## Contents

**Foreword** ................................................................. 5  
**Introduction** .............................................................. 6  
**Abbreviations** ............................................................ 8  
**Navigating Lutheranism 101** ............................................. 10  

### Part One: What Is Baptism?  
1. **A Gift Instituted by Christ Himself** .................................. 14  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 28  
2. **A Gift Christ Offers to All People** .................................. 32  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 49  
   Putting It All Together: A Word for Our Sponsors .................. 52  

### Part Two: What Does Baptism Do?  
3. **Birth into the Royal Family** ......................................... 56  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 66  
4. **A Bath like No Other** .................................................. 70  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 84  
   Putting It All Together: Luther’s Flood Prayer ..................... 87  

### Part Three: How Can Baptism Do It?  
5. **The Gift of the Holy Spirit** .......................................... 90  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 103  
6. **Water and the Word of God** ......................................... 106  
   Study and Discussion Questions ........................................ 116  
   Putting It All Together: The Order of Holy Baptism ............... 118  

### Related Features  
- Water Is Water . . . Is Baptism? ....................................... 101  
- Baptized for Forgiveness .................................................. 102
Part Four: What Does Baptism Mean for Me Now?

7. The Drowning That Gives Life
   Study and Discussion Questions 128
   Putting It All Together: Baptism as Exorcism 139

8. The Christian’s Identity and Daily Comfort
   Study and Discussion Questions 141
   Putting It All Together: Baptism Abides Forever! 152

Related Feature
   Is Your Destiny Written?

Appendix:
   Prayers 153
   Glossary 154

Visit lutheranism101.com to download the free Leader Guide.
Foreword

Lutheranism 101 books give you usable and comprehensive overviews of what Lutherans believe and teach. These beliefs rest upon the foundational discussions of who God is, who man is, and who Jesus is. Along the way, and because faith does not happen in isolation, the series also presents how this faith is confessed in what Lutherans do, both in their corporate practice and in their personal piety.

After the release of the original Lutheranism 101 book, numerous questions, comments, and suggestions were received, focusing on the meeting point between faith and practice. The Lutheranism 101 series grew out of this correspondence. Each book in the series picks one topic and explores the basics of the Lutheran teaching in that area. The author also explores practice in that area, the understanding being that one necessarily informs the other.

The very title, Lutheranism 101, points forward to the learning and building up of the Christian faith through study and by participation in the Divine Service. Lutheranism 101 encourages the use (and, dare we say, acquisition) of the basic resources for a Christian’s study and growth: a Bible, Luther’s Small Catechism, a hymnal, and, ultimately, the Lutheran Confessions.

What Lutherans believe and teach about Baptism is different from what many other Christians teach. For Lutherans, Baptism is not a mere symbol of rebirth. It is not a choice or a prize for attaining a certain amount of faith. Most of all, it is how God bestows faith, cleanses sin, and makes us His family. It is for everyone, the very young to the very old. Lutheranism 101: Baptism gives an overview of what Baptism is, what it does, how it does it, and what it means for our lives now and into the future. Throughout, it emphasizes that the One doing the baptizing makes all the difference. Like the original book, Lutheranism 101: Baptism will never get too far away from the reality that it is all about Jesus.

Each chapter concludes with several questions that can be used to further the study and the discussion about the material. For those who may be leading a group discussion based upon the chapter, and for those individuals who want to check their answers against the author’s comments, a free downloadable guide is available online at lutheranism101.com.
Introduction

More than Meets the Eye

Baptism is an extremely simple ritual. You pour water on a person or dunk the person in a pool, a lake, or a river. You say about twenty words. That’s it. The whole thing is done in a few seconds. What is there to write about, really?

If that were all there is to Baptism, there wouldn’t be much to say. In terms of what we do, Baptism isn’t that complicated, and within a few minutes, even the water has evaporated. But that’s the rub. The reason most American Christians don’t think much about Baptism is that they really do think it’s something we do. They see it as a simple act of obedience to God, as something a person does to show that he or she is a Christian.

