

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, Wash  
January 10, 2010  
Baptism of our Lord**

*Titus 3:3-7*

**My How You've Changed!:**

- 1. Rejoice at the difference in your life**
- 2. Rejoice at how baptism brought it**

**Hymns –90 – 87 – 294 – 299**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

*Titus 3:3-7 -*

*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.*

*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.*

I received an e-mail a week ago from a high school classmate of mine. I was surprised to get it. I haven't seen this person since graduation. I was also surprised to hear why I received the message. Plans are underway for a reunion party for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my high school graduating class. Where has the time gone?

I can't remember attending any reunion parties in my life, but I've heard plenty about them. A question that everyone comes to such a party with is, "How has everyone changed?" Who looks older? Who looks like they've made a success out of their life? Who looks as though they didn't pan out into what everyone thought they would when we graduated? What changes have 25 years brought about?

Change comes to us all. I wouldn't mind seeing the high school pictures of some of you today! Did you graduate when it was cool for you to have an afro? Has the silver crept into the dark hair? Or has the hairline receded? Have the wrinkles come?

Changes like that don't even compare, however, with the changes that our reading in Scripture talks about today. In fact, after reading the verses from Titus 3 we're tempted to marvel "**My How We've Changed!**" Today, based on these verses let's:

- 1. Rejoice at the difference in your life**
- 2. Rejoice at how baptism brought it about**

We read in verse 3, "*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.*" To fully appreciate our former condition, a look at these specific words that the Holy Spirit has caused to be inspired is helpful. If you follow along with the words before us today, we can break them down and see what our natural condition before God was like:

- *Foolish* – The Greek word used here is actually a combination of two words: "without" and "mind." Paul tells us here that at one time we were brainless! Perhaps your dad once asked you, "What were you thinking?!" and you answered, "I don't know." You acted without using your brain. By nature we act senselessly and sinfully, without the mind of Christ.
- *Disobedient* – Literally, the root word here means "not convinced" or "not persuaded." The stress is on the actions of a person because they aren't convinced of the truth. They don't have a heart of faith and their actions show it.
- *Deceived* – This is another interesting word. The sense behind it is that a person has a bad guide. They've been misled, led astray. Before an individual meets God and submits to his wisdom, what kinds of things guide him?
  - His own instincts and logic?
  - Worldly friends?
  - Philosophy?
  - Manmade religion?
  - The media?
  - Advice from the rich and famous?

If the wisdom hasn't come from God, it's misleading.

- *Slave* – Would anyone choose to live with the status of a slave? By definition, it means someone else's will is over your life. You do not have freedom. You do not make choices. It's the nature of being a slave! The text says that we're slaves of the next two words...

- *Passions* – Again, a very unique word. Two words make up this one word in Greek: "Boil" and "up." The way this word developed was that things were recognized to "boil" inside a person, namely, their desires and impulses. When they boil up and are hard to control, this was considered a bad thing! The two impulses this word referred to came to be food and immorality, mostly the latter.

By nature people are slaves to their lusts and passions. They are driven by them and consumed by them. Some even live simply to try to fulfill them.

- *Pleasures* – You would probably recognize the Greek word if you saw it transliterated into English: HEDONAI. We get the word "hedonism" from it. The word comes from a root that means "sweet" or "pleasant." So hedonism is pursuing what's pleasant to you.

For the ungodly person, this word has the evil connotation of living only to fulfill your own pleasures, even to the point of fighting against God's will and his Word. Living selfishly for yourself!

- *Malice* – This is an especially bad word. It's a general word (and a strong one) that says that a person is a "bad person." They can be easily categorized as a wicked person who does bad things. This is the type of person your mother may have been mentioning when she said, "I don't like that person. I don't want you to hang around them." This is the type of person who would do evil things for fun that shock others.
- *Envy* – A general word for jealousy and envy. Feeling evil toward others because of what they have

- *Hated and hating* – Again, rather general words.

This was you. Before our conversion, we were possessed by evil. We didn't have a sanctified thought in us. We were so far gone we didn't even realize it.

I remember a college classmate of mine who used to fall asleep easily. One night he fell asleep at the wheel while driving on the freeway. He woke up when he was skidding through the median. His car came to a stop and he got out, looking the situation over. As he was walking around, a policeman stopped to see what had happened. The policeman talked with him a few moments and then asked him how he felt. My friend said he felt fine, but the policeman asked him again if he felt alright. My friend was a bit confused about him asking again, so the policeman said, "Look at yourself." My friend looked down, and saw he was covered in blood! He had had a blood vessel cut open somehow in the incident and didn't know that he was bleeding dangerously. Fortunately, the officer could point it out to him.

If we have the temptation to say, "My natural condition and my standing before God was not that serious," our reading tells us clearly otherwise! We had a terminal condition that led to hell and punishment.

