

Baptized into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

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Readings

Isaiah 11:1-9

- 1 And there shall come out a Shaft from the trunk of Jesse,
and a Stem from his roots shall become fruitful.
- 2 And the spirit of Jehovah shall rest on Him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah;
- 3 and to cause Him to breathe in the sweet smell of the fear of Jehovah;
He shall not judge according to the sight of His eyes,
nor shall He make decisions according to the hearing of His ears;
- 4 but with justice shall He judge the poor,
and with uprightness shall He make decisions for the meek of the earth;
and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth,
and with the spirit of His lips shall He put the wicked to death.
- 5 And justice shall be the belt of His loins,
and faithfulness the belt of His hips.
- 6 And a wolf shall sojourn with a lamb,
and a leopard shall lie down with a young goat,
and a calf and a young lion and a fatling together;
and a little child shall lead them.
- 7 And the cow and the bear shall pasture;
together shall what is born of them lie down;
and the lion shall eat straw as the cattle.
- 8 And the nursing infant shall play upon the hole of the adder;
and upon the den of the viper shall the weaned child thrust his hand.
- 9 They shall not do evil nor destroy in all the mountain of My holiness;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah,
as the waters cover the sea.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ And the eleven disciples went into Galilee, into the mountain where Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; and yet they doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus coming spoke to them, saying, "All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Going forth, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age." Amen.

Survey of Teachings of the New Church (or Brief Exposition) 32

The existence of the Divine Trinity is made very clear by the Lord's words in Matthew:

Jesus said, "Go forth and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

The reason why the Lord sent His disciples forth to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was that this Divine Trinity existed within Him in His then-glorified state. In the verse preceding the quotation from Matthew 28 just given, the Lord says, "All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18); and in the verse following, He says, "Behold I am with you all the days, even to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20). In these verses, then, He mentions only Himself and not three persons. In John we read, "There was not the Holy Spirit yet because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). He made the statement in Matthew after He was glorified, and His glorification was when He became fully united with His Father, the Divinity that had been inside Him since conception. The Holy Spirit was the Divine quality that emanated from Him once He was glorified (John 20:22).

Introduction

- We're talking today about the significance of *your* baptism.
 - Maybe you were baptized as an infant.
 - Maybe you were baptized as a child, or a teenager, or as an adult.
 - Or maybe you've never been baptized.
- Regardless of your circumstances, this talk will hopefully give you an opportunity to reflect on the significance of your baptism, or your potential, future baptism.
 - Many of us don't think much about our baptism.
 - It can feel like something from our past.
 - But our baptism has use beyond just on the day that it happens, and – like anything – it can become more precious and significant to us if we take the time to reflect on why it matters.
- We're going to focus in on one particular part of the baptism sacrament: the name into which you are baptized.
 - In the baptism service in the Liturgy in the pews in front of you, the priest or minister says, "I baptize you into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."
 - Here are some of the questions we're going to explore:
 - Why is the Trinity mentioned in the baptism service?
 - What does it mean to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?
 - And how can that be significant or meaningful to us?

Important Note: We Need the Lord's Help

- One note before we dive into the topic of the trinity: we need the Lord's help to understand this.
 - There is a section about the Trinity in the book *True Christian Religion*, the last published work of the Teachings for the New Church.
 - Towards the beginning of that section, there is an acknowledgment that it can be tricky to try to understand the Trinity.
 - This is what it says:

- How are we to understand [the three parts of the Trinity]? Are they three gods who are one God in essence and name? Are they three distinct qualities of one underlying material, meaning that they are just qualities or attributes of a single God that have names? Or is there some other alternative?

The only good advice tells us to turn to the Lord God our Savior and read the Word under His supervision (since He is the God of the Word). Then we will be enlightened and see truths that even reason will acknowledge. (*True Christian Religion* 165)

- Let's follow that good advice, as we attempt to better understand the Trinity: let's pray to the Lord for His help.
 - Please bow your heads.
 - Lord, You are our God and Savior. We want to better understand You and we want to be guided by You as we read Your Word, as we try to think things through, and as we try to come to a better understanding of the Trinity. Please supervise us – help us to see when we're going off track and when we're on the right track. Bring Your light into our dark and clouded minds so that we can see more clearly and see You for who You truly are. *Amen*.

