



LifeLight™
FOUNDATIONS

Baptism



LEADERS GUIDE



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer) using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 55);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes).

Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

God at Work

Genesis 1:1–10; 6:1–9:17; 17:1–21

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Some people dismiss Baptism as a ridiculous superstition. Others find it difficult to believe that God uses simple water to make sinful human beings spiritually clean. In this session, we will focus on God's work through means, His use of water to kill and make alive, and His use of signs, as shown us in Holy Scripture.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. learn that God works through means;
2. study God's use of water to kill and make alive;
3. recognize God's demand for spiritual cleanliness; and
4. learn how God uses signs to indicate His promise to save sinners through Jesus Christ.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and the prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* and *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a nine-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's espe-

cially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction: *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

"You shoulda joined us," Delmar said. "It couldn'ta hurt none."

"Join you two ignorant fools in a ridiculous superstition?" Everett replied. "Thank you anyway. . . . Baptism. You two are just dumber'n a bag of hammers."

Released in 2000, the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* tells the story of three escaped convicts who race across 1930s Mississippi in their hunt for stolen money. Played by George Clooney, Everett is the cynical leader of the trio. Here he's making fun of Delmar and his other partner for having just been baptized. To Everett, Baptism is just a "ridiculous superstition."

Welcome to LifeLight Foundations on Baptism! Over the next nine weeks, we are going to search the Scriptures in order to deepen our understanding of one of God's greatest gifts to us. Of course, we do not think of Baptism as a ridiculous superstition. Instead, we know that the Bible speaks about Baptism as God's way of connecting us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that the forgiveness of sins which Christ won for the world is given to us directly and personally.

This first week, we want to go back to the beginning, the very beginning of creation. From there we visit the flood, and from the flood we ponder God's covenant with Abraham. We are going to watch God as He does some spectacular things—some comforting and some terrifying—by means of someone or something else. Through our study of God's Word, we will learn that God does not consider it beneath Him to work through means. In fact, He has done so since the beginning of creation. We will also see how God in the past has used water both to kill and to make alive. Finally, we will discuss the concept of a sign and how God establishes signs to assure sinners of His love for them in Jesus Christ.

First things first . . .

1 God Works through His Word (Genesis 1:1–10)

(Genesis 1:1) "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Those words are familiar to us. With its very first verse, the Bible makes clear that everything ever made was made by God. God made it all.

The Bible goes on to tell us more. It also tells us *how* God created the heavens and the earth. Listen to the following statements:

(V. 3) "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

(V. 6) "And God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. . . . And it was so.'"

(V. 9) "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so."

In each case, how did God create what was created? He spoke. God spoke His Word, and His Word created out of nothing the heavens and the earth.

The apostle John tells us that the Word God spoke is a Word with a capital W. (John 1:1–3) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him was not any thing made that was made."

John tells us that the Word through which God made all things is a person! The Word is a He. Who is He? He is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is the Word, the pre-incarnate Christ, the Son of God, "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made" (Nicene Creed).

This, of course, is a study on Baptism. If we were studying the Trinity, we would emphasize that the Holy Spirit participates in creation too. After all, who is hovering over the waters in verse 2?

But our study is about Baptism. Here we want only to point out that in the very creation of the world, God the Father worked through the Word—God the Son—and with the Holy Spirit created out of nothing everything that was created.

2 God's Creation Is Good (Genesis 1:1–10 continued)

At this point, skeptics like Everett might say, "Well, sure, God made everything. And, sure, it was a cooperative effort on the part of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But it's still foolishness to think God uses stuff like water to save people."

Such a negative attitude toward "stuff" is nothing new. This view was especially popular among students of a certain third-century Persian philosopher named Manes (MAH-nee-z). They were known as Manichaeans (MAN-uh-KEY-uhns) and believed that matter itself was evil. They looked forward to being released from their physical bodies to exist solely as spirits. For several centuries, their ideas attracted a large following in both the East and the West. Even the Church father Augustine (354–430) was a Manichaean before he was converted to Christianity.