Thank goodness our text continues with more words that we can examine. We read, "*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... having been justified by his grace, we (became) heirs having the hope of eternal life.*"

We have a whole new set of unique words in these verses:

- *Kindness* – This is an interesting word that can apply to just about anything. It means whatever you're talking about has a "high quality." If you're talking about food, it's healthy. If you're talking about a person, they're respectable, honest, and pious. What appeared from God? Things of "high quality" that he had to offer!
- *Love* – Some of you might know this Greek word also. It's PHILANTHROPIA. PHILEO is "love" and ANTHROPOS is "man." Today we

use the term “philanthropist” for a person who loves people and does nice things for them. In this verse, we see that love of man appeared from God. He’s a philanthropist!

- *Saved* – We’re pretty used to the words “save” and “Savior” in the church. It’s a pretty dramatic word in Greek. Literally, it refers to a rescue. The feeling is that someone was on the precipice of danger and was snatched away by a rescuer! This is what God has done for us. We were on the wrong road, the road to hell. We deserved punishment forever because of our sins. But God pulled us to safety. Jesus bore our sins on the cross and rose victoriously to rescue us. Now through faith we’re on the road to heaven. The Holy Spirit has worked faith in our heart to accept the message of our rescue.
- *Mercy* – This was God’s motive for saving us. The sense of this word is that an individual looks at another person and is moved to help them out of pity. It’s similar to a man who might be driving on a two-lane highway in the rain and sees an older woman on the side of the road with a flat tire. Even though he may be late, he thinks to himself, “She really needs help,” and is moved to stop to lend her aid. God, out of his pity, helped us sinners in our lost condition!
- *Justified* – Many of you have probably learned about this word already. It’s a courtroom term. “Not guilty!” is the verdict that is pronounced. In God’s court we stand innocent only because our Savior has taken our sin and guilt on himself. Can you imagine the relief and joy that someone standing in court has when the verdict is read and he is acquitted? How much more relieved are we that this verdict is pronounced on us in God’s court!
- *Grace* – Again a familiar term to many of you: God’s undeserved love.
- *Heirs* – Now we come to the result for our lives. We are now called “heirs.” We’re recipients of something we did

not earn ourselves, and something that it took a death to give. We haven’t experienced it in its complete fulfillment yet, but one day we will have it all in heaven!

- *Hope* – This refers to Christian hope, not the unsure hope of this world. The feeling behind this word is that it creates expectation and patient waiting. It has a calm inner trust that what has been promised will come about.
- *Eternal life* – Finally, this is the goal of our faith. It is what we patiently wait for. It is where we are headed forever.

**My how you have changed! And recognize where the action of changing has come from. It is God’s work, effected by his grace. It is not a “turnaround story” based on our own ingenuity. It is God’s plan and action completely.**

Our text has one other interesting note on how exactly God has worked this change in our lives. In verse 5 we read, “*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.*” More interesting words!

- *Washing* – This is the word for a bath!
- *Pouring*

The connection to baptism is obvious.

- *Generously* – Something has been “generously” poured out on us in baptism, literally “richly.” The word for riches here usually means wealth and money. God has riches to give as well for the sinner.

Through this washing and pouring of water we have experience the dramatic change we learned of before. We have experienced:

- *Rebirth* – Again, two simple Greek words put together: “Born” and “again.” How reminiscent of Jesus words to Nicodemus: “*No one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is born of water and of the Spirit.*”(John 3:5) We have new life as we are born again in baptism!
- *Renewal* – Again, two Greek words put together: “Up” and “new.” Through

baptism we have risen up, new and renewed.

A popular show lately has been “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.” The concept is that a family is selected who is having extreme problems of some sort, usually financial, and has terrible living conditions in their home. A crew will completely level their house and build a completely new house right on top of where the former one was. A complete makeover!

This is exactly what has happened to us in baptism. And God makes it clear that it is no “symbol,” as some contend. It is a spiritual change worked by the Holy Spirit.

Other Scriptures teach us this same truth:

- *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)*
- *“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Gal. 3:27)*

All in all, the Bible tells us we have six blessings in Holy Baptism:

1. Forgiveness of sins
2. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit
3. The presence of Christ
4. Salvation
5. Born again
6. Heirs of heaven

What a day to rejoice that you have been baptized! Have you thought about your baptism lately? Martin Luther once said, **“Baptism contains so much comfort that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it.”** We have great comfort that our complete change has come through baptism!

What a fitting day to remember the importance of infant baptism as well. One of the fundamental differences between reformed churches along with non-denominational churches and the Lutheran church is that baptism is withheld from infants and small children in those other churches. Is it vital to stand up for the baptism of infants when

Jesus has commanded us to baptize *“all nations,”* or is it a trivial point? Someone might say, “Well, we christened the child.” Or, “We had a dedication ceremony for the child to be raised as a Christian.” Does it matter?

We might compare it to changing the oil in your car. Does it make a difference if you have the oil changed vs. promising to change the oil someday? Absolutely! It is a great tragedy of our day that many Christian churches withhold these blessings from infants and little children. May God move parents to see the vital importance of baptism for their children and give them God’s gifts through this sacrament!

As we close, it’s fitting that we hear these words from Titus on the day we commemorate Christ’s baptism. May this give us an opportunity to rejoice in a change. **“My How You’ve Changed!”** God be praised for the change he has worked in us. And may we live in this baptismal grace all our lives! Amen.