Why is the Trinity Mentioned in the Baptism Service?

That's What the Lord Says in Matthew

- Why is the Trinity mentioned in the baptism service?
 - Well, because it's in the command that the Lord gives to His disciples at the end of the gospel of Matthew.
 - Jesus said to them, "Going forth, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...."
- We talk about the Trinity when we do baptisms because the Lord said to do that.
 - That's reason enough.

- It's worth noting that this phrase is unique to the Gospel of Matthew.
 - None of the other gospels mention baptizing "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
 - In fact, that phrase doesn't show up anywhere else in the Gospels.
 - There are stories in which we see a depiction of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – like when Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended, and a voice came from heaven (Luke 3:21, 22).
 - And there are plenty of places where the Lord teaches about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – like in the conversation the Lord had with His disciples during the Last Supper.
 - But it's still intriguing that we only get this command to baptize in this three-fold way in Matthew.
- Another intriguing and useful thing to note is that, at least according to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Lord's disciples never explicitly baptized people in this way:
 - They baptized people "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38), and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16, 19:5), and "in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48), but never "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
- Now, maybe the disciples all got it wrong and they never baptized people in the way the Lord wanted them to.
 - This seems highly unlikely.
- More likely is that they correctly understood that the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ.
 - This is actually a very helpful key or shorthand for understanding the Trinity.
 - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one name and that name is Jesus Christ.
 - As Paul said in one of his letters, "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...." (Colossians 2:9).

It Communicates Something Important About Jesus Christ

- This brings us back to our question again, though: if the point was to baptize people into the name of Jesus Christ, why did the Lord tell His disciples in Matthew to baptize into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- In the chapter in *True Christian Religion* on baptism it lists three uses or functions of baptism, and one of them is this: "to Allow Christians to Know and Acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Savior, and to Follow Him" (681).
 - Baptism is meant to help us learn more about the Person into whose name we have been baptized.
 - And part of what we need to learn more about if we want to really understand Jesus Christ is the Trinity.
 - Again, here are two statements from *True Christian Religion*:
 - Only through understanding the Trinity can we gain a just idea of God; and in the church a just idea of God is like the sanctuary and the altar in a church building. (163)
 - The Divine Trinity ought to shine like a lamp in the minds of people in the church, since God in His Trinity and in the unity of that Trinity is all in all that is holy in heaven and in the church. (169)
- Why is the Trinity mentioned in the baptism service?
 - Because it communicates something important and essential for understanding Jesus Christ.
 - If we are being baptized into His name, we want to really understand who He is.
 - This brings us to our next questions: what does it mean to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and how can that be meaningful to us?

What Does It Mean and How Can It Be Meaningful to Us?

What it Does NOT Mean

- Let's start by going over what it does NOT mean.
- It does not mean being baptized into the name of three separate persons of God who are all somehow one God.
 - That is the interpretation in almost all Christian Churches: God in three persons.
 - Three persons of God, with three separate functions, that are somehow all one.
 - That is NOT the New Church understanding of the Trinity.

The New Church Does Believe in the Trinity

- However, it is important to note that the New Church DOES believe in the Trinity (*True Christian Religion* 164).
 - Sometimes people who grew up in the New Church will get confused about this and think that New Church people don't believe in the Trinity.
 - No! There is a Divine Trinity.
 - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are real they are just all in Jesus Christ.
 - As we said together in our recitation today, "God is one, in whom is a Divine Trinity, and the Lord God the Savior Jesus Christ is that one" (*True Christian Religion* 3:2).
- The teachings of the New Church explain that the best way to understand the Trinity in the Lord is to think about a similar trinity in a normal human being.
 - We read, "Can anyone fail to see how the Trinity is in the Lord, if they consider the trinity in any human being? Every person has a soul, a body and activity; likewise the Lord.... Therefore there is a Divine Trinity in the Lord and a human one in us" (*True Christian Religion* 169).
- If the Father means the soul of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son means His body, and the Holy Spirit means His activity, what is the significance of being baptized into the name of the soul, body, and activity of Jesus Christ?
- Part of what it does is highlight just who the Lord is and the process that He went through over the course of His life on earth.
 - To get into more of the details of that, let's return to the passage we read for our lesson from the teachings for the New Church.

