bodies, though the Holy

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Ghost is said to have a “spirit” body, which is made of a finer material substance than the corporeal bodies of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.⁵ They are one in purpose, but not in substance.

More significantly, the members of the Godhead are exalted human beings of the same “species” as humanity.⁶ As literal post-humans with literal bodies, they have a literal dwelling place: a planet near the distant star Kolob.⁷ In this sphere, Heavenly Father has at least one wife—perhaps many more—by whom he begets all of humanity as “spirit children”⁸ in a pre-existent state. Human beings come to earth as “gods in embryo”⁹ to receive corporeal bodies like Heavenly Father’s so that they can become deified and create worlds and spirit children as the Heavenly Parents have done.

Mormons explicitly reject the historic Christian creeds, which Mormon leaders throughout history have called an “abomination,” “corrupt,”¹⁰ “strange,” and “incomprehensible.”¹¹ In 2002 I spent two months in the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, before embarking on my service abroad. During a daily devotional, I remember a speaker from the Mormon leadership putting the Nicene Creed on a screen and mocking it openly in front of the more than three thousand Mormon missionaries who had gathered there to hear him.

These differences led Luis Ladaria, a Jesuit priest who researched the question of the validity of Mormon baptism, to conclude:

As is easily seen, to the similarity of titles there does not correspond in any way a doctrinal content which can lead to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The words Father, Son and Holy Spirit have for the Mormons a meaning totally different from the Christian meaning. The differences are so great that one cannot even consider that this doctrine is a heresy which emerged out of a false understanding of the Christian doctrine. The teaching of the Mormons has a completely different matrix.¹²

The second challenge to equat-

ing Christian baptism with Mormon baptism is Mormonism’s exclusivism. They believe that shortly after the death of the apostles in the first century the true church was removed from the earth, only to be “restored” by Joseph

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Smith in 1830. Thus, the authority to act in God’s name—including the authority to perform baptism—was nowhere to be found for nearly two millennia. Because of this, Mormons require baptism “by proper authority” of all converts, including those from orthodox Christian traditions. Mormons do not recognize the baptism of any other denomination, and one is baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, not the church universal. This is a significant departure from the orthodox understanding of baptism as incorporation into the one body of Christ.

Third are ecumenical considerations. The Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, and a wide variety of Evangelical churches and denominations, among others, have official policies requiring Mormons converting to Christianity to receive baptism, largely for the reasons cited above. As Christians committed to “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5), to break with the ecu-

menical community on this issue does not seem wise.

With all these factors in mind, I came to the conclusion that Mormon baptism is not, in fact, Christian baptism. While Mormonism's baptismal practice seems at face value to mirror aspects of Christian baptism, its corresponding theology and ecclesiology are so radically different that it cannot be said to accomplish, or intend to accomplish, the same things. At the end of my summer of research, I set up an appointment with my dear friend and Old Testament professor at Luther Seminary, Kathryn Schifferdecker, and asked her to baptize me.

Of course, this is not an abstract theological issue. Perhaps more pressing are the pastoral dynamics at play. One resource I found on the ELCA's website, which concludes that in the case of Mormons "it is correct to say that Christian baptism has not taken place," insightfully addresses this issue.

To offer Christian baptism [to a Mormon]... poses a difficult pastoral question. If a former Mormon is anxious to embrace orthodox Christian teaching and practice and is looking to make a radical break from former memberships, then the invitation to Christian Baptism is likely to be welcomed. On the other hand, former Mormons seeking to maintain continuity with Mormonism may see the suggestion that they are not baptized or have not been Christian as an attack on who they have understood themselves to be. Finding a way to welcome former Mormons who are not ready for a complete break with their past fellowship may require gentle and wise pastoral care.¹³

It's important to understand the context from which former Mormons are emerging. Leaving Mormonism, particularly for reasons of conscience—as opposed to fading away

due to apathy or disinterest—can be very painful and disruptive. While there is no official "shunning" practice, it is not uncommon for marriages to fall apart, families to become divided, and those who live in predominantly Mormon areas to face social ostracization. Even in cases where individuals are able to sidestep such severe consequences, the process of deconstructing Mormonism leaves many wounded and angry, as their identity, worldview, and social structure crumble around them. Mormon scholar, memoirist, and erstwhile

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advice columnist Joanna Brooks has noted that Mormonism is not just a religion. In many ways it functions like an ethnicity, with its own language patterns, foods, and phenotypes.¹⁴ For some, to leave Mormonism is to leave the only world you've ever known.

