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*Talking Points on The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism* is a set of nine leaflets issued by the Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to invite conversation about baptism as it is understood by several different church bodies. These are not intended as position papers but as discussion starters with the hope of giving insight and deepening faith as well as fostering Christian unity. These may be reprinted without permission for use in small groups and other congregational settings.

Your ideas about these topics are very welcome. To submit personal reflections or the results of a group discussion, use the accompanying Response and Evaluation form or e-mail [eainfo@elca.org](mailto:eainfo@elca.org)

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*Living in God's amazing grace*

# Talking points on # 9 The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

## Baptism and Death

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**“Do you not know that all of us who have  
been baptized into Christ Jesus were  
baptized into his death?”**

**— Romans 6:3**

## Reflection

For all Christians baptism is a death. Regardless of age, baptism is a time when we shift from our birth family to a faith family. In this way, baptism is a death to the old and also a resurrection to the *new*. I was baptized when I was a boy and will never forget the moment I came out of the water. Members of my church greeted me, hugged me and kissed me. I belonged now to them. My birth family was still very much there for me, but I also belonged to the wider family of God. This was an experience that was entirely new.

What makes baptism new? To be sure, for many Jews immersion into water was a cleansing act: Water washed away sin and offered new life. For his part, John the Baptist proclaimed a water baptism for the forgiveness of sins (also anticipating the baptism of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, Mark 1:4-8).

And yet, after the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection, the meaning of baptism took on a profound 'other' meaning. This meaning was as central to the emerging Christian faith of Paul as it is for us today. Consider Paul's words:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*  
(Romans 6:3-8)

For Paul as for us today, being "buried" in the water of baptism marks a death: Death to the old age and its ceaseless cultural demands, death to obsessive self-seeking and its fatal egotism, death to rugged individualism with its lack of concern for others, and death to a sinful way of life that injures other human beings.

For Paul as for us today, being immersed in the water of baptism brings new life: Jesus was raised from death. We also rise up out of the water, reborn to a new life. We have the choice to live this new life as a gift, given for others, a life lived in a new community, and a life free of sin.

We are buried and reborn through baptism. Just as the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb, so we are buried with him in the water of baptism. Just as the body of Jesus emerged from the tomb, we also come out of the tomb. We become a part of his body, with a new life, through the waters of our baptism.

The authors of 1 Peter and Hebrews think of baptism as receiving the cleansing action of Jesus' sacrificial death. Most Christians today affirm this cleansing motif when at baptism there is an affirmation of "the need to confess and receive forgiveness." Through confession and forgiveness of sins, baptism is once more linked to the central tenet of the Christian faith – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At the end of life, as the Christian comes to the experience of physical death, the reality of baptism takes on a rich meaning, and comes full-circle. In a deep sense the first baptism is repeated. That is, through baptism the believer first died to the old life and was raised in a family of faith. At the time of physical death, the believer is surrounded by this new family, the body of Christ. After burial the deceased comes alive again among her or his family of faith, but in a new way, to a new life. The believer is resurrected from baptism to new life.

### **Talking Points**

- 1) Paul writes, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death ...." Have you ever thought of baptism this way? What do baptism and death have in common?
- 2) Paul continues, ". . . so we too might walk in the newness of life." Conversation about death is difficult. How does your baptism give you the courage to talk about death?
- 3) In what ways do confession and forgiveness of sins mirror death and new life?
- 4) Have you experienced the comfort of baptism when faced with the death of someone close to you? What does it mean that he or she was baptized?
- 5) When you think of your own death, does the thought of your baptism hold out hope to you?