The Bible's account of creation, however, contradicts all views of the world in which creation itself is regarded as evil or even second class. From the beginning, what God created was *good*. The sentence "God saw that it was good"—with one variation—appears six times in Genesis 1 (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25). In fact, after creating everything, God "saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*" (v. 31, emphasis added).

Those who dismiss Baptism on the grounds that "mere water" is involved are not far from the position of the Manichaeans. Of course, Baptism is what it is because God adds His powerful Word to it. God did not have to convey His grace this way. But in light of how God created the heavens and the earth, we should not be shocked to learn that God chose to use ordinary water to bring us the salvation Christ won for us through His life, death, and resurrection. How fitting, in fact. Since creation itself is God's good doing, why wouldn't He use parts of it to take care of us, even to save us?

3 God Uses the Means of Water to Kill and Make Alive (Genesis 6:1–9:17)

Water shows up in the Bible as early as the second verse: "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Martin Luther once compared the Holy Spirit in this passage to a hen brooding over her eggs. The Holy Spirit used water to give birth to all living things!

How appropriate for us to confess in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Spirit is the "Lord and giver of Life."

From water comes life. But with water also comes death. Hurricanes and tsunamis are terrible proofs of this, and of all of history's so-called natural disasters, the great flood recorded in chapters 6–9 of Genesis is the most horrifying.

That God's good water has killing potential we sense already from Genesis 1, before sin and death have even entered into the world. In those verses, we read how God set limits for His creation so that all the parts of His creation might live in harmony. For instance, He separated the water from the dry ground so that all the land animals, including humankind, might live.

These questions arise: What if God were to remove those limits? What if He no longer enforced the boundary between the waters above and the waters below? What if He ceased to separate the waters from the dry land? We discover the answer to these questions in the great flood.

Listen to how God caused a flood to destroy the earth: (7:11) "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened."

The flood was God's response to humankind's sin. Sin is a crossing of the boundary God has set for human beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors. Humankind said to God, "I don't like the boundaries You have set for me," and God answered back, "I'll remove them, then." So water—part of God's good creation and the source of life—became for those outside the ark an instrument of devastation and wrath.

When God first tells Noah what He's about to do, He says, "I will blot out man, whom I have created from the face of the land" (6:7). The Lord wills for His creatures to live a life of purity—clean thoughts, clean actions. By the time of Noah, humankind had become so dirty that God decided to give the whole earth a bath. The word "blot" that God uses in verse 7 is used elsewhere in the Old Testament in connection with washing things. For instance, in 2 Kings 21:13, God threatens to "wipe [or blot] out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down." David uses the word in reference to his sins: (Psalm 51:1) "Blot out my transgressions."

The waters of the flood, therefore, were used to make the world clean again. But did they? The flood certainly eliminated a lot of sinners. But God spared Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his three daughters-in-law. Were they not sinners? Of course they were. In fact, God lets us know that even after the flood He did not expect things to change in terms of human wickedness. When Noah and his family were finally able to come out of the ark, the Lord said, (Genesis 8:21) "I will never again curse the ground because of man"—and notice what He says right here—"for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."

If the flood did not truly make the whole world clean again, if after the flood humans were going to keep on being as wicked as they were before, why did God go to all that trouble?

God did not have to spare Noah and his family. He could have wiped them out too. But He had a better plan. God's plan was to spare Noah so that through his descendants a Savior would come. This Savior would make the world clean, not by blotting out the world, but by being blotted out on the cross on the world's behalf.

In addition to this, by saving Noah and his family, the flood becomes for us a picture of the waters of Baptism. What's that? The flood saved Noah and his family? That's right. The flood saved Noah and his family! Listen to Genesis 7:17–18: "The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters."

The very thing that was death for the rest of creation was life for the creatures—both human and animal—in the ark. The floodwaters "bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth." In the flood, we see God's judgment, but we also see God's mercy.

Peter explains, (1 Peter 3:20–21) "In [the ark] a few people, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you." Just as in the great flood, the water in our Baptism both destroys and saves. It's a bath in which our sins are blotted out so that we are clean before our heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ.

