

An older fish and a younger fish are swimming in the ocean. The older fish says, “The water is pretty nice today!” The younger fish asks, “What’s water?”

Baptism is an important part of Christian teaching. The Word “Baptism” may only occur once in the book of Colossians, but like the water that those fish swam in, the entire letter is soaked in baptismal imagery.

We’ll be starting a four-week sermon series titled “Baptized into Christ.” We’ll be working through the book of Colossians looking through the lens of baptism. Baptism helps us see this book in technicolor and enjoy the text more deeply.

Today’s title is “Baptized into Christ’s Family.” And today we learn **BAPTISM GRANTS US THE FULL BENEFITS OF BEING IN CHRIST’S FAMILY.**

First, I. Baptism in Christ's Family is steeped in prayer and the word. As we start Paul’s letter to the Church in Colossae, we see the fatherly concern that Paul has for the Christians at that church. **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,”** Likewise, Paul writes, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,”** We see Paul’s prayer, thankfulness, and care for those to whom he writes.

There’s more to being in a family than just whose DNA you share. An earthly family is a place to belong. It’s a place to find comfort in the arms of mom or dad. It’s a place to ask for help, rejoice together, and share one another’s burdens.

A mom doesn’t give birth to a child with the expectation of cutting the little guy loose the next week to go out into the world to seek his fortunes. The birth of a child is the start of a lifetime of joys and pains, learning and breaking habits, love and heartbreak.

Children need more than just clean diapers and bottles of formula. One website suggests you say 21,000 words a day to your child to help develop his vocabulary. Another website suggests that if you read your child five picture books a day, they’ll have heard a million more words by the age of five than a child whose parents didn’t read to him. It may seem like he’s not paying attention. It may seem useless to talk to an infant. But that child will be steeped in words and conversation and before you know it, he’ll be speaking back to you the very same words you spoke to him.

What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word. Through baptism we are adopted into God’s family, and just as a mom and dad wouldn’t leave an infant

alone after birth, the Church doesn't leave the newly baptized alone to fend for themselves.

Baptism in Christ's Family is steeped in prayer and the word. Saint Peter writes, **“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—”** Baptized into Christ's family, we live a life steeped in prayer and God's Word just as Paul prayed ceaselessly with prayers of thanksgiving on behalf of the Church of Colossae. Christians surround themselves with spiritually mature Christians to teach them the language of the faith and the mindset of the faith just as the Church in Colossae benefitted greatly through the ministry of Epaphras who first taught them the faith.

A toddler may not be able to speak a sentence, but he makes known his desires. He walks up to his library of books, he selects one from the shelf, and he tugs your hand or plops himself into your lap to let you know he wants you to start reading it to him.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Baptism immerses us into a world of prayer and God's Word. It changes our way of thinking and acting through a lifestyle of prayers and Words that God Himself gives to us. We surround ourselves with a Christian library of psalms, prayers, creeds, Bible stories, Bible passages, and hymnody.

And this diet of words and prayers transforms us. II. Baptism in Christ's Family starts a walk. Baptism is not only the start of a lifetime of learning, but it is the start of a lifetime of Christian living.

A favorite folk song of mine has the line, “Always remember there was nothing worth sharing like the love that let us share our name.” Admittedly families can come in all shapes and sizes and not everyone under your roof may have the same last name, but for many of us, our shared last name represents a shared identity with its own set of values and lifestyle. We are Eichers, this is how we act. Perhaps something similar was said by your mom or dad growing up.

Baptized into Christ's family, you have a certain way that you act and behave in the household of God. Paul is praying for the Church at Colossae **“...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;”**

You raise kids so that they can ultimately be contributing members of society. You change their diapers in hopes of them changing yours one day—or at least seeing to it that someone like a C.N.A. does. You are a blessing to your children so they can be a blessing to those around them. You teach them to walk so that eventually they can take off into a run.

Baptism into Christ's family starts a walk. Christian is your identity. Christian is your lifestyle. Baptized into Christ's family means that you follow in the footsteps of Christ. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life. His walk sent Him across the path of countless sick, downtrodden, and sinful in need of a new start. His walk led to the cross wherein He took on all your sins and forgave them. His walk led to the open grave where death no longer had power over him as He rose from the dead.

As those who are Christened in baptism, we follow in the footsteps of the Christ, often stumbling and tripping as spiritual toddlers. Nonetheless, baptized into Christ's family, we walk; we don't crawl. We love others; we don't only scream mine. We care for the needs of others; we don't hit and steal others' toys. Baptism sets you on a new path and a new lifestyle.

Finally, III. Baptism in Christ's Family qualifies us for an inheritance. Paul brings it home as he shows the reason why Christians do what they do, **“giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**

None of us chose to be born. None of us chose our family. Nonetheless, I think many of us are thankful for the families in which we grew up. Those of us who are older may have been on the receiving end of an inheritance which would be the property that our family has left behind.

Through Baptism, the Father has qualified you to be not only sons and daughters, but heirs of a fortune. An inheritance is given at the death of a loved one, and at Christ's death we are the recipients of a wonderful gift. Baptism applies this gift to us as we become heirs of that promise. We receive the Holy Spirit which is a guarantee of the full treasure that we will receive when we die and go to heaven.

But the point is this: it is the Father who does the qualifying. It is the Son who redeems. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies or makes holy. As a part of God's family, we are recipients of a great treasure, but it's never anything we earned or deserved just as a father's love for his children is not because of their behavior, their intelligence, or their stunning good looks.

BAPTISM GRANTS US THE FULL BENEFITS OF BEING IN CHRIST'S FAMILY. As we look at Baptism, it is the start of a new life. Just as birth is the start of a life of love and learning in a family, so too baptism is the start of a life of love and learning in the Church. In baptism we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation as we learn to speak Christ's language and walk his walk. There are countless blessings as we enjoy the inheritance in the saints in light through baptism.