

16 April 2022
Great Vigil of Easter
Baptism of Ben Fox

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Night That Changed Everything”

Last night, we remembered Jesus’ crucifixion. Tonight, we will witness Ben’s. And we’ll remember our own.

Oh, don’t worry Ben! There’s no cross out back, no nails, no hammer, no crown of thorns or whip. That all belonged to Jesus, not you. That was all for Him, not you.

But tonight you will be crucified. That’s what baptism is. Baptism is not your testimony, your confession, what you do. It is your death and resurrection. That’s what God tells us. We’ll hear it again tonight in a bit. That in baptism we are joined to Christ in His death and resurrection. We die and rise with Him. Not symbolically, but really. Not by nailing and bleeding, but by drowning. Through water and the Word, Jesus takes you with Himself through death to life again. The Old Adam, the old sinner in you crucified, and a New Adam, a new man in you raised. To live before God in righteousness and purity forever. That’s a promise, Ben. You can’t do that. Never could, never would. But Jesus did. And gives it to you.

The rest of us will remember when that happened to us, when we were crucified with Christ, when we were baptized. Maybe some of us were old enough to remember that day, maybe some of us were but infants. But whether or not we remember *the day* is not the point. We remember *the reality*. The Word and promise of God applied to us. The gift given to us. When we, too, were crucified and raised with Christ to new life. It is a promise and gift that we do not remember *just* tonight, but especially tonight. But every day, we awaken and arise and remember: *I am baptized*. Not: *I was baptized*. Past tense. History. But *I am baptized*. Present tense. Reality. This is who I am, because this is who God has made me, the new birth He has given me. I am a baptized child of God. God put His Name on me. I belong to Him.

But you will not always live that way, Ben. I’ll tell you that right now, though you probably already know it. You’ll sin. Maybe fall hard. And perhaps it won’t take long. But when you do, know that you have a Father who forgives you, a brother who died for you, and His Spirit calling you back in repentance and faith. Faith that the words and promises of God are sure and true. That’s why we begin each Divine Service in the same Name we were baptized in, remember that we are baptized children of God, confess our sins, and know that our Father welcomes us prodigals back again. *I forgive you all your sins*, He says. Every week. Words we can never grow tired of hearing.

But before we get to that, your crucifixion with Christ, we're going to hear once again some old and familiar stories. Old Testament accounts of what God has done for us. His gifts to us. And when you do, think about how all these stories teach us not about history, but about our reality. Our baptismal reality.

We'll hear of creation, how all life came to be by the Word of God. And in baptism, it is the same - new life given through the Word of God in the water.

We'll hear of the flood, how God cleansed the world and saved through water. And in baptism, it is the same - cleansing and new life through water.

We'll hear of Israel passing through the Red Sea and how God swallowed up their enemies in that same water. And in baptism, we pass through water, and our enemies - sin, death, and the devil - are swallowed up in that same water.

We'll hear from the prophet Ezekiel of God's promise of a new heart and a new Spirit when He sprinkles clean water on us, as He does in baptism.

We'll hear from Job the confidence that after his flesh has been destroyed he will see God with his own eyes - his own, resurrected eyes. And in the resurrection of baptism, we have that same confidence.

We'll hear from the prophet Zephaniah, of God's joy and salvation, of God gathering and restoring His people, which He is doing even now through His Word and His Word in the water of baptism.

And then what is always our final reading for this night, we'll hear of the three young men in the fiery furnace - three thrown in, but four walking around, unharmed, in the flames. And we know that whatever flames we face, whatever trials and troubles - even the very fires of hell! - we will not be alone, and we will pass safely through, because we've been joined with Jesus in His death and resurrection. The water of baptism dousing the flames of sin and hell.

Tonight we remember that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the nexus of history. All before leading to it; all after flowing from it. The world will ignore that, point to other things and events. We know better. This is the night that changed everything. This is the night that changed us. This is the night of forgiveness. This is the night of life.

So tomorrow, we remember Jesus' *resurrection*. Tonight, we will witness Ben's. And we'll remember our own. And don't worry, Ben! It is yours, too. Your grave will be opened and will not be able to hold you, on that day when Jesus says, come out! And you will. From death to life. This is the night.