But if we reduce Baptism to a mere human act, we miss almost everything that the Bible says about Baptism! Baptism is far more than something we do to show God how much we love Him. Rather, Baptism is something God does to connect us sinners to the cross and resurrection of His Son and to give us the blessings won there.

Knowing Who’s Doing What

Keeping the order straight is one of the things we’ll spend the most time on in this book. When Baptism is something that God does for us, then everything is different. When the Lord Himself is doing it, Baptism ceases to be a mere act of obedience and becomes a gracious gift of God.

FROM THE BIBLE

God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. (Romans 5:8–9)

BELIEVE, TEACH, CONFESS

To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is still truly God’s own work. From this fact everyone may readily conclude that Baptism is a far higher work than any work performed by a man or a saint. For what work can we do that is greater than God’s work? (LC IV 10)
That is why this book exists. Because Baptism is indeed something that God does, the Scriptures have a great deal to say about it. Because Baptism is something that God does, there is much comfort you can draw from knowing that God has done it for you. Because Baptism is something that God does, you've got an awful lot to rejoice about.

**Unbreakable Promises**

In your Baptism, God has made promises to you that He can never break. It would be easier for God to destroy the very foundations of the earth than it would be for Him to take back the gifts that He gave in your Baptism. He would melt away a thousand galaxies, snuff out the sun, or undo the laws of physics before He would say that one whom He has baptized is not His precious and dearly beloved child.

That, dear Christian friends, is the Word that God has to say to you in your Baptism. He says it to you every day. He has claimed you through water in the Spirit. He loves you.

**A Sure and Certain Reality**

Over the course of the next eight chapters, we are going to touch on all that the Scriptures say about Baptism. We won't be able to explore everything the Bible says in great detail. Instead, we'll develop the tools you'll need to continue your own study of the Scriptures. Along the way, we'll discover how the Scriptures speak of Baptism in the Old and New Testaments. We'll notice things about this wonderful gift that you've probably never noticed before.

We'll even begin to think of our own Baptism as a sure and certain reality that is present for us now and is not just a historical event in a past that we don't even remember.
**Abbreviations**


Lutheran Confessions

You will see many quotations from the Lutheran Confessions as found in the Book of Concord. The following list provides abbreviations used, what they mean, and examples of how you would find the text.

AC Augsburg Confession
Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession
BEC A Brief Exhortation to Confession
Ep Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC Formula of Concord
LC Large Catechism
SA Smalcald Articles
SC Small Catechism
SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
Tr Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

Examples:
AC XX 4 (Augsburg Confession, Article XX, paragraph 4)
Ap IV 229 (Apology of the AC, Article IV, paragraph 229)
FC SD X 24 (Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, Article X, paragraph 24)
FC Ep V 8 (Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Article V, paragraph 8)
LC V 32, 37 (Large Catechism, Part 5, paragraphs 32 and 37)
SA III I 6 (Smalcauld Articles, Part III, Article I, paragraph 6)
SC III 5 (Small Catechism, Part III, paragraph 5)
Tr 5 (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, paragraph 5)
Navigating Lutheranism 101

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
Quotes from Martin Luther

MAKING CONNECTIONS
Connecting theology, faith, and life

NEED TO KNOW
Terms and phrases quickly defined

FROM THE BIBLE
Quotations from, well, the Bible

TECHNICAL STUFF
Big theological concepts in bite-size pieces

BELIEVE, TEACH, CONFESS
Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions
What you’ll learn about:

• We can never cleanse ourselves of sin, but God can and does through Baptism.
• Through water combined with His Word, God puts His holy name upon us and claims us as His family.
• God wants everyone to be baptized, including infants and the infirm.
• There are no conditions for belief or worthiness in order to be baptized.
• Baptism is commanded by Christ as a means of making disciples and may come before or after instruction in the faith.
• Baptism is the ordinary means by which we enter God’s kingdom.
What Is Baptism?

