



## Participant Handout for *No Greater Jewel: Thinking about Baptism with Luther* By Kirsi Stjerna

### Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of Holy Baptism, offered out of your love and not because of our ability to interpret it or our goodness to deserve it. Guide and enlighten us as we explore the meaning and significance of this gift. Build our appreciation for it and our enthusiasm to share its blessings. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### Points to Ponder

1. Imagine that a child has asked you, "What's the big deal about my baptism?" How would you answer? What would you like to know in order to give a better answer?

#### *What Happens in Baptism?*

2. Read each of the following Bible verses, and for each, identify what God does and how the baptized person is affected.

	<i>God's Actions</i>	<i>Effects on Baptized Person</i>
Mark 1:9-12	_____	_____
Acts 2:37-42	_____	_____
Acts 10:44-48	_____	_____
Romans 6:1-11	_____	_____
	_____	_____
Titus 3:1-7	_____	_____

3. Compare what you learned from the Bible passages with the following statement from Luther's *Large Catechism*:

In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and practice all his or her life. Christians always have enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.

[In Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord (New Translation): The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 461.]

4. Which of God's actions in baptism, as described in the Bible passages and *Large Catechism*, are new or surprising to you? Which inspire or attract you the most?

### *A Personal Treasure*

5. Kirsi Stjema writes, “Luther’s most famous and influential theological insight was that human beings are made right with God and become pleasing to God only by faith” (p. 49). For biblical support, read Romans 3:21-28.
  - a. Does being “made right with God . . . by faith” mean that our faith is a skill we employ to achieve reconciliation with God, or does it mean that faith allows us to receive what God does for us? What is the difference?
  - b. How strong does a person’s faith have to be for that person to receive the benefits of God’s grace through baptism?
  - c. How sophisticated does a person’s faith have to be for the person to receive those gifts?
6. Kirsi Stjema writes, “In baptism, nothing less is given than transforming forgiveness and a foundation for a new life, a new start for every new day. In baptism, nothing less is given than God—not part of God but full God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier who connects with us in person in a way that makes our life Spirit-filled and, thus, spiritual” (p. 14).
  - a. How does it affect you to think that God loves you and transforms you personally through baptism? How is your reaction different from your feelings in response to the idea that God loves people and all creation in general?
  - b. When have you wanted a fresh start? How can you remember that each day is a new chance to be freed from past sins and led by the Holy Spirit?

### *A Necessity for the Community*

7. Baptism is a public act, not only a private change in an individual’s relationship with God. Who was present at your baptism or at a baptism you recently witnessed? Why would they be interested in that baptism?
8. Joining the church through baptism is not primarily a matter of learning ethics and rituals, but of being joined to the body of Christ. How does it benefit the Christian community that its members have been freed from sin, forgiven, and filled with the Holy Spirit through baptism? How is this different from other kinds of organizations?
9. How can the Christian community support its baptized members to help them grow in faith? How can recalling and learning about our baptisms help the community grow in faith?

## **Closing Prayer**

We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. Stir up in your people the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

(Affirmation of Baptism, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 237)

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