What's more, the Mormon church exerts a high level of control over its members, with frequent check-ins by local lay pastors (called "bishops") to ensure compliance in thought and behavior. Members are "interviewed" on a routine basis to determine "worthiness" based on how well they fulfill the standards of the church, such as submitting to the authority of church leaders, abstaining from coffee and alcohol, exercising strict sex-

ual self-control, and paying 10% of their income to the church.¹⁵ With these constraints gone, many post-Mormons find themselves in a world of once-forbidden possibilities and engage in behaviors that are both risky and destructive—a phenomenon that observers have called a "delayed adolescence."¹⁶

Understandably, many post-Mormons turn away from religion altogether and become atheists. Those who retain some belief in the divine are usually very cautious about jumping into another religious tradition. They often hold skeptical and syncretic religious views that feature eclectic combinations of Mormonism, Christianity, New Ageism, humanism, deism, and/or paganism.¹⁷ These dynamics have led my friend Fatimah Salleh, an American Baptist minister who was formerly an active Mormon, to refer to Mormons who leave as "religious refugees."¹⁸

Thinking of post-Mormons as "religious refugees" has helped me make sense of my own journey and more sensitively approach my pastoral work within the post-Mormon community. Post-Mormons are often traumatized by their experiences both as active members of the Mormon church and by the reaction of the community when they question or leave. It took me several years after my initial conversion experience to work up the courage to begin exploring other churches. For many, even having a conversation with a pastor or religious leader is a tremendous risk.

I would therefore advise pastors to go slow with post-Mormons who are exploring orthodox Christianity. Understand that you are engaging in a cross-cultural conversation. Don't assume common ground on even the most basic theological concepts. Mormons use familiar-sounding language in ways that are dramatically removed from the orthodox Christian understanding, including terms such as "Father," "Son," "Holy Ghost," "God," "salvation," "Scripture," "prophet," "grace," "faith," "heaven,"

“atonement,” and “covenant.” In addition, Mormons have terms and practices that are entirely foreign to orthodox Christians, particularly with regard to esoteric temple rituals that were adapted from Freemasonry and are historically connected with the practice of plural marriage.¹⁹

Perhaps this is a pastoral cliché, but if you’re working with someone who has left Mormonism, it is of particular importance to get a sense for where they are spiritually and theologically before advising them. My own experience seeking spiritual guidance from pastors, spiritual directors, and seminary professors is that few of them have even a basic idea of the theological and cultural differences between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity. Precious fewer take the time to understand them. Unsurprisingly, in every instance that I have received helpful pastoral care, it has come either from those who have intentionally immersed themselves in Mormon culture for the purpose of providing pastoral outreach to Mormons²⁰ or those who have been willing to patiently listen, ask questions, and learn.²¹

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When you reach the point that it is appropriate to address the question of baptism, it is important to help former Mormons understand that baptism is not *rebaptism*, which doesn’t exist. Baptism is God’s work, not humanity’s. A Mormon convert to Christianity

is not baptized because there’s “one right way” to baptize, or a particular denomination authorized to administer it, or a particular liturgical form God requires to “ratify” it. Rather, baptism is pure gift, a means of grace: the moment when we receive God’s unconditional promise of forgiveness, are claimed as God’s own child, and die and rise with Christ.

This conception of baptism is radically different from the way Mormons understand it, and it’s bound to raise a fraught question: are Mormons Christians? Of course, the premise of this article is that former Mormons should receive Christian baptism because Mormon baptism neither accomplishes, nor intends to accomplish, the same thing as Christian baptism. For some post-Mormons, this will be freeing. For others, who have understood themselves to be Christians and had a meaningful relationship with Christ, this will be disturbing. They will not welcome the implication that their life of faith has been deficient in some way.

