

Matt 28:16-20 Trinitarian Baptism – A Great Beginning with A Greater Ending

When I was a child we played a lot of board games, especially on rainy days. There were a couple of games we played quite a bit. One was *Monopoly*. The other was *The Game of Life*. We played other games too, but we really liked these two. Our parents seemed to like them too. I suspect they liked them because these games kept us quiet and busy for hours.

The Game of Life was my favorite. Each player was given a car in which they traveled the road of life. You got married, had kids, bought a house, and got regular paychecks. The point of the game was pretty simple. The one with the most money at the end of the game wins. This is not unlike the way many people view real life. Just as in real life, there are a number of decisions to be made early on in *The Game of Life* that will have a lasting impact on your life. One of the key decisions is made at the beginning of the game. It has to do with career choices. If you decide to go to college you will have better opportunities for advancement and greater earning potential throughout the game. But you also accumulate school debt that has to be paid off later. If you don't go to college you save a lot of money at the beginning and get a head start on the rest of the players, but your paycheck may be smaller throughout the game. How you begin *The Game of Life* makes a huge difference in how the game ultimately ends for you. The same is true for us in real life, and that was very definitely true in the life of Jesus.

How Jesus began His human life made a huge difference in what happened in His life and ultimately in ours. You see, Jesus did not begin His human life on His own. Rather His life began with the unity and activity of the entire Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the moment of His conception Jesus is the Son of God. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit, having been sent forth by the Father. We confess this truth concerning the beginning of the life of the God-man Jesus, and its importance for our lives, in the Athanasian Creed... *"It is necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

If God the Son did not humble Himself by taking on human flesh, becoming truly man, and offering up Himself as the full and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world, then we would remain in our sins and would be justly condemned to hell forever. But for our sake and for our salvation, God the Son, being of one substance with the Father, came down heaven and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man.

"Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man. He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age. Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ... not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God."

Jesus was not working on His own to bring about our salvation, as if He alone is God apart from the Father and the Holy Spirit. For *we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons, nor dividing the substance.* In the Incarnate Christ, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity work as One for our salvation. In Jesus Christ, the Triune God, who created all things from nothing, worked together and continued to do so throughout His life. We see this plainly in the Baptism of Jesus as He begins His public ministry. As the water is poured upon the Son of God, God the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove, while God the Father declares Him to be His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, begins His work of salvation in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *The Majesty in Unity and the Unity in majesty, all active and working as One to accomplish our salvation.*

Throughout His life, we see Jesus regularly in prayer with His Father, and the Spirit is with Him every step of the way. Because He speaks the words of the Father, the Son preaches with truth and power in the synagogues and Temple. The almighty power of the Godhead is revealed in the mighty wonders, signs and miracles Jesus performs among the people. In these we see *the Father almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty, and yet there not three Almighty, but one Almighty,* all working together for our benefit and our salvation. Then came the last days of Jesus' earthly life. Nailed to the cross, Jesus, the Son of God and Mary's son, is left utterly alone. The Father and the Holy Spirit have forsaken the Son as He pours out His blood to pay for our sins. In anguish He cries out, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" as He carries out His Father's will by going to the cross to suffer and die in our place. Yet even in midst of such pain and suffering and death we see the love of the Father for us sinners when on Easter morning, the Father raises His Son from the dead. And then when Jesus ascends to the right-hand of the Father, He sends forth the Holy Spirit to be and abide with His Church, keeping His promise that He would not leave us alone as orphans. *The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal.*

How Jesus began His earthly life made all the difference in what happened throughout His life. From beginning to end, the Trinity was wonderfully united in action for us. And just as how Jesus began His life is important, the same is also true for us. How we begin our life makes all the difference in how it will end. For those in the Church, our starting point is the Triune God; One God in Trinity, the Trinity in Unity. And just as the world was created by the Triune God who hovered over the waters, so we are re-created in the waters of Holy Baptized as God hovers above the water and places His Triune name upon us.

