

18 because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh[c] but was made alive in spirit, 19 in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. 20 These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God’s patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. 21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 22 He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

“Why do I have to take a shower? I’m going to get dirty anyways.” This is a question I would ask my mom. The older I get, and the more I run, the more I notice that it takes at least one shower a day to keep the smell down. But even after a shower, I sometimes still find some dirt on me. Not a single soap claims to kill 100% of the germs. And there is definitely no shower that makes us clean for all time. But there was something else that has made you clean, cleaner than any shower or bath could make. Even better than the most advanced exfoliating methods. Baptism is the best bath ever! God used the waters of baptism to wash us out and wash us clean.

Peter wrote his first letter keeping in mind that his audience were to Christians spread across many regions. They lived as foreigners and strangers in the land. Not because they didn’t belong there, but because their true home is in heaven. Christians face troubles and persecution in this life. So Peter wrote to give them confidence and encouragement. Here, Peter shows that a Christian can have confidence because they received the best bath ever in the waters of baptism.

To understand the confidence that baptism gives, Peter needed to tell the Christians what baptism does. He begins with the negative. It is not “the removal of dirt from the body.” That’s what we expect water to do. When it washes over the person, it washes out the dirt. But, baptism is so much more. Baptism gives the “guarantee of a good conscience before God.”

The guarantee of a good conscience demonstrates that baptism destroys. It is a much different washing than that of dirt off of the body. Don’t get me wrong. There are a couple of similarities. The similarities are that water are used and filth is removed. But the differences are great. Baptism washes deeper than the skin. The filth (guilt of sin) of your heart is washed away. We can wash the dirt off of our own bodies, but we cannot wash clean our own hearts. Dirt is washed by water and soap. Baptism washes the filth of hearts with water and the Word of God.

Peter demonstrates that this washing out that takes place in baptism corresponds with the flood. In the flood, the people who lived at the same time of Noah were very wicked. So wicked that their thoughts were only wicked all the time. God tasked Noah with building this giant ark. It took Noah 120 years to build. As the ark went up, God gave the people time to repent and follow the ways of the Lord. He even provided this large visual. But, they didn’t repent. God led Noah, his family, and two of each of the animals into ark. God sent rain for forty days and forty nights. Whatever was not on the ark perished.

This leads to a very important question: Is the account of the flood about destruction or salvation? There certainly is destruction, but that destruction proved to be Noah’s salvation. Did you notice how Noah, in the ark, was saved by water? If Noah was saved by water, what was he saved from? The water saved him from the wicked people. God washed the filthy people out of the world. This is the

connection that Peter makes with baptism. The waters of baptism wash the filth out of our disobedient hearts.

Where does that filth come from? This filth is sin. When we sin, it continues to blacken our heart. We sin when we waste our time to chase after the things of this world rather than chase after God. How much do you love watching TV? Do you enjoy it more than reading God's Word? More than praying? What about spending time on social media? We are like the people of Noah's day, wasting our time, focusing on chasing after the things of this world in place of wanting to spend time praying and following after the desires of God. For those in the days of Noah, the concern was finding a spouse, no matter if they believed in God or not. This resulted in God coming with judgement. We deserve that same judgement. For those who care only about this world, replacing the world with God, Jesus will come again to send them to eternal destruction.

Thanks be to God that Jesus comes now with destruction! Jesus comes to us through baptism, washing out the sin that plagues our hearts. Baptism is truly the best bath ever because it saves us. Baptism uses the powerful force of water and the Word to wash away our sins. It cleans us so powerfully that we have a clean conscience toward God. When we waste our time chasing after the world rather than chasing after God, he washed that sin and all others from our conscience. There is truly nothing else that can clean our hearts. Baptism is the best bath ever!

When you look at a coin, you notice that there are two sides. Both sides are opposite each other, but both are important to the coin. That is why we have the saying, "Two sides of the same coin." An example, "fortune and misfortune are two sides of the same coin." If a tornado is headed toward your house and veers away, that is fortunate for you. For the person that the tornado veered towards, they experience misfortune. Fortune and misfortune are typically close together. In baptism, destruction and salvation are two sides of the same coin. Because of the destructive force of the water washing out our sins, we gain salvation.

And that is why Peter tells us that baptism now saves you. We gain salvation because our hearts have been washed clean, we have the "guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." That is a statement loaded with meaning. We have the guarantee of a good conscience before God. The guarantee is a claim, having the right to something. In an airport, there is baggage claim. This is where you go to claim your luggage. This luggage is yours; you have a guarantee to it. A greater claim that we have, that is for sure ours and never gets lost, a good conscience before God.

How is our conscience good before God? It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what powers our cleansing. How does a pressure washer clean so well? It is because of its power. And that power comes from the motor. It shoots the water so hard that the dirt gets blown away. In baptism, we are washed completely clean because the power comes from Christ's work. Baptism is always powerful and effective because Christ has been raised from the dead.

The power of baptism gives us great comfort. Remember that the Apostle Peter was writing to persecuted Christians. Baptism is such a great comfort to us because our consciences have been washed clean. We have a guarantee before God. Baptism is so powerful because of Christ's saving work. Notice how Peter surrounds this discussion on baptism with the work of Christ. He begins with speaking about Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. And he concludes with speaking of Christ's ascension and

being seated in power. Baptism is surrounded with the good news of Jesus because baptism is powered by that good news.

This great of power continues giving us comfort today, just as it gave comfort to the congregations that Peter was writing to. We have confidence that our consciences are clean before God. We have a claim to a good conscience through baptism because Christ powers it by his life, death, and resurrection. Baptism now saves you. What other bath can you say this? Absolutely none other. Only baptism has this power. Baptism has washed you clean.

Did you know that today marks another new year? You might be thinking, "Oh no. Vicar is losing it. Should I tell him that New Years is January 1st every year?" But today marks a new church year. This is the first Sunday in Advent. As we look forward to our Christ's coming, I propose we make a new year's resolution. That resolution is that we remember our rebirthday, the day you were baptized. That might be hard for some of us as we were baptized as babies. I had an emergency baptism the day I was born, so I don't physically remember my baptism. But life would have more peace if we could remember that we were baptized. And there are tons of opportunities to do so. At each one of our locations, the baptismal font is in a prominent location. In Verona, it is right in the doorway as you walk into the sanctuary. In Monroe, it is up front, smack dab in the middle. Every time we see it, it is an opportunity to remember. The beginning of the service begins in the name we were baptized in: in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Every time your baptismal date comes around, is another opportunity to remember your baptism. Our baptism means that we are washed out and washed clean.

The flood: was it an act of destruction or salvation? Trick question, the destruction proved to be salvation. Moses and his family were rescued from the midst of wicked people. An even greater act of destructive salvation was your baptism. Baptism is the best bath you have ever had. This bath washed out your sins and washed clean your conscience before God. Take heart, and remember that baptism now saves you. Amen.