Water and God’s Word—surely that can’t be all there is to it! Yet, in such a simple way, God provides us with faith, new life, and a place in His family. What is Baptism? It’s a mystery hidden right before our eyes. It’s a washing that goes soul deep. It’s our invitation and introduction into God’s kingdom.
A Gift Instituted by Christ Himself

In This Chapter

• Sin makes us so dirty that we can never clean ourselves.
• Baptism is a sacred washing through which God cleanses us of our sins.
• Baptism is water combined with God’s Word.
• In Baptism, God’s triune name is put upon us, giving us access to Him.

Making Water “Cooler”

Baptism isn’t a word that you hear much about when you’re standing around the water cooler. It isn’t a regular feature on the nightly news. It doesn’t show up often on the New York Times best seller list. While most people have probably heard of it, many have only a very basic understanding of what it is.

For most, if they know anything about Baptism, they know this: Baptism is a Church ritual. Sometimes it happens in the church building at a special place with a bowl of water. Sometimes it happens outside in a river or a lake. Sometimes the person being baptized is a baby, and sometimes the person is much older. Baptism involves water and some words. That’s about it. If you ask an unchurched person about Baptism, you probably won’t hear much more than this.

But that’s really a pretty good start. Baptism is a Church ritual that involves water and words. Sometimes just a little water is used, and sometimes a lot is used. Baptism can happen in a variety of locations. And, finally, a person can be baptized at any age. All of these things are true.

Despite that, the most important questions still haven’t been answered.

What’s the point?
Why get wet in the first place?
What good is it?
The answers to those questions are what will occupy most of our time.
Splish! Splash!

One of the most fundamental things we can say about Baptism is that it’s a bath. The original languages in which the Bible was written give even more insights into this. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. The Greek word for Baptism means “bath”—in other words, washing. This is important. Most people take baths for a reason, for a specific purpose. Dirty people take baths to get clean.

That’s also why people are baptized. All people are born dirty. All people need to get clean. Most important, God wants them to be clean. He says it outright through His prophet Ezekiel: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules” (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

So let’s get to it. How are we dirty, and what does Baptism do about it?

Dirty as Sin

If you’ve ever seen a baby seconds after he or she was born, you know why people don’t usually take the picture right away. The baby is covered in blood and tissue from the birth process. While beautiful to his or her parents, the child is most definitely not clean. A nurse wipes the baby off almost immediately, and within the first few hours of life outside the womb, the newborn gets a bath.

But as filthy as the baby looks at the time of birth, his or her spiritual condition is even worse. The baby is completely soiled with sin. It sounds weird to say that babies are sinners, but that’s just what the Bible says. In fact, babies are sinners even before they’re born. They are sinful from the moment they are conceived, for sin is an inherited condition. David writes, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–28). God created them holy because He wanted to be in a perfect relationship with them. Everything
changed after Adam’s sin. Adam lost the perfect holiness and innocence he originally had, and because of that, he passed on his sin instead of the perfect righteousness he had in the beginning. Ever since the fall, all human beings have been conceived and born in the sinful image of their fathers (Genesis 5:3; Romans 5:12).

Grime Time

Sin is serious stuff, and we’re all affected by it. It’s dirt that we can’t get rid of on our own. I once knew a man who worked in a steel plant. For hours on end, he worked in areas coated with soot, grime, and pulverized coal dust. When he came home, he would wash himself thoroughly, but it was never enough. You could always find the grime somewhere—in his hair, under his fingernails, and in the wrinkles of his skin. He couldn’t get rid of it any more than he could get rid of a finger or an eye. That’s what sin is like. In fact, references to dirt and filth are some of the Bible’s favorite ways of talking about it! In Psalm 51:2, David prays, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” Later he says, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (v. 7).