Beginning our life in the Holy Trinity through Baptism makes a tremendous difference in our relationship with God. Just as the world was void and formless as the Spirit of God hovered over the water, so we are spiritually void and formless. At creation only the power of God's word, working in and through the water, brought life into being where there was none. And so it is in Holy Baptism. Only the power of God's Word, working in and through the water of Holy Baptism, is able to re-create us, and bring life to souls that are deaden by sin. As in Creation, so in Holy Baptism, God the Father sends forth the Holy Spirit with

His creative Word to grant forgiveness, life and salvation which God the Son has won for us by His life, death, and resurrection.

In Holy Baptism, the Trinity in Unity, and the Unity in Trinity, work together as One to re-create our formless and sin darkened souls so that we may have life in His name, and have it abundantly. And just as God's work of creation is all grace, and all gift, so is His work of re-creation in us. Creation did not ask to be made. Yet in His grace God brought it into being and made it very good. But our sinful nature desires to keep us in darkness with souls that are formless and void. Is that not what we confess each time we gather together in worship? Do we not confess that because of the darkness that dwells within us we have sinned against God and one another in thought, word, and deed? Do we not admit that we are poor miserable sinners deserving only God's temporal and eternal punishment?

But that is not what God desires for us. His desire is to save us from this darkness and re-create us into the very good creatures He intended us to be. Therefore, God the Father sent forth His Son to be our Savior. He did not send His Son as an earthly ruler or conqueror. He did not send His Son as the solution to all our problems. He did not send His Son to make us feel good about ourselves or to make us successful or wealthy. God the Father sent His Son to die on the cross to pay the price for the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine. Jesus came to be placed in a lowly manger. He came to be killed and placed in a cold dark tomb that He might overcome sin and death for us, so that we may have eternal life by believing in Him.

Therefore, we are bold to confess that Jesus, who is both God and man, *is one Christ, who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.* And the Good News is that because of all that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for you and for your salvation, God the Father forgives you of all your sins, because your real life begins and ends with Jesus.

How we begin our lives makes all the difference in the kind of people we become. When we begin our lives (when we begin each day) under the grace and mercy of the Triune God, we begin each day anew, by drowning the Old Adam in the waters of our Baptism. Believing that the Holy Spirit daily and richly calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts, we are re-created each day through faith in Jesus Christ, and receive the blessings of our heavenly Father. As the New Man daily emerges from the depths of our Baptismal waters, we are re-created in the image of God to do good works that He has prepared for us to do. No longer obsessed with our own self-interests, as re-created children of God, we seek to serve God and neighbor in love and thankfulness for what God the Father has done for us through His Son.

How we begin our lives also makes all the difference in how our lives will end. Unlike the *Game of Life*, the time we spend from the moment of our birth to the moment of our death is not a game. Unlike *the Game of Life* there are only two outcomes in real life; eternity in hell, or eternity in heaven. And the truth is, the one with the most money at the end still dies, and they just might end up as the biggest loser of all.

There's a reason Jesus commandment His Disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations; Baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." You see, real life begins when you are re-created by the Triune God in the waters of Holy Baptism. The same God who called all things into being with just the power of His word, the same God who hovered over the formless waters and brought all life into being, also re-creates you by the power of His Word working in and through the waters of Holy Baptism. From the very beginning of our lives as Christians, our Baptism places us into the Triune God's loving and forgiving hands. In those heavenly waters, empowered by the Word and Spirit of God, we are re-created as His own dear children, with sins forgiven and the certainty of a place in heaven, because of what God the Son has done for us. And that is very good!

Today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity, and I can think of no better way to celebrate it than by thanking our Triune God for all that He has done to save us from the power of sin, death, and the devil that we may have eternal life in heaven by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore, let us rise and join our voices in singing the Common Doxology (LSB 805).

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above ye heav'nly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen