<u>What Does Your Baptism Means to You Today</u>?
I. You're connected to Christ
II. You're dead to sin
III. You have a new identity in Christ

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,[a] that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.
⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.
¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Tell me, did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? Maybe you resolved to get more exercise, or eat less sweets, or spend more quality time with your family. Or maybe your goals are not quite so lofty. Maybe, if you're the quarterback of the Green Bay packers, you just want to learn how to shuffle a deck of cards. Or, your New Year's resolutions were more spiritual in nature. This year you really want to pray more fervently, worship more regularly, read the Bible with a greater purpose.

I expect that we all want to improve our lives in some way this year. I mean, fill in the blank: "I want to be a better…parent, a better spouse, a better friend, basically, a better Christian. The question is, "How do I accomplish that goal?" Or to flip it the other way around, "How do I keep from slipping back into bad habits, bad attitudes, bad behavior?"

In our text for today, St. Paul answers those questions by inviting us to turn our attention to, of all things, our baptism. Now, maybe someone might say, "My baptism? Man, that happened a long time ago. I was just a baby. I don't remember anything about that day. And besides, what does my baptism have to do with living a more godly life today?" That's a great question. In fact, it's the question that we want to consider for a few minutes this morning/evening, namely,

<u>What Does Your Baptism Mean to You Today</u>?

Here in Romans chapter 6, the Apostle Paul answers that question three ways. He says that your baptism means:

<p align="center">I. You're connected to Christ</p>

<p align="center">II. You're dead to sin</p>

<p align="center">III. You have a new identity in Christ</p>

First, your baptism means that you are connected to Christ. You realize that not one of us here was born connected to Christ. We were all born in a state of sinfulness. And scripture says that sin separates us from God. Or to put it another way, you and I did not come into this world as members of God's family. We were not the natural children of God. By nature, we were all children of the devil. For us to become children of God, we needed to be born a second time. We needed to experience a rebirth, as Jesus once told Nicodemus, *"No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born again."* And how does God accomplish that rebirth? He accomplishes it through the application of water and his word, or as Saint Paul called it in Titus 3:5, *the washing of rebirth.* Through the sacrament of holy baptism, God made you his child; he adopted you into his family. And this connected you to Christ.

And because you are now connected to Christ, what else are you connected to? Paul answers that question here in our text when he writes, *Don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus we're baptized into his death?* What does that mean? It means that your baptism has so closely connected you to Christ that when Jesus died, it was as if you died. It was as if you were up there on the cross. God, in effect, is giving you credit for Jesus' death. Because Jesus was separated from God on the cross in your place, you need never be separated from God.

You might say that that is the first thing that your baptism means for you. It means that you are connected to Christ. You are a member of God's family, with all the rights and privileges that come with it. When I was baptized, the pastor gave my parents, on my behalf, a baptismal certificate, which noted when and where I was baptized, and by whom. You maybe have your own certificate stashed away somewhere. But in reality, do you know what this is? It's my adoption papers. It's the documentation that, yes, at my baptism, God adopted me into his family. And the same thing is true for you.

That's the first thing that your baptism means for you. The second thing it means is that:

II. You are Dead to Sin. What does that mean, that you are dead to sin? Well, go back to the idea that at your baptism you are intimately connected to Christ. That means that whatever Jesus went through, you went through too. When he was crucified, so were you. When he was buried, so were you. Or more specifically so was your sinful nature. How does St Paul put it here in our text? *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.* Do you understand what Paul is saying? *"Anyone who has died has been set free from sin."* Let me see if I can illustrate that. If you go to the local funeral home, go down in the basement and find a casket with the body of a deceased person in it, and then wave a Playboy magazine in front of his face, do you think you would get a response out of him? If you handed him a bottle of Jack Daniels, would he start chugging it? Of course not. Why not? Because he's dead! Dead people are not tempted by sin. They are dead to sin. It can't control them anymore. Well, God says that that's what happened to you at your baptism. Because your baptism connected you to Christ, when Jesus died, so did you, or more specifically, so did your sinful nature. God, through your baptism, put your Old Man to death.

