



Rev. Dr. David Preus baptizes a child in Palmar Arriba, Dominican Republic.



Rev. Sergio Maita baptizes four people at a new mission plant in San José de Ocoa, Dominican Republic.

## Baptismal Joy

In Latin America and in many churches around the world, we begin service on Sunday with the Invocation. The pastor begins by saying “En el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo” or “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The congregation responds with “Amen.” During this short prayer and opening of the service, the pastor makes the sign of the cross and the congregation is encouraged to do the same. Why?

According to Martin Luther’s Explanation of the Small Catechism (Q. 294), “by repeating these words...we recall, claim, and confess before heaven, earth, and hell all that God the Holy Trinity has given us in our Baptism.” Baptism? I thought we were going to a regular church service here; why are we talking about baptism? Baptism is one of the essential parts of Christianity, one of the means of grace by which we receive the gifts of God he so freely pours out on us each and every day. Bear with me now.

This Trinitarian Invocation is accompanied by the sign of the cross because we receive that same sign upon our foreheads and upon our hearts the day we are baptized and join God’s glorious family. Luther reminds us of the blessings of baptism (Q. 277); “It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.” Not only is baptism a command given by Jesus (Matthew 28:18-19), but it is a privilege and great honor to be marked as redeemed by Christ the crucified.

As we enter into God’s house on Sunday morning and make the sign of the cross, we remember our baptism. We repent of our sins, we reflect on Jesus’



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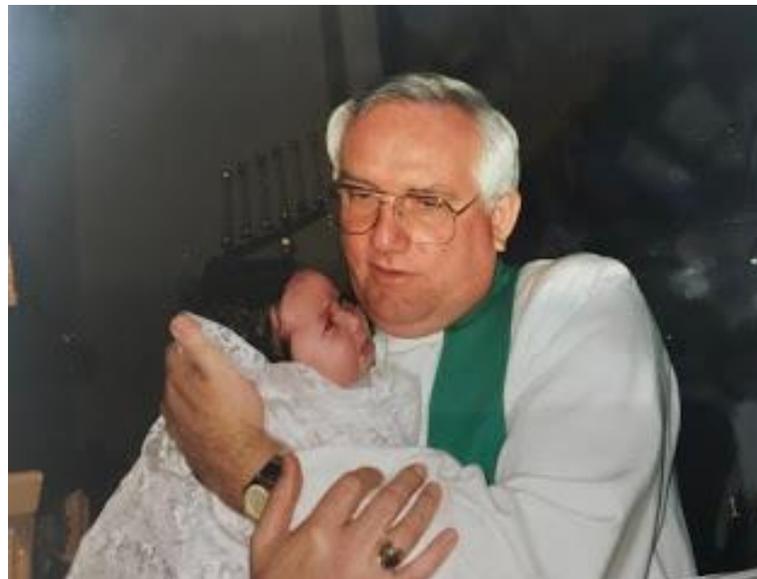


death and sacrifice, we give thanks for His endless mercy and grace, and rejoice in our salvation. We prepare our hearts for worship and come before God as the sinners that we are, yearning to hear the Gospel of Jesus. Titus 3:5-7 tells us that “he [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Again, why are we talking about baptism here? For one, my baptismal birthday is in January, so I’ve been reflecting on baptism a bit more deeply lately. I’ve always treasured the day I was baptized because it was the most important day of my life. I was welcomed into God’s family at 45 days old, received all the blessings mentioned above, and continue to receive them every single day as a baptized Christian. I never used to make the sign of the cross during the Invocation, but now I do. I will never not value the significance of my baptism. (P.S. Shoutout to all you who celebrate your baptismal birthday- it is a day worth celebrating indeed!)

Baptism days are some of my favorite days of the year. Any time I witness a baptism, my heart sings for joy as I visibly see the saving grace of God wash over my new family member in Christ. In Latin America, we usually celebrate baptisms on feast days, like Easter or Reformation. What better way to welcome new brothers and sisters into the family of Christ!

Friends, join me in praying that all may know Jesus and be baptized into His family. It is the greatest gift anyone could ever asked for.



My baptism day! Baptized by Rev. Ray Mirly on January 26, 1997. (Don’t worry. I know I look sad, but I was inwardly rejoicing!)

#### Verse of the month!

Y les dijo: “Vayan por todo el mundo y prediquen el evangelio a toda criatura. El que crea y sea bautizado, se salvará; pero el que no crea, será condenado.”

Marcos (Mark) 16:15-16

#### Prayer Requests

- That all may be baptized and be saved.
- Thanksgiving for all those who belong to the family of Christ through baptism.
- For the new mission in San José de Ocoa.
- For those who are distant from God, that the Holy Spirit may work in their hearts.
- For the end of the pandemic.
- For those dealing with health challenges.
- Thanksgiving for new church members.

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