

NOVEMBER 2026

The Union Press

"To know Him and make Him known"

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Drawing Near through Baptism

We all know someone who is slick at buying and selling things online, always finding a great deal on eBay or Facebook Marketplace. Maybe you're that person. If you are, you probably recognize the acronym NIB: New in Box. Never opened. Never used. Maybe the shrink wrap is still on it. When you're shopping, "New in Box" is an exciting thing to find.

But there's one thing we as Christians should never leave "New in Box": our baptism.

We have a responsibility that is often neglected: improving our baptism our whole life long. If that phrase sounds strange to you, you're not alone. Many Christians think of baptism as something that happened to them once, at the beginning of the Christian life or when they were an infant, and they rarely think about it again.

Improving our baptism doesn't mean making it better. We can't improve on the work of Christ. It means our baptism is meant to have an ongoing, formative effect on us as we remember and live out God's grace to us in Jesus.

A Sign and a Seal

Baptism is a sign and a seal. As a sign, like a road sign, it points us somewhere: to Christ and his death and resurrection for sinners. As a seal, like a wax seal on an envelope, it seals to the believer the benefits of being united to Jesus by faith.

It isn't the water that does the sealing, nor the person who administers the sacrament, nor the vows taken by the one baptized or by a parent. The sealing is the work of the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes, "*when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1:13–14).*

Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by it a person becomes part of the visible church. But it is not a substitute for saving faith. No one can say, "I've been baptized, so it doesn't matter whether I trust Christ." Baptism is not a get-out-of-hell-free card. If you've been baptized but have never trusted Christ, your baptism isn't telling you that you don't need Jesus. It's calling you to Jesus: to repent of your sins, believe in him, and receive the salvation baptism signifies.

Neither can we say baptism doesn't matter so long as we believe. Jesus commanded that his followers be baptized, and we want to obey him. And he gave us this sacrament to strengthen our faith, to remind us that we've been engrafted into him.

This is what Paul teaches in Romans 6: we improve our baptism by living as those who are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Grace forms who we are, and grace informs how we live.

(Continued on Page 2)

WHAT'S INSIDE

Pastor's Letter.....1-3
Advent Devotional...4
Event Pictures.....4-5
Calendar 6
Just So You Know...7
November Events 8

REMINDER:
Deadline for Newsletter Articles Is Nov. 22nd.

(Continued From Page 1)

Grace Forms Who We Are

Romans 6 opens as if we've walked into a room in the middle of a conversation: "What shall we say then?" To understand the question, we need to rewind to the end of Romans 5, where Paul sets before us two representatives who stand at the head of humanity: Adam and Christ. Picture a courtroom where your entire case rests on your representative.

God created Adam upright, in his image, and in fellowship with him. But Adam rebelled, and as our representative head, his rebellion brought sin, condemnation, and death on all he represented: "*sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).* If Adam is our representative, the verdict is guilty and the sentence is death.

But there is another representative: the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam. His record is spotless. He is the Righteous One, whose whole life conformed perfectly to the will of God. "As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

In Adam we are under sin, condemnation, and death. In Christ we are given righteousness, justification, and life.

So who represents you? Saving faith is receiving and resting on Christ alone for our justification before God, and that is what baptism signifies and seals. We belong to Christ and he belongs to us. Our sins were laid on him, and his righteousness and blessing are given to us. This is where Christian formation begins.

Consider the self-help industry, worth billions of dollars giving us best-sellers like: Atomic Habits, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, and the rest. Much of it rests on one premise: change what you do, and eventually you'll become a different kind of person. Christians can spiritualize the same idea: read your Bible more, pray longer, serve more, discipline yourself more. None of those things are bad. Scripture calls us to train ourselves in godliness, and God uses these means to grow us in grace. But real spiritual transformation doesn't begin with the habit. It begins with Christ and what he has done on our behalf. That is pictured in baptism: Jesus' death and resurrection assure the believer that they are definitively dead to sin and alive to God, not by their own work, but by grace.

"By No Means!"

That doctrine of grace raises an objection. Paul has just said that "*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."* So we might imagine someone piping up: if my sin gives grace another chance to triumph, why not keep sinning?

This is the antinomian (anti-law) distortion of grace, the error that because we're saved by grace and not by obedience, God's moral law no longer has any claim on the Christian life. It treats justification as if it stood alone. It doesn't. Picture our salvation as a chain, each link equally load-bearing. Alongside justification stand effectual calling, God calling us from death to life by his sovereign grace; adoption, the privilege of being his children; and sanctification, being set apart by the Spirit to grow in holiness. God doesn't merely justify people and drop the matter. He completes the work he starts.

Some argue it's possible to be a "carnal Christian," to confess Christ, be saved, and never live, nor care to live, a life of obedience to him. We answer with Paul: "By no means!" No such category exists. A person who professes Christ yet has no desire to follow him is not a believer.