David’s thoughts about his sin are pretty clear. Sin made David dirty, and he couldn’t wash himself. The reason that we must be washed is that sin puts us in complete opposition to God. It cuts us off from full reception of His presence, His gifts, and His goodness. We have neither the desire nor the ability to rescue ourselves from our sinful condition. We are, in fact, dead, as Paul puts it: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Ephesians 2:1–3).

More Than Skin Deep

In his novel The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, C. S. Lewis tells the story of Eustace, a boy who becomes a dragon because of his greed. Eventually, Eustace is desperate to shed his dragon skin and become a boy again. He claws at his skin over and over, but he learns that no matter how many times he sheds his dragon skin, he’s still a dragon underneath. Eustace needs Aslan to remove the dragon skin for him. Fortunately, Aslan—the lion who serves as a Christ figure—is waiting to

FROM THE BIBLE

Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before Me, declares the Lord God. (Jeremiah 2:22)
help him. After he removes Eustace’s scales, Aslan heals Eustace by sending him into—you guessed it—a bath.

Lewis loved to weave Christian theological themes into his stories. It’s no surprise at all that Baptism has a role to play in Narnia. Unless Aslan washes Eustace, the boy will never be clean. Unless we are washed, we will never be clean either.

**Water and Word**

**A Special Word**

Baptism is unique because it is a holy washing, a spiritual bath that cleanses us from sin. We don’t get out of our bathtubs each morning and say, “I just baptized myself.” For starters, Baptism is something done to us, not something we do to ourselves. More to the point, there is something special and unique about Baptism that sets it apart from an ordinary bath. If there wasn’t, then we could just use the word any time we wanted to refer to any sort of bathing. **Baptism** is a special word; it is used almost exclusively by the Church.

The term the Church uses for Baptism is **sacrament**, and whenever the Church talks about a sacrament, it does so on the basis of what Jesus says when He first institutes it. The word **sacrament** is used by the Church to refer to several specific ways that God has promised to deliver the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to His people.

The Lord’s Supper: the Sacrament in which the forgiveness of sins is delivered by the eating of Jesus’ body and the drinking of His blood in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine.

*FROM THE BIBLE*

*Baptism* is a good example of theological jargon. We will discuss many other theological words in this book, including some that Lutherans define in unique ways. When a word of theological jargon is first used, it will often be accompanied by a “Need to Know” box in the margin.

*MAKING CONNECTIONS*

One of the few times the secular world uses the word *baptism* is in the phrase *baptism by fire*, referring to a difficult initiation into a new job or other situation. It means to do something the hard way. Our Baptism in the Church is not this way at all. It is not a test of our abilities, and it is not hard. God acts, and we receive all the benefits of a “position” in His family.
Holy Absolution: the Sacrament in which a pastor forgives sins (often very specific) that are confessed to him either privately or within a worship service.

When you hear “promise of grace,” you should think “forgiveness of sins.” Baptism is a sacrament because God commands it and because through it, God actually does wash away—forgive—our sins. To say that Baptism is a sacrament is a wonderful thing. It tells us something about the fantastic blessings that God has in store for us through it.

Not Just a Ducky

So what distinguishes Christian Baptism from what happens when you’re in the bathtub with your rubber ducky? There is no better place to find the answer than the Scripture passage in which Jesus gives us the gift of Baptism. Shortly before His ascension, Jesus tells His apostles to “make disciples of all nations by baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, author’s translation).

From our Lord’s words we learn that two things must be present in order for a bath to be a Baptism: water and God’s Word. Though water is not explicitly mentioned in our Lord’s words, it is certainly there. Water is implied by the word “baptize.” To baptize is to wash with water. If there is no water, there is no Baptism. What makes the bath of Baptism different from any other bath is that the water is combined with God’s Word.
When a person is baptized, the words that are used are those that Christ used when He instituted Baptism: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (LSB, p. 270). Water and the Word together are what make an ordinary bath a Christian Baptism.