Navigating this question takes wisdom, prayer, deep listening, and careful pastoral discernment, depending on the needs of the person asking it. In general, I have come to answer it in a nuanced way. I share it here in case it’s helpful. There is no denying that Mormonism is *sociologically* Christian. It emerges from a Christian context and holds to a belief in Jesus of Nazareth as savior, however peculiar the Mormon understanding of Jesus may be. And there is no denying that there are many Mormons who do have faith in Jesus and in whom that faith has blossomed into lives of prayer and service. It is hard to deny that such individuals are Christian in this important sense of the term. Having said that, there is also no denying that Mormonism is a radical, and in many ways idolatrous, departure from the historic Christian faith. Theologically, Mormonism falls well outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy. In this sense, it is not correct to consider it Christianity; it is a distinct religious system. This observa-

tion has led some scholars to propose that it should be classified as a fourth Abrahamic faith.²²

There is one final pastoral consideration worth noting. Mormons are taught that they must be “worthy” to participate in religious rituals, including baptism. They are also taught that

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if they become “unworthy”—most commonly through sexual sin or publicly questioning church leaders—the Holy Spirit will abandon them and their religious rituals can be stripped from them, including baptism.

It took me by surprise, but one of the most impactful aspects of my baptism was preparing for it. I had never participated in a significant religious milestone without a crippling sense of anxiety that came from enduring a personal inquisition. During our preparatory conversations, Kathryn did not ask me a single “worthiness” question. Of course she didn’t! There is no “worthiness” checklist for baptism. But the contrast was so profound it is still difficult for me to wrap my mind around it.

Instead, we talked about what baptism is and what it accomplishes. We talked about the liturgy, and its meaning, and why we perform each part. I knew it would be difficult for some members of my family to hear that I had made this decision, and Kathryn provided wise guidance in terms of navigating these conversations openly, honestly, and with compassion.

Most importantly, we talked about the radical truth at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ: that God’s grace is a free gift, imparted to us not because of anything we’ve done or

left undone, but because that is Who God is. That in baptism, our sins are forgiven and we are claimed as God's own. That once God has claimed us, God will not abandon us. For God keeps these baptismal promises and will never, ever let us go.

My baptism took place the evening of October 2, 2017. Because several of my Mormon and post-Mormon friends attended, and Mormon baptisms tend to be very simple liturgically, Kathryn took care to explain the ceremony as we went. It also served the double purpose of sharing the gospel with an audience that does not often have the chance hear it. The homily Kathryn preached follows this article as an aid to pastors who may find themselves in a similar situation.

It is difficult to express how transformative my baptism was. For years I had wrestled with feelings of unworthiness, fear of divine rejection, and spiritual displacement. In my baptism, this was healed. God's word in the water washed it all away and exchanged it for wholeness and peace. That night I wrote to a friend: "The forces of darkness have no power over me anymore. I feel it. It's different. I'm different."

Perhaps we have a tendency not to invite people to baptism—Mormon or otherwise—because we fear offending them. We worry about being pushy or overbearing or oppressive. These are legitimate concerns. I have participated in pushy, overbearing, and oppressive religious systems. We do well to avoid them.

But in our hesitation, perhaps we forget that our calling to make disciples and baptize is not actually about spreading a religious system. What God has promised in Jesus Christ is liberation from the powers of death and hell. To invite those we love to the baptismal waters is to invite them into the new life God has offered in His abundant mercy; it is to share a precious gift of grace.

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Notes

1. In Mormonism, all males twelve years of age and older who are found "worthy" by their local leaders are ordained to the priesthood. "Elder" is an office in the Mormon priesthood that men typically receive around the age of eighteen.

2. "Ward" is the Mormon term for congregation. Wards are assigned based on geographic boundary; it is considered unacceptable to switch. In high-density Mormon areas, such as Utah, the ward boundaries might consist of just a few blocks in the neighborhood.

3. Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), a canonized collection of Smith's revelations, gives the following instruction in section 68, verse 27: "And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands."

4. In 1842 Smith sent a letter to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*, outlining Mormonism's basic beliefs. The thirteen "Articles of Faith," as they came to be known, were subsequently canonized as Mormon scripture. Article of Faith 4 says: "We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are: first, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, repentance; third, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost."

5. D&C 131:7–8: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; we cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter."

6. In a sermon given on April 7, 1844, at the funeral of a man named King Follett, Smith said, "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible, I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another." Online at <www.lds.org/ensign/1971/04/the-king-follett-sermon?lang=eng> (this and all subsequent websites accessed July 15, 2018).

7. In the Book of Abraham, a canonized "translation" of an Egyptian papyrus that Smith claimed was written by the hand of the patriarch Abraham (in fact, it was a common funerary text), Smith writes in the voice of Abraham, "And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones; and the great one is named Kolob, because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God" (3:2–3).

8. See "Chapter 37: Sons and Daughters of the Eternal Father" in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 335.

9. *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 21.

10. Joseph Smith, History 1:19. "History" is yet another book of scripture in the Mormon canon compiled from Smith's disparate writings into a single text with chapters and verses.

11. See, for example, LeGrand Richards, "Strange Creeds of Christendom" (October 8, 1972), <www.lds.org/ensign/1973/01/strange-creeds-of-christendom?lang=eng>.

12. See Luis Ladaria SJ, "The Question of the Validity of Baptism Conferred in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," *L'Osservatore Romano* (August 1, 2001): 4, <www.ewtn.com/library/theology/mormbap1.htm>.

13. "Do Lutherans re-baptize former Mormons who are joining the congregation?" <download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Do_Lutherans_rebaptize_former_Mormons_who_are_joining_the_congregation.pdf>.

14. Joanna Brooks, "Religion? Ethnicity?" (December 14, 2010), <www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2010/12/mormonism-religion-ethnicity>.

15. See a list of the temple-recommended interview questions in the essay by Mormon apostle Robert D. Hales, "Preparing for a Heavenly Marriage," *Ensign* (February 2006), <www.lds.org/new-era/2006/02/preparing-for-a-heavenly-marriage?lang=eng>.

16. William Lobdell, "Losing Faith and Lots More," *Los Angeles Times* (December 1, 2001), <articles.latimes.com/2001/dec/01/news/mn-10326/3>.

17. To the best of my knowledge there has been no specific research on this, but I know and have worked with hundreds of questioning and post-Mormons, and in my experience this reaction is very common.

18. Personal conversation, April 2017.

19. While mainstream Mormons no lon-

ger practice plural marriage “in mortality,” it is understood that in the afterlife, some and perhaps many polygynous relationships will exist. To this day in the Mormon temple, multiple women can be “sealed” (eternally married) to one man—just not at the same time, for example in instances when a man remarries after being widowed or divorced. See Carol Lynn Pearson, *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy* (Walnut Creek: Pivot Point, 2016) for a compelling exploration of how this practice continues to haunt contemporary Mormonism.

20. One such example is Community of Christ’s Latter-day Seekers ministry. Community of Christ, formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is the second-largest denomination emerging from the Joseph Smith movement. While they have some irregularities from an orthodox Christian perspective, primarily their acceptance of the Book of Mormon as scripture, they uphold the primacy of the Bible, reject esoteric Mormon temple rituals, and retain an orthodox perspective on the Trinity. See more at <www.latter-dayseekers.org/>.

21. The best example of this in my life is Kathryn Schifferdecker, who baptized me and whose homily follows this article. She spent a considerable amount of time listening to my stories, watching the random Mormon YouTube videos I felt compelled to show her, and helping me reconstruct my worldview in ways that are more compatible with Scripture and the gospel. Just as importantly, she did it in a way that was sensitive, good-humored, and low pressure.

