

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

## BAPTISM GIVES SIGHT TO THE BLIND

John 9:1-41; Lent 4A; March 14-15, 2026

**[Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then He anointed the [blind] man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" ... So he went and washed and came back seeing.**

### [GREETING]

My Sermon Theme is "Baptism Gives Sight to the Blind," which is based on the Gospel Reading, although you might question my choice of the word, "baptism." The Reading has many references to the man born blind washing the mud off his eyes leading to receiving sight, but none to "baptism" or "baptizing." The Greek word for "wash" John uses throughout this account is *νίπτωμαι*, not *βαπτίζω*, "to baptize," though the Greek word for baptize means to wash with water. What is the basis of my claim that this text teaches something about baptism?

What does Luther's Small Catechism say about Baptism?

Please open your *Lutheran Service Books* to Page 325, and you will find in the left column the heading in red, "The Sacrament of Holy Baptism." The "FIRST" part has two questions. I will ask the questions and together we will recite the answers. *LSB* page 325.

- P** What is Baptism?
- C** **Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.**
- P** Which is that Word of God?
- C** **Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 28:19 NIV)**

The Catechism highlights here a couple of things about the Sacrament. First, Baptism uses water, noting later that it results in a washing away of sins. Second, since Baptism's water is used according to God's command and the word of Jesus, it contains promises from God: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, which are received through faith in Jesus, as noted in Parts Two and Three.

How does God's use of water and Word in Baptism compare with Jesus' sign of healing the man born blind? Jesus commanded the man to wash off the mud Jesus had made with His spit and placed on his eyes. Siliva is essentially water, and water was in the pool he washed in. The washing in water the blind man received according to Jesus' command and word resulted in healing – he was able to see for the first time in his life.

Another connection this healing has to baptism is the issue of sin. Jesus' disciples asked whose sin caused this man to be born blind, his or his parents. Jesus' answer was neither, though He did not deny that they were sinful from birth. Jesus' point was that this healing would be a demonstration of how God saves us. The Bible verse from First Peter three comes to mind: **“Baptism... now saves you”** (3:21).

The healed man was questioned repeatedly about how he received his sight. When he confessed faith in Jesus, the Pharisees accused him of being born in sin and kicked him out of the synagogue. When Jesus heard what they had done to the man, He stated that the world would be judged either guilty or innocent by how it rejected or believed in Him. **“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”** Some of the Pharisees near Him heard these things, and said to Him, **“Are we also blind?”** Jesus said to them, **“If you were blind, you would have no guilt (lit. “sin,” ἁματίαν); but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt (“sin”) remains.”**

Those who believe in Jesus as their Savior have the “sight” of faith and their sins forgiven; those without faith have the “blindness” of unbelief, remain in their sins, and are condemned by God. The Small Catechism emphasizes this point in Part Two by quoting Jesus in Mark 16: **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”** (16:16).

Jesus healed the man of his blindness by being washed according to Jesus' word, and he and came back seeing and believing in Jesus. The Pharisees could see with their eyes, but their hearts were blinded to seeing and believing in Jesus as their Savior.

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What about us? Can we see, or are we blind? Do we believe in Jesus, or not? Jesus did God's work by healing the man born blind. Jesus still works by bringing light to a world dark in sin and unbelief. We realize that we were once like that man born blind, and God has brought us into the light of Christ to see Jesus by faith in Him.

The Gospel of John begins: **In Him** (The Word in the beginning who was with God and was God; the Word made flesh) **was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world... He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him** (the Jewish Pharisees in today's Reading). **But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name** (the man born blind whom Jesus healed, and all of us who have faith), **He gave the right to become children of God** (1:4-5, 9, 11-12).

Jesus asks us what He asked the man He healed: **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you."** He said, **"Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him.** Baptized into Christ, healed of our blindness of unbelief and sin, by faith we can now see Jesus as our Savior. We live in the light as the children of God. With the sight of faith, we hear Jesus say, **"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

What is the connection between light and sight? Even people with perfect vision are blind in the dark; they can't see anything. How does vision work? Light from an outside source needs to shine on an object, be reflected off it, and enter our eyes, where it stimulates the rods and cones of our retinas, which send electrical signals through the optic nerve to the brain, which interprets those signals and pictures the object. No light, no sight.

I find it fascinating that Paul's theological statement about Christians changing from being darkness in unbelief to light in faith makes a statement that is supported by the physics of light. **When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light** (Eph 5:13). When we see something, we don't actually see the object itself. We see the light reflected from that object.

Through baptism and faith in Jesus, God has healed the spiritual blindness and sin we were born with. We have been brought out of the darkness to live in the light of Christ. Each time we sin, we step out of the light and back into the dark. St. Paul warns us, **“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them”** (5:11). Sin and unbelief like the dark. We hear Jesus say in John three: **“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed”** (3:19-20).

This is why we need to keep praying, **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** The sinful things we do in the dark, when they are exposed by God’s light bring shame on us. We need to resist temptations and realize that danger, death, and the devil lurk in the dark; there is no good there for us.

God has made us children of the light and of the day. Jesus says, **“We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** Born dead and blind in our trespasses and sins, Baptism has washed away our sins and given us the sight to see Jesus our Savior. Let us walk as children of the light, reflecting the light of Christ by thinking, doing, and speaking all that is good and right and true. Amen.