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Identity in Christ Marked by Baptism

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READINGS
OT Gen. 11:7-24; Psalm 32; Epistle 1 Peter 3:18-22; Gospel John 3:1-8

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” (John 3:5)

One of the greatest questions every human being asks is, “Who am I?” People often define themselves by their family background, nationality, profession, education, achievements, wealth, or social status. These identities may shape our lives, but they are temporary and incomplete. The Bible teaches that our truest identity is found not in what we possess or accomplish, but in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.On this Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, the Church reflects on the theme, “Identity in Christ Marked by Baptism.” Baptism is much more than a religious ceremony or a family tradition. It is the visible sign of God’s covenant, the outward expression of an inward transformation, and the public declaration that we now belong to Jesus Christ. Through baptism we are identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and we become members of His Body, the Church.Today’s readings beautifully unfold this truth. In Genesis, God establishes His covenant with Abraham through the sign of circumcision. Psalm 32 celebrates the joy of forgiveness. Peter explains how baptism points us to the saving work of Christ, and Jesus teaches Nicodemus that no one can enter God’s kingdom without being born of water and the Spirit. Together these passages remind us that our identity is not self-created—it is graciously given by God.

1. Our Identity Begins with God’s Covenant

The journey of faith always begins with God’s initiative. In Genesis 17, God appeared to Abram, renewed His covenant, changed his name to Abraham, and gave circumcision as the outward sign of belonging to His covenant people.The change of name was significant. Abram, meaning “exalted father,” became Abraham, “father of many nations.” His identity no longer rested on his past or his limitations but on God’s promise.Throughout Scripture, God marks His people with visible signs of His covenant. Under the Old Covenant, circumcision distinguished Israel as God’s chosen people. Under the New Covenant, baptism has become the sign of belonging to Christ and His Church.Just as circumcision did not save a person without faith, baptism is not a magical act that automatically transforms someone. Rather, it is God’s covenant sign, pointing to His grace and calling us to live faithfully within that covenant.Our baptism reminds us that we belong to God before we belong to ourselves. Our primary identity is not our ethnicity, denomination, profession, or nationality. We are children of God through Jesus Christ.In a world where people struggle with identity and acceptance, baptism proclaims that our worth comes from God’s gracious love. We have been called by name, claimed by Christ, and incorporated into His family.

2. Our Identity Is Rooted in Forgiveness and New Life

Psalm 32 begins with joyful words:“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”Every lasting identity in Christ begins with forgiveness. Sin separates us from God and distorts who we were created to be. Guilt burdens the conscience, fear enslaves the heart, and shame

hides us from God and from one another.David speaks honestly about the misery of concealing sin. His strength dried up until he confessed his sin before the Lord. Then he experienced God’s abundant mercy.This same truth reaches its fullness in Christ. Peter reminds us that “Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.”Jesus accomplished what no human effort could achieve. Through His death and resurrection, He opened the way for reconciliation with God.Baptism proclaims this Gospel visibly. Going into the water symbolizes dying with Christ; rising from the water symbolizes sharing in His resurrection and receiving new life.Therefore, baptism is not merely about washing with water. It points to the cleansing of the heart through the saving work of Jesus Christ.Every baptized believer is invited to live daily in the reality of God’s forgiveness. We do not define ourselves by our failures, our past mistakes, or our guilt. We are defined by God’s grace.The Christian life is a continual return to the promises signified in baptism – repenting of sin, trusting Christ, and walking in newness of life.

3. Our Identity Is Created by the New Birth Through the Holy Spirit

The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is one of the most profound discussions in the New Testament.Nicodemus was a respected religious leader. He possessed knowledge, influence, and sincere devotion. Yet Jesus surprised him by saying,“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”Human achievement cannot produce spiritual life. Religious activity cannot replace spiritual transformation.Jesus continues,“No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”This new birth is entirely God’s work. Just as physical birth introduces us into earthly life, spiritual birth introduces us into God’s kingdom.The Holy Spirit changes our hearts, renews our minds, and gives us a new identity in Christ.Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind. We cannot control the wind or fully explain its movement, yet we see its effects. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works mysteriously but powerfully, transforming lives from within.Baptism points toward this inward work of the Spirit. The water itself does not regenerate us; rather, it signifies God’s gracious action through the Holy Spirit.Therefore, every baptized Christian must continually ask whether the outward sign is matched by inward renewal.Our identity in Christ is not simply recorded in a baptismal register. It is demonstrated in a transformed life marked by faith, obedience, holiness, and love.

4. Our Identity Must Be Lived Out Every Day

Peter gives one of the clearest explanations of baptism in the New Testament.He writes that baptism is “not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”This means baptism is not merely an external washing. It is a lifelong commitment to live under the lordship of the risen Christ.Identity always shapes behaviour.If we truly belong to Christ, our lives should increasingly reflect His character.The world should recognise Christians not merely because they have been baptized, but because they display the fruit of the Spirit.Our baptism calls us to reject sin, forgive others, pursue justice, serve the poor, love our neighbours, and bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ.In every baptism service, the congregation also makes promises. The Church pledges to nurture the newly baptized in faith. Therefore, baptism is never an individual event alone; it is the beginning of life within the Christian community.The Church has the responsibility to teach, encourage, correct, and strengthen one another so that our baptismal identity becomes visible in daily discipleship.The world desperately needs Christians whose lives reflect the reality of their baptism – people who speak truth, practice compassion, demonstrate integrity, and radiate the love of Christ.The greatest testimony to the world

is not simply that we were baptized years ago, but that Christ continues to transform us today.

Conclusion

The readings for today invite us to rediscover the richness of our identity in Christ.Genesis reminds us that God establishes a covenant with His people and marks them as His own.Psalm 32 celebrates the joy of forgiveness and restored fellowship with God.Peter teaches that baptism points us to the saving death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.Jesus declares that entrance into God’s kingdom requires new birth through water and the Holy Spirit.Our baptism is therefore not merely a memory of the past; it is a call to faithful living every day.Whenever we remember our baptism, we should remember God’s covenant, His forgiveness, His transforming Spirit, and our calling to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.In a world searching for identity, meaning, and belonging, Christians have the privilege of proclaiming that our truest identity is found in Christ alone.May we never reduce baptism to a ritual or tradition. Instead, let it remain a constant reminder that we have died with Christ, risen with Christ, belong to Christ, and are called to live for Christ.May the Holy Spirit continually renew us so that our identity in Christ is not only marked by baptism but also revealed through lives of holiness, humility, love, and faithful witness, until the day we enter God’s eternal kingdom.

Amen.