



Northwestern Ohio Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Is It I, Lord?



**Explore How God is Calling You
Through Your Baptism**

For Lay Leaders, Pastors, and Anyone
Seeking to Live Out Their Baptismal
Promises.

Table of Contents



02. Part 1: Baptismal Basics

07. Part 2: Jumping into Action in Acts

13. Part 3: But You Can't Mean Me!

We are excited for you to join us on this exploration of your baptismal journey! What promises were made at my baptism? What does the Bible have to say about this? How can I live out these promises?

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Part 1: Baptismal Basics



What is Baptism?

For us as Christians, in a very real sense life begins at baptism.

Questions:

- What exactly is baptism, anyway?
- What comes to mind for you?
- What is it that we teach and believe?

One helpful place to turn for an answer is the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, which says “Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, it is water used according to God’s command and connected with God’s Word.”

This is a solid answer, and one which many of us memorized back in confirmation class! But it raises another question—what is God’s Word about baptism, do you know? What does the Bible say happens here?

Read Acts 2:28 & Acts 22:16

- What is promised in baptism, according to these verses?

Read Mark 16:16

- What is promised here?



Read Galatians 3:26-29

- What are we promised in baptism, according to these verses?

In sum, baptism is forgiveness of sin. It is life and salvation. It is our adoption as the very children of God, and heirs of eternal life!



Questions:

- What does this mean to you, can you say?
- What has it meant at different moments in your life? Put this into your own words as best you can.

And before we move on, there is another interesting (and rather more challenging) Bible passage that references baptism, and it is found in the book of Romans.

Read Romans 6:1-8

- *What happens in baptism?* Well, frankly, you die! And while after baptism your old body soldiers on in this world for a while longer, it is no longer you who lives, but Christ who lives in you! Kind of radical, don't you think?
- *What would it mean for your life, if you took this seriously?* Things that make you angry, things that make you afraid, things that make you resentful—do they scare or anger or annoy Jesus? Then why do they still scare, anger, and annoy you? Don't you know, you're dead, and it is Christ who now lives in you?



So baptism is forgiveness, it is the promise of everlasting life, and it is God's call to a new kind of life, starting now, this very moment! All this through Jesus Christ who died and rose again.

And this new baptismal life is a life we live together, as part of a body—what Paul calls the very Body of Christ. Often these days, we refer to the body of Christ as “the church,” and fair enough; but since we sometimes confuse “the church” with “the building,” it might be better to stick with Paul's phrase.

According to Paul, Christ is alive and well and at work in this world. He lives in and through each one of us, and we together are His hands and feet; we, together, are His very Body on earth today.



Questions:

- Does the world see Jesus when it looks at His Church? Why or why not?
- Do you see Jesus when you look at His Church? Do you see Jesus when you look at each other?
- Do you see Christ when you look at yourself? How? Why? Why not?

Even on our worst days, we have this firm promise from God, that we together are the Body of Christ here on earth. And, very importantly, each part of the Body is called, and gifted, and given a job to do.



Read 1 Corinthians 12:1 - 20, 27 - 31

- You've heard these words before; think about what they might mean.

This passage is crucial to how we understand what the Bible wants us to know about being the church today—it's not the job of any one person, it's the job of everybody. And everybody has what it takes to play a part—that's not just me saying so, that's God saying so.

Questions:

- Everyone is called and everyone is gifted—what are some gifts you see in the people around the room today?
- What are the gifts they see in you? Are they right? Do you have these gifts? And btw, to say, "I have this or that gift" is not to be prideful. Instead (look at the text) we are simply taking God at His word. God says YOU YES YOU have been called and you have been gifted, and God does not lie!
- How might those gifts be used to the greater glory of God?

No two of us are the same, and no one of us has all the gifts (not even pastors!). But everyone has some gift for the good of all.



Questions:

- What might it look like in your congregation if every member took this passage to heart?
- Conversely, what happens to the church if people start insisting they have no gift, or can't possibly be expected to use it?

Summary:

Jesus died and rose again to save the world, and in baptism He makes it personal: The Lord died and rose again for you. In baptism, God forgives your sins, adopts you as a child, promises you new life now and forever—and calls you to new life today, as part of His Body on earth. He has gifted you, and summons you to use your gifts to His greater glory.

So what might a church like this look like? It's worth turning to the book of Acts to see. . . .



Part 2: Jumping Into Action In Acts



What is the Book of Acts?

We turn now to a Bible book known as The Acts of the Apostles. Just offhand, what do you know about the book of Acts, anyway? What do you remember?

Acts is the 5th book of the New Testament, written (so we believe) by the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke – compare Luke 1:1 – 4 with Acts 1:1 – 2. Both the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the book of Acts, were written as letters to a man named Theophilus.

While all four Gospels tell the story of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, Acts records what happened to those who believed in Jesus, after He ascended into heaven (see Acts 1:6 – 11 for the story of the Ascension).

Here's one way of thinking about the book of Acts, and its place in the Bible: What happens when you throw a large rock into the middle of a farm pond? A big splash, of course! And the ripples immediately start spreading out.



Jesus is the rock of our salvation, and boy did He make a big splash in Jerusalem! He died and rose again! Acts is the story of the ripple effect, how the Gospel spreads from Jerusalem, in ever widening circles, till it reaches the whole wide world.



Question:

- The apostles! Who were they, do you remember? And what does the word even mean?

Read Acts 1:13 for the list, and don't forget Matthias in verse 26, or Paul in chapter 9.

The word apostle simply means sent out—the apostles were the ones “sent out” by Jesus Himself to preach the Gospel and make disciples.

Read Matthew 28:16 – 20.

- As the 28 chapters of this book begin to unfold, what did these men do?
- In Acts, what exactly were the “acts of the apostles”?

Acts is full of inspiring (and entertaining!) stories of what was done in those days in the name of Jesus. People were healed of illnesses, and the dead were raised! Hungry people were fed, and above all the Good News of Jesus was proclaimed. Congregations were established, at first in Jerusalem, then in chapter 8 in Judea and Samaria, and later (especially through the ministry of Paul) in all parts of the Roman Empire.





Let's now focus on the Apostle Paul, whose story begins in chapter 9. In Acts, Paul goes on three lengthy missionary trips, making converts and establishing Christian congregations everywhere he went (see Acts 16:11 – 15 and Acts 18:1 – 11 for two brief examples).

But what is important for our conversation now: What did Paul do after he established a church?

He left! He moved on to the next town and started another one.

So when the apostle left town, who was responsible for the congregation?

The members were! The baptized believers stepped up and took on whatever role needed filling. What might those roles have included?

Questions:

- So if you were a member of one of those early congregations, what would it have been like?
- What might you have seen and experienced and even been called on to do, when you “went to church”?



For starters, believers met in private homes, not specially constructed “church” buildings, which didn't exist for several centuries. In addition to stories in Acts, check 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:1 – 2 for references to “the house church.”

Second, the church met daily for worship and prayer, and shared generously with one another. Read Acts 2:43 – 47, for example. These people took their faith very seriously!

As a result, occasionally the church was persecuted. See Acts 9:1 – 2 and Acts 12:1 – 5 as examples. Did the persecutions break the church? What happened instead?



And one more point: The early church had no trained leadership coming out of a seminary somewhere! Instead, the members themselves took on roles as the need arose. Consult the story of Stephen, starting in Acts 6:1 – 5, as well as “the elders” appointed for a congregation in Acts 14:21 – 23.

Early Church Vs. The Church We Know Today:

There are certainly differences: We have buildings, we have money. We have legal status and are not routinely persecuted! We have printed Bibles, readily available, but they had the apostles, people who actually had known the Lord Jesus when He walked this earth.

But there are similarities too: We have been baptized. We don't have many trained leaders coming out of seminary these days! But we do have the Holy Spirit. And we have the need (the opportunity?) to take on roles and do more things ourselves.



Questions:

- So turning now from Acts to the congregations we attend today: Over the years, how has ministry been done in your place of worship, anyway? Be honest. How much of the ministry of the church has always depended on the leadership of the pastor?
- Is depending that much on the pastor a way of being the church that is still working today? Why? Why not? And what do you foresee in the church in years to come?
- What if our future is to be found in our past?
- What if, in today's world, God has chosen to send us back to the book of Acts—what if we had no pastor, and no new one was coming in? Is that the end of the congregation, or is it a new and different beginning? What would that look like in your congregation, and how would it work?
- Look again at your home congregation. What are the ministries currently carried out there? Make a list, it's probably longer than you realize! Now add to this list new ministries you've been dreaming of.

Got Your List? Take a Moment to Share It.

- What on this list can be done by the members of the church? What if anything absolutely requires "the pastor?" And what is stopping us from going back to the future we find in the book of Acts?



Summary:

The Acts of the Apostles tells an exciting story, how the church grew from a handful of believers in Jerusalem into a collection of thriving, active congregations throughout the Roman Empire. And all this, without a single trained pastor coming out of seminary! Granted, our pastors today are important to us—but isn't the Holy Spirit more so? Can we trust the Spirit to lead us now, as the Spirit led the church in Acts?

As a matter of fact, yes, we can! Perhaps the better question is, do we really want to. . .



Part 3: But You Can't Mean Me!



Up to this point in our Bible study, there's a pretty good chance you haven't learned anything you didn't already know. You understand baptism to be God's call on your life; you know the same Holy Spirit that led the early church is here, ready and willing to lead us and our congregations today; and you know we're short on pastors, and that now more than ever congregational members are needed to step up and provide leadership in new and sometimes unexpected ways.

Ok. You know all that. "*But you can't mean me!*" We may understand the Bible background, and we likely all see the need in the church today—but we have such excellent excuses! We'd like to help, honest, but right now we're just going to have say no!

This is a response, common to us all, and it needs to be admitted out loud and taken seriously. How do we respond to others, and to ourselves, when we want to tell God, "*You can't mean me?*"

Let's dig into the Bible, and let's begin by looking at a reluctant young man named Timothy, and how Paul responded to him



Read 2nd Timothy 1:1-14.