Unfortunately, sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we let our sinful nature come back to life. We let that corpse lift his head out of the casket. And when that happens, when you see sin getting the upper hand in your life, do you know what you have to do? You have to go back to your baptism. Remember what God did for you, through your baptism. He put your Old Man to death.

Do you know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of something that Phil Robertson once said. Do you know who Phil Robertson is? The original duck commander, patriarch of the TV show Duck Dynasty. In his younger years, Phil was a bad man. He was a drinker, a lawbreaker, he cheated on his wife, he had a child out of wedlock. And then by the grace of God, he found the Lord. Or better, the Lord found him. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, Phil's life was totally turned around. In fact, it kind of caught all his drinking buddies off guard. They said to him, "Hey, what happened to the old Phil Robertson? The one who used to run around and party all night?" Phil's answer? "That guy? The old Phil Robertson? Sorry. He died. He was buried. He was buried in the water of baptism."

My friends, you realize, the same thing is true for you. Your baptism means that the "Old You" died. Your Old Self is no longer in charge. In fact, in that sense, you might say that this

baptismal certificate is not only your adoption papers. It's also your death certificate. It's your proof that, in Christ, your sinful nature can no longer control you. That's what Saint Paul meant when he said, *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*

So, what is your baptism mean to you? It means that you're connected to Christ. It means you died to sin. And finally, (III.) it means you have a new identity in Christ. Actually, this is just a logical progression in Paul's argument. I mean, if baptism connects us to Christ, that means when he died, so did we, or more specifically so did our sinful nature. But it also means that if we are connected to Christ, then when Jesus rose from the grave, so did we, or more specifically so did our spiritual nature. So did our New Man. Isn't that what Paul is telling us here our text? *Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that,* (and here's the important part) *just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4)*

In your baptism, God has given you a new life, a fresh start. As surely as he put your Old Man to death, he brought your New Man to life. Your New Man is who God wants you to be. In fact, it's who God made you to be, in Christ. It's like your New Identity—which means that your baptismal certificate serves one more purpose. Yes, it's your adoption papers. Yes, it's your death certificate. But it's also your new ID. Tell me, have you ever heard of the Federal Witness Protection Program? When people are asked to testify on behalf of the federal government against a high ranking member of the crime syndicate, those people's lives are often in grave danger. The Mob is going to want to retaliate. So, what does the government do to protect those witnesses after the trial is over? They give them a new identity. They move them to a new town, give them a new name, maybe a new appearance. If they had a previous criminal record, it's expunged. If they had debts, they're all paid off. Each one of those people gets completely fresh start. Each one becomes a new person.

My friends, that's what happened to you. In your baptism, God has made you a new person. How does St Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5? *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.* Do you realize how critical it is for you to remember who you are in Christ? To embrace the identity that God has given you at your baptism? You maybe

heard me say before that when Martin Luther was tormented by his sinful nature, when his sins were causing him to question how he could ever be called a child of God—what did he do? He wrote in chalk across his desk these words: BAPTIZATUS SUM. In case your Latin is a little rusty, I'll tell you that those words are not in the past tense. They don't mean, "I was baptized once upon a time." Rather, they are in the present tense. They mean, "I am baptized!" With those words, Luther was confessing a present reality. "This is who I am in Christ. Even when I fall into sin, I'm clinging to this powerful truth, I am baptized!"

Again, you realize, the very same thing is true for you. Is your baptism something that God did for you many years ago? Yes, it is. At your baptism God the Holy Spirit took the forgiveness of sins that Jesus purchased by his death on the cross and personally applied them to your heart. Even if you were a baby who had no idea what was going on, God still planted saving faith in your heart by the water and his Word. But your baptism is not just something that happened a long time ago. It's something that defines who you are today. Because of your baptism, right now, you are a precious child of God. Right now, you can say to your Old Man, "You can't tell me what to do. You are dead to me." Right now, you are a New Man, a new Woman, someone who is truly alive in Christ—all because you ARE baptized!

Brothers and sisters, as we enter this new year, and maybe make some resolutions about what we are going to change in our lives and how we're going to improve ourselves, let's not forget where the power to change comes from. It comes from what God has already done for you in your baptism. He's adopted you as his child, put your old man to death, and now given you a new identity in Christ. Wow, what a great way to begin another year of God's grace, as God's people, in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.