4 God's Use of Signs (Genesis 17:1–21)

At the end of the flood, God established a sign: the rainbow. In everyday life, we use the word *sign* to mean several different things. There are traffic signs. There is sign language. There are signs from our spouses—like a polite coughing sound—to indicate it's time to hold our tongue.

However, when we speak of signs in the Bible, we are referring to things like the rainbow: an outward act or external object that indicates a fact, event, or feeling. In the case of the rainbow, we have a visible object that indicates God's will to never again destroy the earth by a flood.

For the outward act or external object to be a sign of God—that is, an indication of something God has done or something God promises to do—God Himself must say so in His Word.

For instance, there are other interpretations of the rainbow. Some see in the rainbow a foreshadowing of Christ. The rainbow, they say, points skyward, indicating that next time instead of the earth receiving God's punishment God Himself will.

This is an interesting idea. But God does not tell us this. Instead, we know that the rainbow is a sign of God's promise not to destroy the earth again by means of a flood. We know this with certainty because God says so in the Bible.

There were other signs that God used in the Old Testament to point ahead to His Son, Jesus Christ. This brings us to Genesis 17.

When God called Abraham, He made him a sevenfold promise (Genesis 12:1–3). Later, God established a sign pointing to this promise: (17:10–11) "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you."

Just as God made the rainbow to assure the earth that He would never again wipe it out with water, God used circumcision to assure Abraham and his descendants of the blessings that would come through Jesus Christ

(Abraham's Offspring; see Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7; Galatians 3:16).

Read all of Genesis 17. Notice how serious a matter circumcision is. No wonder circumcision became a hotly contested issue in the early days of the Christian Church (see Galatians 5:1–6). Any Jewish Christian who knew the Old Testament would have had a hard time accepting the idea that circumcision was no longer a requirement of God's people.

But it's important to understand that circumcision was a sign of God's promise to redeem them through a later descendant, namely, Jesus. Once the promise to which the sign pointed was fulfilled, it was no longer necessary for circumcision to be performed. It'd be like us still needing rainbows after God has re-created a new heaven and a new earth at Christ's second coming. The promise to which the rainbow points would obviously have been kept: No more *need* for rainbows! Likewise with circumcision: now that Christ has come, "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision" (1 Corinthians 7:19).

Baptism, however, is the new circumcision. (Colossians 2:11–12) "In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

What does all that mean? The descendants of Abraham could know from the fact that they were circumcised that the promises God made to Abraham were for them too. We who have been baptized can from our Baptism know that Jesus' forgiveness is for us and His victory over death is ours too (Romans 6:1–8)!

Conclusion

At the end of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Everett and his buddies are caught by the police just outside of his home. About to be executed, Everett prays to God for deliverance. Suddenly, a torrential flow of water—released by a newly constructed dam—sweeps him and his captors away. Our heroes eventually emerge down river, safe from their drowned executioners. Having previously made fun of his buddies for trusting in Baptism for their salvation, Everett is kept alive by mere water.

It took an extraordinary event to persuade Everett of the truth that God uses ordinary stuff like water to kill and make alive. All he would have needed to do was read his Bible. May this week's study of God's Word lead us to know more surely that God does use His Word and water to kill our sin and make us alive, to cleanse us, and to apply to us what Jesus did for us on the cross.

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Concluding Activities

Pray aloud: Our Father in heaven, even though we are sinful and unclean, You made a way for Your mercy by sending Your Son to die for us. Remember the promise You made to us in our Baptism. Forgive us our sins. Always help us not to take Your good gifts for granted. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Make any necessary announcements. Distribute study leaflet 2.

Out of Egypt

**Exodus 2:1–10; 3:1–15; 14:1–15:3;
Matthew 1:21; 28:16–20**

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

We continue to explore passages in the Old Testament that help us better understand God's saving action in Baptism. This second study will introduce the participants to the significance of names in the Old Testament and of God's name in particular.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. learn that God's name tells us who He is;
2. recognize that it is a privilege to know God's name; and
3. learn how being baptized into God's name means salvation.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* and *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a nine-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction: What Does Your Name Mean?