The Process That the Lord Went Through

- We read, "The reason why the Lord sent His disciples forth to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was that this Divine Trinity existed within Him in His then-glorified state" (*Brief Exposition* 32).
- We need to unpack this a bit.
 - There are three times we need to understand:
 - 1) Before God came into the world as Jesus Christ.
 - 2) After God came into the world as Jesus Christ, but before He was fully glorified.
 - 3) After Jesus Christ was fully glorified.
- Before God came into the world as Jesus Christ, there was no Trinity.
 - This is a big difference from what many other Christian churches teach.
 - Many other Christian churches teach that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were three persons of God, existing from eternity.
 - The New Church, instead, teaches that the Trinity was something that came into being through the process that the Lord went through over the course of His life in the world (*True Christian Religion* 170-173).
 - In the Gospel of John, the process that the Lord went through is called being glorified.
 - This was the process of Jesus Christ, from His Divine soul, making every part of Himself fully Divine or glorified.
- So there was a time before any of that process had begun.
- Then there was a time while that process was going on.
- And then there was a time after that process was complete.
- While the process was going on but not yet complete is when we read statements like this from John: "There was not the Holy Spirit yet because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).
- But after the process was complete, then we read statements like what the Lord said at the end of Matthew: "All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth" (28:18).
 - Let's read further from the passage from our lessons:

- He made the statement in Matthew after He was glorified, and His glorification was when He became fully united with His Father, the Divinity that had been inside Him since conception. The Holy Spirit was the Divine quality that emanated from Him once He was glorified (John 20:22). (*Brief Exposition 32*).
- So after the Lord Jesus Christ was fully glorified – fully Divine – that was when He sent out His disciples and told them to baptize the nations into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - In so doing, there was a built-in reminder of who Jesus Christ really was.
 - We can appreciate the significance of this by thinking through what it would be like to not know about the Lord's soul, body, or activity.

"...the name of the Father..."

- If we were just baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, without knowing about the Father or His Divine soul, we might be inclined to think of the Lord as just a really good or important person but not Divine.
 - Like Moses, or John the Baptist, or some more modern person who seems to have done a lot of good for the world.
- But we can know that the Lord Jesus Christ was and is a whole lot more than that.
 - He is the God of the Old Testament and God of the universe who took on flesh to be God with us in this world.

"...and of the Son..."

- If we were just baptized, without knowing about the Son of God, what would be missing?
 - In this case we might miss that God is in human form, that God is someone who we can picture and have a relationship with.
 - The children of Israel had a ritual that they did to show their connection to God.
 - They were circumcised.
 - And that did something but they did not have a sense of close connection to their God.
- Being baptized into the name of the Son reminds us of all the things our God did as love in human form – all the healing, teaching, casting out demons, and caring for His people with compassion, wisdom, and love.

“...and of the Holy Spirit...”

- Finally, if we were just baptized, without knowing about the Lord's Holy Spirit, what would be missing?
- The Lord also commanded His disciples to teach people to observe all things that He had commanded them.
 - Sometimes when we're trying to do the work of following Him and living according to what He teaches, the Lord can seem pretty far away.
 - In those times we need to remember that He is with us always.
 - Jesus Christ's Holy Spirit is with us, even when we can't physically see Him.
 - To borrow language from the Old Testament, it is the “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah.”
- The Holy Spirit is the activity of Jesus Christ and He is very active in our lives.
- To be baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit is to be reminded of that reality.

Conclusion

- When the first people were baptized by the disciples into the name of Jesus Christ who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they were becoming part of a new spiritual era that was just beginning.
 - A spiritual era marked by a revolutionary new ability to join together with our loving human God.
 - He had always been loving and human but now people could know that and connect with Him as that.
- Even though billions of people have now experienced it, when each person gets baptized it is still an amazing thing – including if and when it happens for you.
- The Trinity can be hard to understand, but it can also shine like a lamp in our minds and help us to better see, understand, and connect with our Savior.
- You can be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has the Divine soul of God within Him, who took on flesh to dwell among us, and whose spirit is with you always.
- You can be baptized “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit....”
- *Amen.*

If you would like to talk more about this topic, get in touch with Malcolm at malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org.