

The Jewish people did not like water. Certainly they appreciated it as it kept them alive, and some were brave enough to become fishers, but they weren't a nautical people. I don't think that water sports were a favourite pastime. Even though it was commonly used in religious rituals, it wasn't necessarily near and dear to their hearts because water represented pain. Yes, it was used in purification rites in order that they might be holy. But in reality, it's purification and holiness came from death, and it meant a starting over.

Genesis 1 verse 2 is where this idea begins; the Spirit hovers over the deep, formless waters which are about to take form. Here there is no purification because nothing has gone wrong because nothing yet exists which could have gone wrong.

Creation out of nothing repeats in the story of Noah. Here we get a gruesome picture of purification. Apart from a few relatively faithful, God starts over, he puts forth a new creation, but that requires an end to the old creation.

In the story of the Exodus, water is a barrier to their freedom, a horrifying end to their escape, except for the hand of God which spares them from drowning in the waters ahead or dying to the Egyptians behind them, and God puts an end to the slavery they had been subjected to. The Egyptian army in this rendition is the world, the Israelites are Noah and His family, and their redemption is a new creation on the other side, headed towards the promised land. Repeatedly God creates from nothing, and water is the purifying "reset button."

And above all these floods, sits God the LORD and King, who is enthroned and rules above it all.

So John the Baptiser, by calling people to water, was not calling people to a washing away of what is bad; he is calling for a metaphorical death of the self in order that God might create something new; they are turning away from their life in the hopes that God might create new life. They ask what shall we do and John points them in the opposite direction of where they were

So then In the story of *Christ's* baptism, we see something completely unnecessary. Christ doesn't need to be created anew because He hasn't gone corrupt. He isn't a willing participant in the sins of a sinful world, one who needs to be drowned and have someone new put in His place. And yet He walks out of the crowd, those submitting to repentance. He identifies with them; He is made one with them, and yet He goes further than they can. He undergoes a baptism fuller, more complete, one by water and by fire.

He leads the way as one incorruptible, safe from both sin and death; yet He, the moral, takes on our immorality and repents of it, He, the eternal, takes on our temporal ways and gives it up in our place. In Christ's baptism Jesus becomes the world in the story of Noah, the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus, you and me in the final separating of the chaff and the wheat, the sheep and the goats, and in these He endures the water and is swept away, He endures the fire and is burned up; He endures total devastation and destruction in our place. He who will one day baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, in the consummation of time and the judgment of all that is not holy, He endured it first.

And yet He remains; He remains the Son of God in the flesh, perfectly righteous and raised from the dead. Because He remains, He has risen in order to carry whosoever would believe in Him by the work of the Holy Spirit right through the path He went, through the water and the fire.

So our baptisms are different. They are not in the Jordan, at the hands of John. They are not in repentance as you await the coming of the Messiah. They are *into* that very messiah who came, who left His place above the floods and allowed Himself to be submerged under the floods, held there until His last breath, and still rose victorious.

This is how God can grant strength and peace to His people—because He is the God who is with us in the fire and the flood.

Christ took on our sin which earned us drowning and burning, and He took on these deadly consequences as well. He took them on not so that we might live a perfect life in response to all that He

has done—see how great the Father’s love is for us? That we should live a life out of appreciation? No, John doesn’t say that, but He says “see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are.” In our baptism into Christ, we fall into Him who fell into the River, and dwelling in Him we hear the Father’s voice clear as day “this is my son, my daughter, in whom I am well pleased.” Dwelling inside Christ we look to the heavens and see the skies torn apart, the veil no longer separating us from our merciful Father, and we see the dove coming to rest on us, His consolation and comfort and righteousness made ours because we dwell in Christ.

You and I are like Noah and the Israelites, undergoing a baptism in which we die so that something new may be created.

We have died, certainly. But we didn’t die alone, like Christ did, in the waters of the Jordan and in the fire of the cross. We have died *with* and *into* Christ, so that He who has already been through the trials of this world and of certain death can carry us through. Noah and the Israelites died to themselves looking forward to the Messiah who would come and be their saviour, the one who walked even then through the mighty waters with them, and we die looking back at Him. Christ doesn’t stand on the clouds laughing maniacally as people drown beneath the floods; He has become one of us and drowned first, for our sins, so that we might not suffer the consequences of our sins but suffer the rewards of His righteousness. Rather than dying *for* your sins, you have died *to* them so that they no longer rule over you; you have died *to* yourself so that you are no longer #1. But we have died *into and alongside* Christ.

And so, just as we have died with Christ, so we rise. He came out of the waters of the Jordan and the darkness of the tomb unharmed—in fact radiant. And today this is how we arise.

We were drowned in remembrance of our baptism once again as we were marked with the sign of the cross and the name of the Triune God, as we confessed our sins that earned us eternal damnation; and we were raised from those waters righteous. In His righteousness you have already been raised to new life, a life certainly hidden today but real nonetheless.

In God's eyes you are righteous. Your poor attempts at righteousness—at loving and giving and serving and being, they are all perfected by Christ's life so they are a true joy to the Father. Even your sins, they are wiped away and replaced by His righteousness, so on the slate they are replaced and superseded by His glorious works, all His perfection yours.

And because you've been dressed in Christ, His baptism in the Holy Spirit and of fire look very different. You don't need to wait until He comes with His farming gear to separate the chaff and the wheat and hope you don't end up in the furnace. Instead, you are baptised with fire in order to purify your days; your sin is burned away and you truly live righteously. Some of this you see, as you maybe find it less difficult to give to charities or go visit your aging parents. Other parts of this purification you don't see; this is when you're doing the work of the Lord, showing mercy and grace and care and it happens almost unconsciously—it wasn't something you went out of your way to do, it wasn't even something you thought "yeah, this is a good work" but instead it happened almost as if it were routine, as if it were natural. Because it is. Because you are righteous, righteousness flows from your being.

All this because Christ was baptised in your place, and now you have been baptized by Him and into Him. The Lord who sits above the floods is He who goes with you through the floods and fires, the wearying days and terrible trials of this day. In Him you will be protected and carried even through your last day into that great and unending last day, when your baptism is finished and you see yourself as God does; purified, pure and righteous, just as Christ is and has already made you.