Matthew 3:13-17  
Baptism of our Lord  
January 10, 1992  

P: Pastor, I hate to interrupt at a time like this but something has been bothering me.

L: Paul, can’t it wait.

P: This is very important to me, it seems we are always pushing aside things that are important. Maybe the sermon could wait a little bit today.

L: Well, what is it?

P: I was wondering as I listened to the gospel reading. Jesus was baptized in a river, the Jordan. John didn’t go around with a little bowl like we do. People went into the water, went under the water. Jesus went under the water.

L: Paul, it is not important how much water we use for baptism. We can use a little or a lot. What counts is God’s word and our trust in his word. When we pour a little water on the head of the one being baptized it is the same as if they were baptized in a river, or in the lake.

P: I know that is what you think. But sometimes it seems in the Lutheran Church as if we are only baptizing brains.

L: Baptizing brains?

P: Yea, we put a little water on the head, and then we spend a lifetime trying to change how that person thinks. We talk of faith, as if faith is only what happens in the brain.

L: I’m confused, what do you mean?

P: I think the Christian faith is a body faith, not a brain faith. Jesus did not gather a group of thinkers, but a group of followers. St. Paul wrote in Romans:

"I appeal to you therefore brothers and sister, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but
be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

L: But what does that have to do with baptism?

P: Maybe with this pouring a little water on the head not all of us gets connected up with God. Just our brains, but not our whole life. Jesus whole body was baptized, everything he did and said belonged to God.

L: You think that God would want that of us also?

P: Exactly. God does not simply want our minds, our thoughts, he wants our whole lives. Every word we speak, every deed we do, every hour of every day God claims for himself.

L: The way you talk it sounds as if we should all go off and join an monastery or a convent. We can't all live religious lives all the time, we have to live in the real world.

P: That is what faith is about living in the real world with Jesus as our Lord. Remember? Present your body as a living sacrifice. Your whole life is your spiritual worship.

L: So you are saying that baptism claims our whole life, not just our thoughts and beliefs?

P: Of course. Paul writes in Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

L: This newness of life is not simply something to think about but is to be lived?

P: Yes, and our way of baptism hides this from us all. Paul says we are buried with Christ in baptism, but who would ever think about a burial if they saw a few pieces of soil put on someones head. The whole body is covered in a burial. The whole body should be covered in baptism.
L: And the whole body that now belongs to Christ should walk in newness of life.

P: Now you are catching on.

L: You make a convincing case, Paul. But I don’t think we’ll change our practice.

P: Why not?

L: We baptize infants and adults. Mothers and Fathers would not let us take their child and plunge her or him under the water.

P: Then maybe we should be like the baptists, and only baptize those who are old enough to understand.

L: Now who is being saved by what they think? When we baptize infants God makes it clear that everything depends on Christ and what he has done. For the child has no thoughts or words or deeds to show God that the child is worthy. Everything depends on Christ and is a gift of God.

P: Everything?

L: Everything. Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In baptism God is joining us to Christ, burying us with him so that we will one day be raised with him. Our thoughts and words and deeds will not save us, Christ and Christ alone will save us.

P: Sometimes that is hard to believe. Sometimes it feels as if I would try harder, give more, believe more that God would treat me better.

L: That is why baptizing infants is so important. No where else is the love of God so clearly a gift. When we die, we will be every bit as helpless as infants. Even when I think about my life right now I am as helpless and dependent on God as an infant. I can’t protect those I love, I can’t even keep myself safe.
P: Well, I don't know that I'm convinced. I still think we should put the whole body under the water when we baptize. That is what God is doing, claiming our whole life, mind and body and spirit.

L: I'll tell you what, there is no time for a sermon. What if each of us spends just a moment imagining our body, going under the waters with Christ. Close your eyes, see your body sinking under the waters, being buried in the waters with Christ. And now see God, lifting that body, holding that body, your body in God's hands, guiding and directing your body throughout your day. See yourself walking in newness of life. Full of Christ. His joy, his love, his peace. See Christ touch every life around you, through you. See Christ presenting your body as his living sacrifice.