

## A Shared Baptism

Acts 2:36-41; 1 Peter 1:17-23

The Third Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2023, at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

### Introduction

Baptism is universal in the Christian church.

Many years ago, I watched a documentary showing a baptismal service in an Orthodox church in Bulgaria, I think. I'm not sure of the location nor of the tradition of the church. There were eight or nine sets of parents with their infants, so perhaps the priest was in a hurry. He gave the appropriate words of baptismal institution to all the children at the same time, and then picked up the first child, stripped of his clothes. He then supported the child with one hand and stabilized the neck and head with the other and then immersed the child face first into the water three times each. He did this rapidly and splashed water all over the place and then promptly returned the stunned infant to his parents and picked up the next victim. The baptismal font was large, large enough to immerse the child entirely but small enough that everyone got wet. I sometimes wonder what ever happened to those children and whether any of them are seeing a therapist right now.

### The meaning of Baptism.

Fortunately, baptism is not usually a traumatic event, and it is one that is part of almost every Christian's life. Whether as an infant or as an adult, baptism's potency is in its symbolism. When baptized you are symbolically leaving an old life-dying to that life-and starting a new life as a follower of Jesus and following that life wherever it may take you. We share in that common choice and destiny in that we share in the Sacrament of Baptism. It can involve sacrifice, as indicated in the old stories of people gathering at a river to be baptized only to confront one's spouse, family, employer, and friends, all of whom will abandon you and declare you dead to them if you enter the river. Baptism is a new life that you follow even if there is a cost. So, let's take a look at baptism as mentioned by the Apostle Peter. One comment made early in his career as a leader of the church and another many years later.

### Set the Stage: Peter in Acts and later in life in 1 Peter.

The first verse is at the end of that famous sermon Peter gave on the day of Pentecost. According to Acts 2:37, the people were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the apostles what to do? Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The gift is the Holy Spirit, who takes the things of God and brings them to bear on our human lives. There are the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and there are gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 & 14), and they serve as very large subjects with whole books written about them, but the marvelous promise here is that the Holy Spirit is offered as a gift. There's a detail to that gift that I would like to consider, knowing that this is a very large subject.

Years later, Peter wrote to fledgling churches in various regions in what is now Turkey, and he wrote of spiritual truth and appropriate response of those baptized into Christ. The word "baptism" is not here mentioned, but it was common practice since before the days of the Lord Jesus through the present hour. He wrote to baptized people and he mentioned something that is oft maligned but, I believe, is an indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit, fear. In 1 Peter 1:17 he wrote "and if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves

through the time of your stay here in fear. While the same word is used for either definition, the context indicates that "fear" here is not terror, but a deep and abiding reverence that will make someone think twice before acting in a manner that would displease God.

**Main Point:** The gift of the Holy Spirit comes with baptism, and one of the characteristics is fear.

**Application:** Know that there is a holy fear that prizes life but prizes the costly redemption from sin even more. I have a Bible program in my computer that allows me to do "searches," so I took the phrase "the fear of the Lord" and ran it through the program. I received numerous responses, especially from the Book of Proverbs. Here are a few examples. The fear of the Lord causes a person to hate evil, pride and arrogance (Proverbs 8:13) and it is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). The fear of the Lord prolongs life (Proverbs 10:27) and is the fountain of life (Proverbs 14:27). It is better to have a little with the fear of the Lord and much treasure with trouble instead (Proverbs 15:16). There is more, this is just a sample that the fear of the Lord is a grace of the Holy Spirit that is good for you spiritually and good for your health as well.

#### Conclusion

"Fear" is usually a negative word connoting a state of terror or anxiety that can cause panic or confusion, but there is a fear that is actually good and healthy for you. The Apostle Peter wrote of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to those who, like us, shared in the Sacrament of Baptism. He later wrote to the baptized people in several regions and mentioned living our lives in fear, not in terror or anxiety but in a reverence that strengthens us morally, makes us wise and is actually good for our health. Fear is one of the benefits of our shared baptism.