Listen to Paul's logic: "*How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (vv. 2–3).* Baptism isn't a sticker slapped on us that says "baptized." It's a naming ceremony. The name of the Triune God is placed on us, the way a family name tells people to whom you belong. By it we're given a new identity: in Christ.

And notice that Paul says we were buried with him. Why burial? Because burial confirms that the dead are really dead. Jesus' burial showed his death was real and complete, and something equally decisive has happened to us in union with him: the old life under sin's dominion has come to an end.

Imagine growing up in a terribly rough neighborhood—drug deals on the corner, police lights, violence in the streets. It's all you've ever known. Then someone says, "You don't have to live here anymore," and brings you to an entirely different home, where people walk their dogs and kids play in the street. That's something like what Christ has done for us. Sin may still call after us. We may even wander back into the old streets. But it isn't home anymore, and it isn't our master anymore.

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued From Page 2)

Following, Even Limping

Perhaps you're thinking to yourself: "I don't follow Christ perfectly, so I must not be a Christian." "I struggle with fear, lust, pride, bitterness, anger, so I must not be a Christian." "I want to love my neighbors better, and I don't, so I must not be a Christian."

That is not what Paul is saying. Being in Christ comes with newness of life. We share in his resurrection, raised to new spiritual life. Yet we still face seasons of struggle, confronted daily with our own weakness, fighting a continual war with our flesh. Through the fight, what remains for the Christian is the God-given desire to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Some profess the name of Christ yet have never taken one step to follow him. But there are others who follow carrying their cross and the wounds of battle. Who follow limping, in an unimpressive manner. Who follow exhausted because the journey has been so long. Who fell down and believed they'd been left behind, yet by God's grace are back on their feet and making up ground.

Friends, if that's you—if you believe you've been raised with Christ and your desire is to follow him, however imperfectly—take heart. You have a strong and gracious Savior who will be your strength, your shield, and your salvation.

Grace Informs How We Live

"For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (vv. 10–11).

Notice what Paul does not say. He doesn't say, make yourself dead to sin, or try to become alive to God. He says consider yourselves: reckon, count as true what is already true. It's like taking inventory. You're not creating what's on the shelves; you're taking account of what's there. Don't let your remaining sin tell you who you are. God tells you who you are. Sin remains in you, but it no longer reigns over you. Count God's verdict about you truer than what your temptation says.

Only then does Paul command, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body" (v. 12). Don't let sin rule you, because it doesn't rule you. Its passions are demanding, but you don't have to listen. Instead, present yourself to God as an instrument of righteousness.

Paul doesn't say, live differently so that you can become someone new. He says, in Christ God has made you new, therefore live differently. Your eyes belong to Christ. Your mouth belongs to Christ. Your hands and feet, your mind, your sexuality, your ambitions all belong to Christ. You have been raised with him, so present all of yourself to God as one who lives under his grace.

Out of the Box

We cannot leave our baptism sitting in the box. We must spend our lives making use of what God has given us in it.

When sin accuses you, remember your baptism: I belong to Christ.

When temptation calls you back to the old neighborhood, remember your baptism: I died with Christ. Sin does not own me anymore.

When you wonder whether you can change, remember your baptism: Christ has been raised, and his Spirit is at work in me.

And when you rise tomorrow to start a new day, present yourself again to God—not to earn his grace, but because in Jesus Christ, God's grace is already yours.

So let us improve our baptism: believing God's promises, reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, and living out who God has made us to be in Christ.

Pastor Appreciation

Dear UPC Family,

On behalf of our entire family, thank you for the outpouring of love and generosity you have shown us during Pastor Appreciation Month; it has been overwhelming and deeply appreciated. We love you all.

Sincerely, Pastor Jeremy & The Peterson Family

CHURCH DECORATING FOR ADVENT

We will be decorating the church for the Advent/Christmas season on Saturday, November 28 at 9:00 am. All are welcome to come and help.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Would you consider contributing to our Advent Devotional? There are still quite a few days to choose from. The process is not difficult.

- Choose a scripture passage. Prayerfully consider what the passage says to you about Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love during this Advent Season.
- Jot down those thoughts.
- Include Scripture reference.
- Include a short prayer, if you choose.
- Return to Julie by November 15 by putting it in her mailbox or emailing her at upc@epix.net.

Please speak with Elaine Swinehart, if you have any questions.