According to the Social Security Administration, some of the most popular baby names in the last few years are Jacob, Emily, Andrew, and Samantha. *Jacob* is originally a Hebrew name meaning "He grasps the heel." Remember when Jacob and Esau were born, or how Jacob came out of Rebecca's womb, grasping Esau's heel (Genesis 25:24–26)? The name *Emily* is originally a Latin word meaning "eager to equal or surpass another." (Think of the word *emulate*.) As for *Andrew* and *Samantha*, they're originally Greek and Aramaic names, respectively, meaning "man of a man" and "listener."

When we address someone named Andrew, we do not think, "man of a man." The case is different, however, for other cultures. Consider the American Indians and their practice of using descriptive phrases as names: Sitting Bull, Four Bears, or Pocahontas. *Pocahontas* means "she is playful." As we shall see, names of people in the Old Testament worked the same way: each revealed something about the person who possessed it.

In this our second study, we are going to spend some time on what it means to have a name. More important, we are going to learn what God's name means and how blessed we are to know it and to be baptized into it.

1 What's in a Name? Part 1 (Exodus 2:1–10)

What's in a name? In Moses' case, a lot! In the second chapter of the Book of Exodus, we read that when Moses was born, his mother hid him for three months. She did this because Pharaoh had decreed that all the male Israelite babies were to be killed. Moses' mother then put him in a reed basket that she let float down the Nile. The baby wound up being retrieved by a servant girl attending none other than Pharaoh's daughter. The daughter had compassion on the baby and adopted him as her own son, naming him "Moses" (Exodus 2:5–10).

We might easily pass over this fact. A woman finds a

baby and decides to raise him as her own. Naturally, she's going to name the baby. But in this case there was special significance—perhaps more significance than Pharaoh's daughter realized—in her choice of name for the foundling. In fact, it was prophetic of Pharaoh's daughter to have given Moses this name. The name *Moses* is a combination of two Egyptian words that together mean "rescued from the water." Throughout his days growing up in the Egyptian court, other Egyptian-speakers would have addressed him literally as "Rescued from the Water." That was Moses' name.

Could Pharaoh's daughter have known that those same two syllables in Hebrew mean "delivers" or "deliverer"? Every time an Israelite said "Moses," he or she was literally saying "Deliverer." That was the meaning of his name in Hebrew, and that was exactly what he turned out to be. Pharaoh's daughter—who likely did not know Hebrew—gave Moses a name that in his own people's language pointed ahead to the act of deliverance God would work through him.

2 What's in a Name? Part 2 (Exodus 3:1–15)

As remarkable as Moses' naming was, an even more remarkable name-giving occurred later in Moses' life. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3). Moses had misgivings. Moses did not feel confident telling the Israelites that he spoke on behalf of "the God of [their] fathers." What if the people demanded proof of Moses' encounter with God? What would he be able to tell them? He would be able to tell them God's very name, for "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (v. 14).

What a moment in human history—God's revelation of Himself to Moses. For just as who Moses was and what he was to do was concentrated in his name, so, too, is God's name an expression of who He is, of His very essence.

The relationship between a person's name and a person's essence was more apparent in Old Testament times than in our own. However, even in our own culture in which the connection between names and their root meanings have been lost, we still sense that a person's name expresses his or her unique individuality.

Philosophers such as Hegel have said this about a person's name. Poets such as Shakespeare have known this about names. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, Juliet says the famous line "What's in a name? That which we call a Rose, By any other word would smell as sweete." She says this about Romeo, who bears the name of the family that her own family hates. She is claiming that if Romeo were called by a different name she would adore him no less. But by the end of the same scene, Juliet contradicts herself, vowing to make herself and her echo hoarse "with repetition of my Romeo." Romeo's name cannot be changed without somehow changing who Romeo is. Romeo's name expresses his unique individuality.