- What are your initial thoughts, comments, and questions?
- Who was Paul and who was Timothy, anyway? What do we know about their relationship?
- Timothy had gifts for ministry. How did Paul know that?

Timothy had gifts for ministry, and everybody in the church knew it! Who was the only person who didn't seem to know Timothy had gifts for ministry? You guessed it—it was Timothy himself!



So Paul started reminding Timothy, and encouraging Timothy, and nudging Timothy.

- Has anyone ever done that for you? Who has nudged your faith and commitment along, the way Paul nudged Timothy?
- Have you ever nudged somebody else this way?

Another thing: Paul repeatedly tells Timothy, “Don’t be ashamed.”

- Put this into your own words—what was Timothy experiencing, and why?
- When and how and why have you ever felt embarrassed about stepping forward in faith?
- When and how and why do you worry about getting egg on your face?
- Which is more powerful—your fear, or your God?



Fear of embarrassment and reluctance to just get started are very human feelings, and are quite understandable—but to be blunt, are they really reasons? Likewise with “being busy.” Did these answers work for Timothy, and do you think they’re going to work for us?

And remember: You have been baptized! You are gifted! And God is good.



Let’s now turn to the Old Testament, and read about some other people who were called by God, and who were reluctant to follow, to say the least.

And let’s start with a guy named Moses.

Share what you remember about the story of the Exodus as a whole and Moses in particular, then read Exodus 3:1 – 12.

- God wanted to send Moses to Pharaoh, and Moses wasn’t sure he was the best candidate for the job. Why?



Read Exodus 2:11-15.

Moses had killed someone! He was a “wanted man,” and everyone knew it.

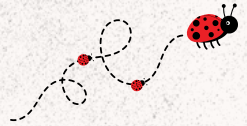
Read Exodus 4:10-13

Note that in Hebrew, being slow of speech and tongue may mean that Moses actually had a speech impediment.

Think about this for a moment – the most important spokesman for God in the Old Testament was a fugitive from the law who had a speech impediment. So from a very human point of view, did Moses maybe have a point when he told God, “You can’t mean me?”

Was God impressed? Did God back down? Or did God insist on sending Moses anyway?

Another example: The prophet Jeremiah.



Share what you remember about Jeremiah, then read Jeremiah 1:4 – 10.

Jeremiah was only a child when God called him, and as a child could hardly be expected to start a prophetic ministry. From a human point of view, Jeremiah had every reason in the world to say “no” to God.

Questions:

- Did he try? Did it work? What happened instead?
- What are your reasons for telling God, “No, you can’t mean me.” Can you name them?
- Again, to be a bit blunt, are your reasons any better than Jeremiah’s reasons? Are they any better than the ones Moses had?



There is something to understand here that is of critical importance. Sometimes God calls us because of the gifts He really has given us, and the only problem is that we are somehow reluctant or embarrassed to use them—see the story of Timothy, for example, and with the help of God, let's get over being so bashful!

But sometimes God calls us knowing full well we DON'T have all the right gifts, and that from a human point of view we are NOT the right person—as God did with Moses and Jeremiah. But God calls anyway! As Moses and Jeremiah discovered, God's call was not about them, or the gifts they may or may not have had personally. It was always and only about God, and what God can do! Same with us—ministry is always about Him, and not you or me.

In other words, if you tell the Lord “I can't because I don't have all the right gifts,” God is likely to say “You're correct, you don't have all the gifts. As a matter of fact, and with all due respect, there are a lot of gifts you don't have, but remember, this is not about you and what you can do! This is about Me, and what I can do.”

See also Judges 6:11 – 16 and 1 Samuel 16:1 – 13 for further examples and discussion.



Summary:

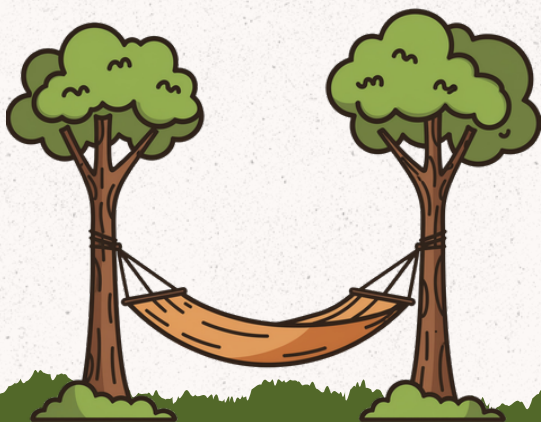
God has called each and every one of us, but we all have such excellent reasons to say no. Surprise! God is not impressed with our reasons. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and is fully aware what you can or can't do. He calls you anyway, and you're likely not talking Him out of it. Instead, by trying to argue God out of it, you may only be wetting His whistle, so to speak.

It's not about us, it's about what our great and glorious God can do, through us.

Questions:

- What can God do through you?
- What are your gifts and where exactly have you been called, and how is He calling you to use them?
- What's getting in the way? What's holding you back?
- When and where and how might you get started?

Pray for God's guiding hand in the lives of all those who have shared this study with you, and God be with and bless one and all.





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