Stopping for Water

A story from just a few years after our Lord instituted Baptism illustrates this point. At that time, the Christian Church was growing so much that the apostles found they needed extra help. Because of this, they appointed seven men to assist them in their work of proclaiming God’s Word. One of these men, named Philip, was sent to speak to a eunuch as he was traveling.

The eunuch was going home to Ethiopia, where he served in the court of Queen Candace. As he traveled, he read a passage from Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection: “Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opens not His mouth. In His humiliation justice was denied Him. Who can describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth” (Acts 8:32–33, quoting Isaiah 53:7–8). When Philip arrived, he asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading.

The eunuch answered that there was no way he could understand it unless someone explained it to him. Luke continues the story with these words: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the

TECHNICAL STUFF

Unless your Bible is the King James or New King James Version, you may notice that verse 37 is missing. That is because the manuscript used when the verse numbers were assigned included a few verses that were probably added by scribes several hundred years after the Bible was written. The earliest and best manuscripts don’t have these verses.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The Jordan is a 156-mile river that forms the eastern border of the modern nation of Israel (and of the occupied territories). It begins 60 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and ends in the Dead Sea. In biblical history, the Jordan was very prominent. The Israelites formally entered the land God had promised to them when they crossed the Jordan after forty years of wilderness wanderings. Later, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed of his leprosy by washing in the Jordan. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River.
eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ . . . And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:35–36, 38).

Luke’s account in Acts 8 gives us a glimpse into the simplicity of Baptism. All that the eunuch needed in order to be baptized was water and a person to perform the Baptism. Philip dunked him in the water, he spoke the Lord’s words, and the eunuch was baptized. There was no need for the eunuch to travel to the Jordan River (where Jesus was baptized) or even to a nearby synagogue. The stream that they passed by in the chariot was completely sufficient.

SH₂O+

The water of Baptism, however, is no ordinary water. Luther puts it this way: “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word” (SC IV, First). Luther knows how to pack a lot of theology into just a few words. Because of that, we need to unpack that sentence a bit.

When Luther says that Baptism is not plain water, he does not mean that it is not the chemical composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. He means that through the Word of God, the water has become something more than what it initially was.

High Stakes Water

Luther describes it in the Large Catechism: “Baptism is quite a different thing from all other water. This is not because of its natural quality but because something more noble is added here. God Himself stakes His honor, His power, and His might on it. Therefore, Baptism is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water, and whatever other terms we can find to praise it.
This is all because of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, which no one can praise enough. For it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do” (LC IV 17).

Luther says that the water is “included in God's command.” The command is what Jesus says in Matthew 28:19: make disciples by baptizing. If the Lord hadn’t commanded that we baptize, we could use exactly the same words that we use now, and they would have no effect. But because of the Lord's institution and mandate, the words do what they say.

Luther also notes that the water is “combined with God's Word.” Even better, the Word of God that is combined with the water is nothing less than God's own name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). When you are baptized, God’s name is poured on you with the water. In the Bible, having God's name on you is a blessing.

The Gift of God’s Name

Since the Word of God that is combined with the water in Baptism is God’s own name, it’s important to pay special attention to what the Bible says about names in general and God’s name in particular. Depending on how the Hebrew word for “name” is used in the Bible, it can mean a lot more than just a personal name, such as Tiger or Elizabeth. It can embody a person’s whole reputation. If I say Tiger Woods or Elizabeth II, a lot is going to come to mind beyond the fact that these names refer to two particular people. When I say Tiger Woods, you will probably think both of his golf ability and of his extramarital affair. When I say Elizabeth II, you will probably remember her as the queen of the United Kingdom. In either case, there’s a lot more to each of those names than just what’s on the birth certificate.

Some in the ancient world believed that if you knew the true name of a deity, you would have enormous power over that being. The way the Bible talks about God’s name was unique. It was something the world had never encountered before.

Jesus’ own words make it clear that in Baptism, God puts His name on you. It is God’s triune name that is combined with the baptismal waters, and this is a glorious reality. Indeed, God has some amazing and important things to say about His name throughout the Scriptures.