

It has been said cleanliness is next to godliness. Now, to be certain, this is not a Biblical teaching. The Bible doesn't say that clean people are somehow more holy.

But we as humans seem to think so. Several studies have been conducted that correlate feelings of guilt and the need to wash hands or use an antiseptic wipe. Maybe when we do something wrong or our conscience plagues us, we feel the compulsion to take a shower or wash our hands. That's certainly what Pilate did when Jesus was sentenced to death. He washed his hands of Jesus' blood.

But no, that basin of water didn't absolve Pilate. The world's most effective soap won't make your terrible mistake go away. A long bath won't atone for your guilt.

God knows this human impulse to want to wash ourselves when we feel we did something dirty. He who created the heavens and the earth, dirt and soap, water and mud knows us inside out. He gives us a cleansing solution that actually works. Christian Baptism does just this. **BAPTISM OPENS HEAVEN FOR THE LORD'S FORGIVEN CHILDREN.**

I. Baptism forgives sinners. **“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”**

John the Baptizer was the last, great Old Testament prophet. He must have made an impact on people because everyone from all around was coming to him to confess their sins and be baptized. This baptism of John was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That is, it was a chance at a fresh start. People could turn away from their old lives, confess their sins, and receive that blank slate.

So it is with baptism today. Those who have been baptized have had their slate wiped clean. Dear Christian friend, you have had your slate wiped clean. If the devil haunts you with your past sins, mistakes, and a guilty conscience, don't scare him away with a squirt of Purell. Don't wash your hands. A cloth facemask won't scare away Satan.

Rather, recall, I have been baptized into Christ. My sins have been washed away for Jesus' sake. You have no claim on me, Satan. If you have a problem with something I did, take it up with Jesus. He's my Lord, my Savior, and my God. The Word of God is powerful, and the word of God attached to the water is strong enough to cleanse you of your sins. God's Word is more powerful than the most caustic soap.

If baptism is for sinners, then we must scratch our heads at the next part of our Gospel reading. **“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”** If people were coming to confess their sins

to John and be baptized, what was Jesus doing there? What sins did He have to confess?

He didn't have any sins to confess. Rather in His baptism He has taken on your sins. **“For our sake [the Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.”** Jesus has taken on your imperfections in baptism. You get His perfection in exchange. That's a pretty good deal.

Back in the olden days before running water, the family would fill a tub full of water and everyone would take turns getting a bath. If you lived on the farm, it was likely you had ten brothers and sisters. The family would start with the youngest and then go to the oldest. Often the father would be the last in line to take a bath.

Remember, there was no running water, so it wasn't easy to get a bathtub full. If they recycled the water for all those baths, how clean would dad get at the end of the line? Probably not very much.

So too it is that in this cleansing flood that is Baptism, our sins are washed away, and Jesus takes on the dirty bath water. We even see where He takes those sins. The next place He goes is into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark tells us that He was immediately driven into the wilderness.

When you're tempted by Satan, tell Him to go talk to Jesus. The devil hates that. He *hates* it. Because guess what. Satan's been there done that. He tried for forty days to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, but it didn't work. Even weighed down with your sins, Jesus overcame Satan.

Baptism cleanses you from your sins and wrongdoings. Because of this, we can easily see our second point: II. Baptism opens heaven. **“And when [Jesus] came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”** What an amazing sight to see, to see the heavens rend open and seeing into heavenly realms.

Yet this is what happens at every baptism. Maybe we can't see it with our eyes, but in baptism Heaven's gate is opened to you, and the Holy Spirit descends upon you like a dove. Do you believe this?

A Jewish historian in the time of Jesus described the temple curtain in Jerusalem that was at the entrance to the temple. This historian, Josephus, described how grandiose this temple curtain was. The temple curtain was eighty feet high by twenty feet wide. That's about as wide as the wooden backsplash in the front of the church, but about twice as tall. You think our back wall is tall, if Josephus is correct, the curtain was even taller. On it was a tapestry that portrayed the panorama of the heavens—a vision of the night sky.

When Jesus died on the cross, **“The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”** Based on Josephus' description of the temple curtain having

the stars and the night sky portrayed on them, You could say that for a second time, the heavens were torn open.

The temple curtain being torn open means that you have access to your Heavenly Father through the death of His Son. The temple curtain being torn open means you have entry into the holy places of God. And Holy Baptism delivers you these fruits of Jesus' death and resurrection by the cleansing flood.

When Jesus died and the heavenly tapestry of the temple was torn in two, that is a reminder and a sign that in baptism, you have those gifts of God delivered to you, and the heavens rend open for you.

Finally, III. Baptism makes you a child of God. After Jesus was baptized, **“...a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”**” In Baptism, Jesus heard the voice of God His Heavenly Father identify Him as His Son. This of course was true before Jesus was baptized, but it was confirmed in this event.

In Baptism, you have been made a child of God. You have been adopted into God's family. Peter tells us, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies 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.”**

Thus, in baptism, not only have your sins been washed away, but you have been claimed and welcomed by your Heavenly Father. It is in Baptism that God looks at you and says, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” “You are my beloved daughter; with you I am well pleased.” It is in baptism that the King looks to you and says, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.”

As part of God's family, everything He has is yours. Everything that belongs to Jesus is now yours: His holiness, His perfection, His love, His patience, His wisdom, His power. Because you are part of God's family, you have an inheritance waiting for you, one of eternal life, one of heavenly treasures, one of everlasting joys.

You don't need to be afraid. You don't need to be worried. You don't need to wonder if you're good enough. Baptized into Your name most holy, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I claim a place, though weak and lowly, among your saints, your chosen host. Buried with Christ and dead to sin, Your Spirit now shall live within.

What a great gift to be washed clean in baptism, to have heaven opened for us, and to be part of God's family, all because Jesus was baptized in the Jordan and took on sin, death, and hell for us. Amen.