

+ Titus 3:3-7 + Remember Your Re-Birthday! +
+ First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord + 1 January 2010 +

Do you remember that day? Not September 11 or Christmas, but something important happened that day. Nor am I talking about the day you started school or the day you graduated from high school or college, but it was a significant day in your life. I'm not talking about the day your spouse said, "I do", or even the day the doctor laid your child in your arms, but that day was very special.

Do you remember that day? By now, you're probably wondering, "What's he talking about?" As significant as all those days were, there was one day that was more important than any other, even your birthday. That day your life changed forever. On that day you were rescued from the clutches of death itself. That day was the day of your Baptism – your Re-Birthday.

Do you remember that day? For some, you may actually remember it if you were baptized when you were older. For most of us, like the day we were born, we have no recollection of our re-birth. You may not remember the congregation singing a hymn of praise as your parents brought you forward to the font or the pastor making the sign of the cross over your head and heart and sprinkling water on your head with the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." You may not remember how Jesus did the impossible that day and rescued you from the fires of hell. You may not remember how he took a dead little sinner and made you alive through those waters of Baptism. Pretty important day, but why don't we ever celebrate it? Unlike our physical birthdays, we usually forget or maybe don't even know our re-birthdays. We often forget how important that day is for our lives as God's children. So this morning Paul reminds us through his letter to Titus, "**REMEMBER YOUR RE-BIRTHDAY!**" (Read Titus 3:3-7)

When you and I look back on our physical birthdays, sometimes stories are told about how long mom was in labor or how dad had to rush her to the hospital. Today, as you and I look back at our re-birthdays, we remember a very exciting event as well. Now this isn't something normal like a long labor or a mad dash to the hospital, but something truly extraordinary happened that day. The thing you and I remember most about our re-birthdays is **the miraculous rescue**. It was so amazing, because it was so impossible. There you were...floundering, gasping for breath, nothing to hold onto. The raging floods of sin had rushed in and overwhelmed you at the moment of your conception. The waters of sin threatened to drag you down into the dark depths of death and hell. Old Adam inside you actually made you think you could swim, that it was no big deal, but that only made things worse. The harder you tried, the more the flood swept you away. Sin had complete control of you and there was nothing you could do about it. Paul describes the situation in verse 3, "**At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.**" The situation looked impossible. There was no way of escape and soon the waters would overtake you forever.

Do you remember what happened? Do you remember the miraculous rescue? Jesus wasn't going to just let you drown. He used everything in his power to save you as the flood of sin overtook you. He did the impossible as Paul describes, "**But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.**" You really didn't help him any though. You kicked and screamed and fought him every step of the way with every fiber of your being. Sin lulled you into thinking you would rather stay in the water, but God still rescued you. Why? Well, his reasons were embodied in the One who came to save you.

When God saw you helpless in sin's flood, his generous kindness and love moved him to send his Son to put himself in your perilous situation. That kindness and love moved your Rescuer, your Savior, to put your needs before his own. He knew you had to be rescued. He knew he would lose his life in the process, but that didn't scare him. He left the safe shores of heaven and dove into those deadly waters to pull you out of sin's grip. He took the full brunt of sin's power to rescue you. Death did not claim your life. It claimed his instead. All this happened because of God's mercy and grace, his undeserved kindness. You didn't deserve it, but he loved you too much to let you drown. This rescue wasn't heroic. It was miraculous!

Paul explains, "**He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.**" To the naked eye, there was nothing extraordinary about it. To those at your baptism, they couldn't see the miracle taking place. All they could see was the pastor pouring water on your head and saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Yet it was so much more than that! Through that water and the Word, Christ, your Rescuer, pulled you out of sin's deadly floods with the lifeline of baptism. That's why we remember!

Do you remember that day? When you look back at your re-birthday, you joyfully recall the miraculous rescue that resulted in your re-birth, but as you look back, you also see the results of that re-birth. Paul reminds us again, ***“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal...so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*** When you look back on your re-birthday, two results come from that rescue.

First of all, **you have a new life to live.** When a newborn enters the world, it’s often said, “He has his whole life ahead of him” or “She has her whole life ahead of her.” That was true of you on the day of your baptism. You had been saved through the washing of rebirth and renewal. Your whole life in Christ lay ahead of you, but there was one who wanted to ruin that life. Inside of you there is an old man, Old Adam – a sinful nature that wants to wreck your life. He wants you to fall into sin’s many traps and pitfalls. He wants you to let your desires and emotions make the decisions for you. He wants you to disrespect the boss behind his back or mouth off to mom and dad. He wants you to use rude comments to cut down a co-worker or classmate or be filled with envy when a co-worker gets a promotion or a classmate does well. He wants you to fight with your siblings or refuse to share the computer or the Playstation or argue with your spouse over little things. Old Adam wants you to jump right back into those deadly floods of sin, because he makes those waters seem so inviting.

But Christ didn’t rescue you for nothing! He didn’t rescue you so you could just put yourself back into danger. No, he rescued you so you would have life. Paul writes in Romans 6, ***“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*** You see, when Christ rescued you through the waters of baptism, what he accomplished became yours. Because he died to sin, you died to sin. Because he was buried, you were buried with him through baptism and now because he lives, you also will live. Through baptism, you have a new life to live.

Your miraculous rescue is the motivation to live this new life in Christ. As Paul wrote, ***“I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”*** How can you do that? Paul offers a few examples. ***“Be subject to rulers and authorities...be obedient.”*** Your new life in Christ leads you to willingly work under your superiors and support them. It means you can willingly obey the rules and laws of your local, state and national governments. At home and in school, you can listen to your parents and teachers, not because you have to, but because you want to.

Paul gives other examples. ***“Be ready to do whatever is good...”*** Remembering your baptism will lead you to help that next-door neighbor who isn’t always the nicest, but needs your help. ***“Slander no one...”*** As you remember your re-birthday, you won’t be so quick to bad-mouth your peers at school or someone at work. Rather you’ll do what we can to build them up and speak well of them. ***“Be peaceable and considerate...”*** As you recall your baptism, rather than fighting with your siblings or letting stress become an excuse for a short fuse, you can seek to calm things down and be considerate of the other person. ***“Show true humility toward all men...”*** As you remember how your Savior put your needs before his own, you can act towards others with the same humility.

“But what if Old Adam gets the better of me?” Well, by God’s grace, as you daily remember your re-birthday you can drown those evil deeds and desires again in the waters of your baptism and by faith devote yourself to leading a God-pleasing life.

Finally, **you have eternal life before you.** Paul writes in verse 7, ***“So that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*** When you were baptized, God made you into something special. He didn’t just make you one of his servants. He made you an heir, an actual member of his family. You have a share in his awesome inheritance. That new life that you received at your baptism will continue far beyond your earthly death into the eternal glories of heaven. Since you know you have this inheritance, why forget your re-birthday?

So do you remember that day? It was such an important day, because God performed a special miracle in you that day. He changed your life forever. In the days to come, find out the date of your baptism and celebrate it. Find your baptismal certificate and those of your family members. Put them up in your house to remind you of that day. Whatever you do, don’t forget how God rescued you that special day and gave you life in Christ. My friends, remember your re-birthday! Amen.