22. Patrick Q. Mason, *What is Mormonism? A Student’s Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 163.

BAPTISMAL HOMILY

Kathryn Schifferdecker

The small congregation gathered around the baptismal font, and after introductions and some instructions about the service I preached this homily. Because there were a few Mormons and ex-Mormons at the service, I explained each element of the baptismal service as we went along. I explained the practice of facing west to renounce Satan and then facing east to profess faith in the triune God. After the baptism itself, I gave Katie a white shawl as a baptismal garment and I quoted Galatians 3:27, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves

with Christ.” When the time came for the anointing with oil, I prefaced it by saying, “In marking the sign of the cross on your forehead, I am branding you, in a sense, or perhaps the better metaphor is to think of it as a tattoo. It is there, invisible, but to remind you for all your coming days who you are and Whose you are. God never lets you go, Katie, and God will never abandon you.” The Bible quotations are taken from the NRSV.

Dear friends, dear Katie, I’d like to begin the service this evening with some biblical passages that help us understand what baptism is. Water plays an important role throughout Scripture, and there are lots of passages I could have chosen to speak about, but here are just a few. First, from the prophet Isaiah:

But now thus says the Lord,
He Who created you, O Jacob,
He Who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are Mine.

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in My sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life...

Thus says the Lord,
Who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
Who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,

they are extinguished,
quenched like a wick:

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;

for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,

to give drink to My chosen people,
the people whom I formed for Myself

so that they might declare My praise.

—Isaiah 43:1–4, 16–21

The prophet is speaking here to the Israelites in exile in Babylon. They are without hope, far from home, their holy city Jerusalem destroyed and the temple in ruins. The prophet reminds them of another time of trouble, when they were slaves in Egypt, and of how God saved them through the waters of the Red Sea. Just as God brought them out of slavery by making a dry way through the sea, so God now will make a wet way through the desert to bring them home.

In the Exodus story, water is understood as a symbol of new birth and of liberation. God brings the Hebrew slaves through the waters of the sea, and a new nation is born—Israel, a nation set free to be a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). In the return from exile there is another new birth, and God sends water to make the desert sprout, to bring the exiles home. New birth, liberation, slaves set free, new life in the desert, exiles returning home—these are the things that God does through water.

Another passage, this time from the New Testament, from the Gospel of Mark:

In those days Jesus came from

Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

—Mark 1:9–11

God says to Jesus at his baptism, "You are My Son, the Beloved." God also says to you now, Katie, in the waters of baptism, "You are My beloved child."

The Lutheran teaching on baptism is that it is *God* Who acts in baptism, not us. God is the one Who saves. This is not about worthiness. This is not about what you've done or what you've left undone. This is about God claiming you, Katie, and naming you "Beloved."

Another reading, this one from Romans 6:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of

life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

—Romans 6:3–5

There are several metaphors for baptism. We talk about baptism as a kind of washing, being made clean. We talk about baptism as new birth, being born into the Christian faith, becoming a child of God. But we also talk about baptism as a kind of death. Water gives life, but it can also kill. In baptism, we die to ourselves and are raised to new life in Christ, a life that will never end.

There is a tradition in the Christian church of putting a white cloth, a funeral pall, over the coffin of a believer at his or her funeral. The pall is a reminder of the garment or gown worn at baptism. At the time of death, we remember God's promise of life. Baptized into Christ's death, we also claim his resurrection life. The promises God makes to you in baptism this evening, Katie, are not nullified by death. They do not end at death. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." In Christ, death is swallowed up in life.

So, just a few biblical passages to

remind us of what we're doing here this evening, what *God* is doing here this evening through water and the word. Slaves set free. Exiles coming home. A child being born and named "beloved." A daughter being claimed. Sins forgiven. Dying with Christ and rising to new life. Entry into the church, the body of Christ, the communion of saints, which stretches across time and across space, of which 1 Peter says:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

—1 Peter 2:9–10

This is what God is doing here this evening as you are baptized, Katie, claiming you as God's own beloved child, calling you out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and making you a member of the body of Christ. Let us begin. ✠

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