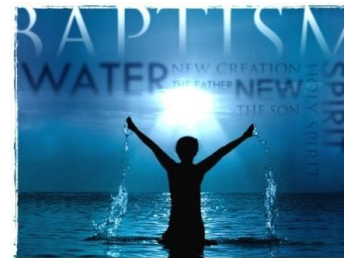


JANUARY 5, 2014

The Good News



*D*undalk United Methodist Church
*G*raceland United Methodist Church
Cooperative Parish



Baptism...The first steps of a journey

This Sunday is the remembrance of “the Baptism of the Lord.”

Baptism...everybody has an idea of what it is and we all know that water is involved.

We all have heard of John the Baptist, know that he was the cousin of Jesus, that he baptized penitents in the Jordan River and lost his head because of a vengeful woman and a weak king.

But what is Baptism, really?

To some it is something to be done because Grandma would get mad if we don't, to others it is a great excuse for a party.

To become Christian is to receive a new identity. You no longer allow others to tell you who you are. Christ now claims you and instructs you. A Christian is one who has “put on Christ.”

Baptism celebrates us as a new person, a new creation in Christ by the Holy Spirit. In Baptism we enter a covenant with God as evidenced

by the words, “The Holy Spirit works within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”

Yet how many take that covenant seriously? How many parents bring their babies to a church to be Baptized only to never enter the church again?

We, as Christians, need to take this as seriously as we take Communion—it IS a sacrament...and a covenant.

So the most important things about us, our true identity, is that we are now sons and daughters of God. That is why the introduction to the United Methodist Baptismal Covenant states, “We are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit.”

The introduction also says, “Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are initiated into Christ’s holy church.”

Because baptism is a sacrament of God’s grace and a covenant that God has initiated, it should not be re-

peated. However, God’s continuing and patient forgiveness, God’s prevenient grace, will prompt us to renew the commitment first made at our baptism.

At such a time, instead of rebaptism, The United Methodist Church offers the ritual for the reaffirmation of baptismal vows, which implies that, while God remains faithful to God’s half of the covenant, we are not always faithful to our promises. Our half of the covenant is to confess Christ as our Savior, trust in his grace, serve him as Lord in the church, and carry out his mission against evil, injustice, and oppression.

From the beginning, baptism has been the door through which one enters the church.

Why Baptize Babies?

From the earliest times, children and infants were baptized and included in the church. As scriptural authority for this ancient tradition, some scholars cite Jesus’ words, “Let the little children come to me...for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God be-

longs” (Mark 10:14). However, a more consistent argument is that baptism, as a means of grace, signifies God’s initiative in the process of salvation.

John Wesley preached “prevenient grace,” the grace that works in our lives before we are aware of it, bringing us to faith. The baptism of children and their inclusion in the church before they can respond with their own confirmation of faith is a vivid and compelling witness to prevenient grace.

You have heard people say, “I was baptized Methodist,” or “Presbyterian,” or “Catholic” which could mean that in baptism they got their identity papers and that was the end of it. There is only “ONE baptism for the forgiveness of sins.”

But baptism is not the end. It is the beginning of a life-long journey of faith.

It makes no difference whether you were baptized as an adult or as a child; we all start on that journey at baptism.

—Pastor Dan.