Available Scriptures are included below:
HOPE – 12/1 2 Samual 7:8-16, 12/3 Isaiah 7:10-14, 12/4 Isaiah 9:1-7
PEACE – 12/7 Isaiah 40:1-4, 12/8 Isaiah 52:1-10, 12/9 Isaiah 55:1-6, 12/11 Zechariah 9:9-10
JOY – 12/14 Luke 1:18-25, 12/15 Luke 1:57-66, 12/16 Luke 1:67-80, 12/18 John 1:19-28
LOVE – 12/20 Luke 1:26-38, 12/21 Luke 1:39-56, 12/22 Matthew 1:18-24, 12/23 Luke 2:1-7, 12/24 Luke 2:8-20, 12/25 John 1:1-4 & Revelation 22:12-14, 20-21



DEACON JUDY VISTS WITH JACK HASTINGS







Scarcrow Family Night



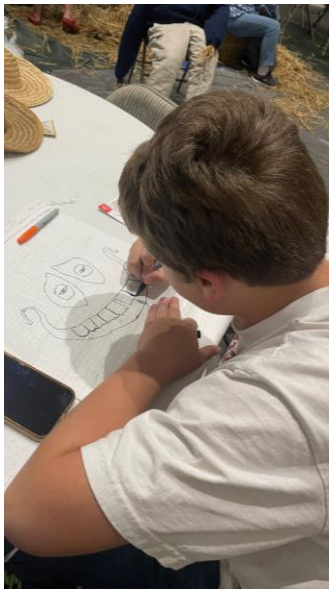




















2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 8:30 Prayer Meeting (Library) 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship – Memorial Sunday Daylight-Saving Time Ends	**2** 6:30pm Octorara Pines Growth Group	**3** 7:00 Trustee Mtg	**4** 10:00 Prayer Meeting (Library) **6:30 Union Growth Group**	**5** 1:00 Deacon Meeting 1:00 Bible Adventure 3:45 Solid Rock @Bart 5:30 Quarryville Growth Group	**6** 1:30pm Kirkwood Growth Group	**7**
8 8:30 Prayer Meeting (Library) 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship	**9** 1:00 Bible Study 6:30pm Octorara Pines Growth Group	**10** Veterans Day	**11** 10:00 Prayer Meeting (Library) **6:30 Union Growth Group**	**12** 1:00 Bible Adventure 3:45 Solid Rock @Bart	**13** 1:30pm Kirkwood Growth Group	**14**
15 8:30 Prayer Meeting (Library) 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship	**16** 6:30pm Octorara Pines Growth Group	**17**	**18** 10:00 Prayer Meeting (Library) **6:30 Union Growth Group** 7:00 Session Mtg	**19** 1:00 Bible Adventure 3:45 Solid Rock @Bart 5:30 Quarryville Growth Group	**20** 1:30pm Kirkwood Growth Group 6:00 Family Night	**21**
22 8:30 Prayer Meeting (Library) 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship 4:00 Pie & Praise Hymn Sing	**23** 6:30pm Octorara Pines Growth Group	**24**	**25** 10:00 Prayer Meeting (Library) **NO Union Growth Group**	**26** Thanksgiving	**27** 1:30pm Kirkwood Growth Group	**28** 9:00 Advent/ Christmas Decorating 10:00 UPW Mtg
29 8:30 Prayer Meeting (Library) 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Worship Advent Begins	**30**					

LECTIONARY PASSAGES

November 1st – All Saints' Day
Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22;
1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

November 8th – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7;
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

November 15th – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123:1-4;
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

November 22nd – Christ the King Sunday
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100:1-5;
Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

November 29th – First Sunday of Advent
Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65;
2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19

FOOD BANK

Pineapple (20 oz can), macaroni and cheese (box), assorted pasta (boxes), tuna (cans), Seafood soup/chowder (can), SPAM, Refried beans (can), Cheerios (yellow box), fruit snacks, fruit cups, microwave popcorn, diapers (size 5, 6, and 3T, 4T, 5T)



Union Post Office

The post office at Union Church will operate for the Christmas Holiday Season. Christmas Cards will be delivered to anyone who attends church in person. Please place the cards in the box in the lobby. Please have first and last name on the envelope. **December 6th will be the last day to bring cards.** The sooner cards are deposited the better! If you have any questions, please ask Arlene or Donald Hastings 529-2495.

GREETERS

1 Bill & Trudy Bard
8 Ruth Barker & Darlene Gray
15 (Open)
22 (Open)
29 Lois Rineer



1 Charlotte Stoner
2 Richard Stoner
3 Casey McCardell Cotton
4 Ray Wallace
5 Michael Whiteside
Bill Bard (Jr.)
Gregory Nixon
James Nixon
6 Lois Rineer
Evan Hastings
8 Judy Beiler
9 Andrea Nixon
Richard Hastings
Tom Chase
Mick Chase
10 Sharon Noonan
Joyce Gunzenhauser
Mary Denise Slodki
16 William Jackson, Jr.
22 Brian Wade
23 Matthew Sheaffer
28 Thomas McCardell
30 Laura Greenleaf



Christmas Organ Concert

Come celebrate the birth of our Lord! Join us for our annual organ concert by Bob Trimble on Sunday, December 20th at 6:30pm in the Union sanctuary.

Union Presbyterian Church
5637 Street Road
Kirkwood, PA 17536

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