So it is with God and His name. His name tells us who He is. God's unique individuality is revealed by His name. Who is He? He is "I AM WHO I AM." An equally valid translation of God's name in Hebrew is "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE" or even "I WILL DO WHAT I WILL DO." He is the merciful God who is from everlasting to everlasting. He accomplishes His will for His people and continues to do so eternally.

What a comfort to Moses and what a comfort to the Israelites whom Moses would lead! The Israelites were groaning under the burdens laid upon them by their oppressive Egyptian overlords. But the God of their fathers was not on a level with other gods, as though it were a question if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were stronger than the gods the Egyptians worshiped. God differs from other gods in the most significant way: God is the great "I AM"; therefore, the other gods are not. They do not exist. They are nothing. Only God has the name "I AM WHO I AM."

3 Yahweh Is His Name (Exodus 14:1–15:3)

God proved His name in the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, not only for the Israelites, but also for the Egyptians. What did He say beforehand? (Exodus 14:4) "I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and *the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.*" The uppcased "LORD" is how the translators have put into English the Hebrew word for God's name. We may just as rightly translate the verse, "and the Egyptians shall know that I am I AM."

The Egyptians did in fact learn that the God of the

Israelites was the one and only God. As God threw their army into confusion, the Egyptians said, (Exodus 14:25) “The LORD”—again, uppcased “LORD” means “Yahweh,” God’s name in Hebrew—“The LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.”

God caused both the Egyptians and the Israelites to know that He is the true God. God’s revelation of Himself struck fear in the Egyptians’ hearts. The showing of His glory meant their destruction. But for the Israelites, the same display of power meant deliverance. In fact, the miracle of the Red Sea crossing moved Moses and the Israelites to sing a victory song to God.

God had said to Moses, (Exodus 3:15) “This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” In the exodus, Moses and the Israelites he led through the Red Sea became the first to know God’s name (Exodus 6:2–3). This first remembering or celebrating occurs with the Song of Moses, recorded in Exodus 15. In the course of eighteen verses, they say God’s name eleven times! The very acknowledgment of God’s name is praise: (15:3) “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name.” No wonder the Israelites were so joyful—the God who said His name is “I AM WHO I AM” had proved it by delivering the Israelites through the Red Sea.

4 Jesus’ Name (Matthew 1:21; 28:16–20)

So far we have discussed the significance of names in Old Testament times. A person’s name expressed who the person was, the person’s character, and in some cases, the person’s destiny. A name, even in our own times, is connected with a person’s unique individuality. We have also discussed the significance of God’s name, as He revealed it to Moses and the Israelites during their time under Egyptian rule. The name *Yahweh*, or “I AM,” tells us that God is the one and only God and that He accomplishes His purposes now and forever.

What does all this have to do with Baptism? Before we answer that, let’s look at one more biblical name-giving. The Gospel of Matthew records that the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said of Mary, (1:21) “She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Did you catch that? The name *Jesus* was not chosen by Joseph or Mary. It was

the name the Lord Himself chose. In Moses’ case, Pharaoh’s daughter gave Moses his name, and as it turned out, it was most fitting. There was no such “coincidence” with Jesus. Jesus’ name in Hebrew is *Jeshua*, which means “He saves,” or “the Lord saves.” The Lord Himself named Him. That His name would reveal what He was all about was intentional. From the beginning, Jesus’ name was a proclamation that He had come to save His people from their sins.

Fast-forward to Matthew 28:16–20. In this passage, we find the disciples on a Galilean mountain where Jesus, the risen Lord, has summoned them. Much of what happens on this mountain reminds us of Moses’ encounter with God in the burning bush. Just as God commissioned Moses, so Jesus commissions His apostles “to make disciples of all nations.” Just as God told Moses that the Israelites would worship Him on a mountain, so the apostles worship Jesus on a mountain. Just as God assured Moses, “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12), so Jesus tells His apostles, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

But there is one more very important similarity, which connects everything we have said before about names, God’s name, and the meaning of names, with Baptism. In the burning bush, God told Moses His name. On the mountain in Galilee, Jesus speaks of God’s name too. “Make disciples of all nations,” Jesus says, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” A new name? No. The “I AM WHO I AM” has always been and will always be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But now that Jesus Christ has died and risen from the dead for the sins of the world, God’s name—who He really is—is revealed to us. God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one divine essence. That is who He is.

