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# THE SCRUTINIES

## THE CATECHISM FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP IN LENT AND EASTER

### 4: Holy Baptism

Here is the fourth of six Scrutinies intended for use in Sunday worship in Christian congregations during Lent and Easter. See [Essay 146](#) for an introduction to this brief series.

As I maintained in introducing this series, I'm indebted to both Don Johnson and Frank Senn for the concept — and even the language! — of adapting Luther's *Small Catechism* for use in parish worship. Again, I salute both of these friends for their scholarship and their imagination!

And also as I noted in [146](#), I'd likely have this Rite conclude the sermon. In the best circumstances, I'd do without a print piece altogether, since Pastor and Assisting Ministers do most of the speaking, and the people themselves have *ELWorship* for the texts of the *Small Catechism*, pages 1160 - 1169.

Once again, could some sort of visual aids be useful in communicating certain of the meanings explored here? I'll leave that possibility to your own imagination...

Before we begin, note three important qualifiers.

First, *ELWorship* includes Confession and Absolution somewhat idiosyncratically as an appendage to its section on Baptism on page 1165. In my copy of *The Book of Concord* — the Lutheran confessional symbols — this important Office stands alone as "How Plain People are to be Taught to Confess". That's the title most often given to what is also known as "The Office of the Keys" — the "Third Sacrament" for Luther.

Because Luther intended Confession especially for those who were about to receive

Communion, in these pages I'll position "The Office of the Keys" — those last three paragraphs on pag 1165 — as its own distinct Rite, after Baptism and before Holy Communion, as a number 5 in my series.

All this is to alert users of these Scrutinies that here at Number 4, Baptism, we'll be omitting those last three paragraphs on page 1165, *ELWorship*, in order to save them for another day. You'll find those last three paragraphs next time, as a stand-alone rite entitled "The Office of the Keys" — for an explanation of this title, see *Matthew 16:19*.

Second, I present here at some length a set of explanations for each of the "signs" in Baptism: water, oil, garment, candle. My interpretations surrounding the use of oil are especially extended: See [Essay 43](#) for even more. Feel free to shorten or to eliminate these sections altogether, if it is your parish practice not to include these signs when you baptise.

On the other hand, you must give an accounting, to me or to your conscience, as to why you would *want* to omit these signs, rich as they are with fabulous metaphorical meaning. It is the "sign" of water, after all, that makes this event a sacrament. And the further "signs" of oil, garment, and candle have become in recent years, for me, well nigh irreplaceable also.

Finally, the garment itself deserves a special pastoral word. We live in a time when "black is beautiful", and I would not want to dwell too exclusively on the symbolism (which our parents could take for granted) about the colour white in this garment denoting innocence and purity. As I have it, the colour white in some South Asian countries denotes, to the contrary, mourning and bereavement. Those Asian metaphors for the colour white might also be profitably enlarged upon in this Rite by a sensitive imagination. I'll leave all this to your pastoral discretion.

As before, you might want to enlist several voices to speak at (A).



## The Rite of the Scrutinies ~ 4: Holy Baptism

P = Pastor A = Assisting Minister Congregational responses in **bold**.

Prayers

*The people stand.*

P Gracious and everlasting God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you created the human family and restored it as well. Look with mercy on your adopted

people. Set the offspring of your new race within your new covenant, so that what we cannot attain by our own efforts, we may joyfully receive by grace, as beloved children of your promise, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

P God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of Sarah, and Miriam, and Hannah, you appeared to your servant Moses on the holy mountain and led the children of Israel out of slavery, sending to them the angel of your goodness to guard them by day and by night. We pray, O Lord, send your holy angel to guard your servants who belong to you, and lead us all to complete the promises of our baptism, in our conformation to your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The people sit.*

### The Exposition of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism

P Beloved, we shall open to you now the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, whereby we are adopted into the family of God as beloved children of our Heavenly Parent, heirs with Christ in the promises of God's prodigal providence.

A1 The water of Baptism is a sign of death by drowning, for in Baptism we die with Christ. Henceforth we who have died in this death have no fear of death; death has no more dominion over us. This water is also a sign of cleansing by washing. We are made clean in this washing. Guilt is gone and sin is shriven.

A2 The oil of Baptism is, first, a sign of ownership. It is God's seal or mark upon our brow, never to be erased.

The Bible reminds us also that kings and priests were anointed. So we too are anointed to royal and priestly responsibilities.

Athletes in antiquity were anointed to prepare them for their contest. So we too are to be prepared for our contending against the forces of evil.

Sacrifices in antiquity were oiled to make them shine and look splendid. So we too are to adorn the Gospel in our life and in our very person.

Corpses also were anointed in ancient times. So also we are prepared in Baptism for our sentencing to share in the death of Christ, confident that God will not forget us.

Finally, the oil of Baptism is an ordination to service. The title "Christ" means "Anointed" in Greek. The title "Messiah" means "Anointed" in Hebrew. So also we too share with Christ in his anointing, ordained to his "messiah-ing" of God's world. Henceforth, we are to serve as nothing less than "Christs" to each other and to our world.

- A3 The white robe of Baptism is a sign of a new and royal righteousness granted us by God for the sake of Jesus Christ. Before our washing in the waters of Baptism, we cast off the garments of our own sinfulness and mortality. And when we emerge from these waters, we are enclothed in the garment of a new imputed purity. In Baptism we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, who calls us to his great feast.
- A4 The candle of Baptism is a reminder of our stewardship as followers of Christ. We are to let our light shine before others, that they may see our good works and glorify our God because of them.

*The people stand.*

- P Dearly beloved: The Holy Spirit spoke to our forbears in faith and instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, whose meanings are of such eloquence and brevity that its truth can neither escape our understanding nor burden our memory. So let us learn the meaning of Holy Baptism with attentive minds and write its truth in the pages of our hearts.

*Pastor and people repeat the Sacrament of Holy Baptism from The Small Catechism, ELWorship, pages 1164-1165, the Pastor taking the role of interlocutor.*

*Note that the last three paragraphs on page 1165 are omitted here, and saved for next time!*

- P Beloved, allow this brief abundance so to live in your hearts that at all times you may use the defence of this gift against all snares of the Enemy. Enjoying the protection of the One whom we confess, let us persevere in the confirmation of our Baptism, so that receiving the forgiveness of sins and newness of life, we may have our share in the fulness of God's Dominion, according to God's promises in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Next time: Confession and Forgiveness...

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