Here we should note two important points. First, Baptism in the “name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” distinguishes the rite of Baptism from every other ordinary washing or pouring of water. Some people reject the teaching that God bestows His grace in Baptism because Baptism is a human work. (Ephesians 2:8–9) “For by grace you have been saved through faith . . . not a result of works.” However, where does God command us to apply His name as we wash our cars, our clothes, or even our coffee cups? It makes all the difference in the world that Baptism is in

the “name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism is not our work, it is God’s work. Baptism is a washing done in God’s name. The pastor may hold the child, pour the water, and say the words, but he is only God’s instrument. The work is God’s, done in His name.

Second, because God’s name is in it, Baptism has an effect. What did we learn God’s name was? “I AM WHO I AM” God accomplishes His purposes now and forever. What is His purpose? This we know from the name of God’s anointed, Jesus, “the Lord saves.” Where God’s name is, then, there is salvation. Baptism saves us. It is truly a “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5).

Those who dismiss Baptism as an external thing that cannot save, because only faith saves, are only partially correct. The benefit of Baptism is lost on those who do not believe. But belief, or faith, is always in something. On the basis of God’s Word and promise, faith believes that in the water of Baptism there is salvation, not on account of the water itself, but because God has joined Christ’s saving work and His saving name to it. What’s in a name? In our Baptism, everything!

Conclusion

Sacajawea (SAK-uh-juh-WEE-uh) was the American Indian woman who served as guide and interpreter for Lewis and Clark during their 1804–6 exploration of the Louisiana Purchase. In 1997, the U.S. Congress authorized the minting of a dollar coin with her likeness stamped on it. When it was released, the coin stirred up a controversy. Why? It all goes back to Sacajawea’s name.

Sacajawea was born a member of the Shoshone (shuh-SHOH-nee) tribe. She was later kidnapped by a rival tribe, the Hidatsas (hi-DAHT-sahs). When she met Lewis and Clark in the winter of 1804, the teenage Sacajawea had subsequently been bought by and was married to a French trapper.

The question still unsettled by historians is, Was *Sacajawea* her Shoshone name at birth, or was *Sacajawea* the name the Hidatsas gave her after they kidnapped her? Like Moses, Sacajawea has two different meanings depending on what language it is spoken in. In Shoshone, the name means something like “canoe pusher.” In Hidatsa, however, the name means “bird woman.”

The Sacajawea dollar was a disappointment to certain Shoshone descendants and scholars who believe *Sacajawea* was her native Shoshone name. The coin disappointed them because it featured the spelling of Sacajawea’s name used by the Hidatsas and by the men who kept journals on the Lewis and Clark expedition. (In Shoshone, *Sacajawea* is with a *j*; in Hidatsa, *Sacajawea* is with a *g*.) How ironic and hypocritical, these critics said, to print the word *Liberty* on a coin that adopts the spelling used by Sacajawea’s kidnapers and slave owners.

Sacajawea’s story is not unlike that of all baptized believers. In our Baptism, God kidnapped us. But this kidnapping was *out* of slavery, not into it. Baptized believers gladly bear the name of their Captor. We were born with the name “child of Adam,” “sinner.” That is who we were. But through our Baptism into God’s name, we are given a new name, “saved,” “redeemed by Christ.” That is now who we are. We have been delivered by God Himself out of the Egypt of our sin. In our Baptism, we have true liberty. Let us remember the name of the Lord forever.

Concluding Activities

Pray aloud: Lord God, everlasting Father, You revealed Your name and proved it to Your people of old by leading them out of Egypt by way of the Red Sea. Help us see in our Baptism an even greater deliverance, a rescue from the power of sin and a crossing from death to life. Forgive us our sins and quicken our hearts to praise You and to remember Your name forever. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Make any necessary announcements. Then distribute study leaflet 3.