



# MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 12, 2025

Pastor James Enderle

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany; The Baptism of Our Lord

First Lesson: [1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)

Psalms of the Day: Psalm 2a

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Titus 3:4-7](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

## EPIPHANY MOMENTS

### Baptism is the Cure of an Identity Crisis

#### BAPTISM: A SAVED IDENTITY

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ has been identified.
2. Misplaced identity leads to \_\_\_\_\_  
- \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ identity in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ filled identity.

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Some of the more famous movies, for whatever reason, have to do with people who have a loss of identity. Sometimes it's through psychological issues. I think of some of the times when it's a complete loss of identity. One of the famous ones (this is becoming an old movie already) is The Bourne Identity, about Jason Bourne. There were so many more Bourne movies after the first one, but he gets in this accident where he hits his head and he doesn't know who he is. He starts finding clues about who he might be. If you remember, he opens up this bank safe and he finds all these passports with his picture on them and they have all these different names. Could you imagine that? You're trying to figure out who you are and then you have this list of all these different identities. Which one are you?

Do you ever feel that way in life, where you don't know what your identity is? That you feel in this place this identity or at this place you're this identity? But a lot of times you've just lost your identity. Sometimes we can lose our identity and maybe it's because of something that has happened, a change in life. I can think of one that I hear more and more about as the Baby Boomers are now in retirement age is how much

retirement can be a loss of identity. You go to work every day, maybe for 30 years, and you see the same people, people look to you for wisdom, and then one day it's done and you've lost that identity.

There are other times in life where situations change and relationships change and now you've lost that identity. There could be other reasons that you struggle with it, but we're going to look at understanding how Christ gives us an identity that really saves us. It's an identity to hold onto and really that comes through **baptism: a saved identity**, one that lasts and one that gives us some lasting results as well.

As we begin, Paul is writing to Titus. He is writing to a church leader and he is explaining to him how to lead other Christians. He writes to him on what it means to be a leader. But then he is talking to him in the chapter before, giving advice to different types of Christians on how men should act, how children should act, how different people should act. And then in the verses before this, he talks about what we used to be, what sins we struggled with, but a change has happened. Something happened that meant we no longer are in those sins anymore and we don't have to fear that, because something happened.

Where Paul writes in [Titus 3:4](#) it says, <sup>4</sup>***But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared...*** Isn't that a fascinating introduction, a fascinating sentence? ***...the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared...*** He's not saying the kindness of love, our God appeared, or just our Savior appeared, but ***...the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared...*** When Martin Luther writes about this section, he says this is a beautiful section of Scripture. What he is saying is that our Savior appeared, but what is He? He is the kindness and love of God. As we look at this Baptism of Our Lord and Epiphany, what it's really about is ***the love of God has been identified***. Why is that important?

The world likes to talk about love in general terms, as a feeling and emotion or "A God of love would do this," or "A real God of love wouldn't have hell or He wouldn't really condemn this sin or that sin" or have all these different ideas about what a God of love is like. But here Paul tells us what the kindness and love of God is. The kindness and love of God is Christ. And on His Baptism, He is identified. We see that He is walking just as kind of an unknown man at that time. He really didn't have a following. And here, John the Baptist, people have been pointing to him and asking if he is the Messiah and he is saying, "No, one is coming greater than me." And here Jesus goes to be baptized and the Holy Spirit shows and a voice from heaven says "This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased." The love of God is identified and that changes things. That changes things for you and for me. It changes everything. This moment in time and history that had been prophesied about forever and now that has happened and that changes things. How does it change things?

It says that as He *appeared*, <sup>5</sup> **he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** We are going to focus on that "saved" part in just a bit, but first notice what we are NOT saved by. It's not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. Notice that Paul has to write that we are not saved because of righteous things we've done. This is one of those things that people put their identity into. You can think about work. You can think about all sorts of things. But the truth is in life, instead of putting our identity in Christ/God, we often put our identity in many different things. You could say a *misplaced identity leads to insecurity*. When I have put my identity wholeheartedly, everything about myself is in this thing or person, what does it do? There is insecurity. If it's not on the foundation of something that lasts, then there is always a hint of insecurity. And I'm not saying those things, those identities are bad. Your work is not bad. But if I find my whole purpose and meaning in that, then there is a problem.

Before we get to the list of some of those things, I'll give an example of how that could happen even for a pastor. What is my identity? If you read the Resiliency Prayer, the first line talks about how my identity is a redeemed child of God. Pastors need to do that too because otherwise, if a pastor finds their identity in just being a pastor, then what happens if in church only 20 of you show up, or we have a Bible study downstairs and there are 5 of you? Or people start getting upset at something that happens. If my identity is all wrapped up in being a pastor, what happens to my emotions? What happens to how I feel and what I think about God and myself if I'm all wrapped up in that thing? If I put my identity in things that change, that can lead to anger and depression and sadness and fear—all these different things. So what are some of the things that we all struggle with when it comes to misplaced identity? I'm going to put up four there. The first one is listed in our text. They are *deeds, sexuality, things, and people*. Those are the four we are going to look at real quick.

We talked a little bit about deeds, about work, but notice it says here because of righteous things we've done. You can say "I don't put my salvation into being a good person," but do you put your reputation and do you define yourself in the good things that you do or that you are here and other people aren't, so that makes you a good person, or that you haven't stolen, you're not a thief, you're not this horrible person, you're not like that person. Even though you know that you're a Christian, you know that you love Jesus and He saves you, but "What really makes me good is that I'm not like them." We can put our identity in our deeds, our actions.

But an important thing is also to understand the flipside of that as well. Can you also put your identity in your deeds when you've done something wrong, when you feel like you can't be forgiven, that no one could love you, that "This person will never forgive me," that "God hates me because I did this thing"? In the same way of putting your identity in your good things, sometimes you can put your identity in the wrongs things that you've done and say "I'm unlovable. Not even God can forgive me. God hates me."

Is your identity the good things you do? No. Is your identity in the worst things, the sins that you've committed? It's not even that. You are not your deeds. It's important to understand that you're forgiven. You are loved. And it's about grace and mercy. We'll see that in just a second.

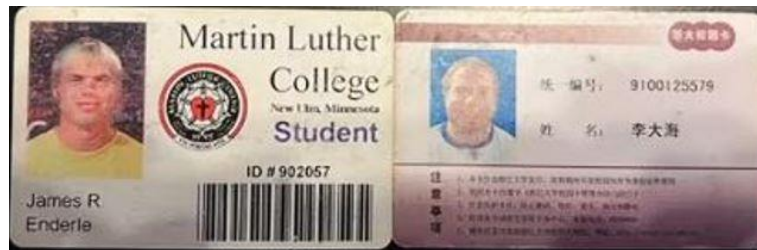
If you look at what the world finds their identity in today, what is it all about? It's about being part of a group or looking into my sexuality, your LGBTQ; I have to identify with this thing. Is your sexuality important? If you get married, if you have kids, all these things are part of you, but is it everything that defines you? Is your sexuality EVERYTHING about you? No, it's one part of you. Especially when you're young, who you like, who you don't like, those things change. As you get older, hopefully if you're married that doesn't change, it's still one small part of you but it's not your whole identity. Maybe you don't struggle with that but you can think of the same things by thinking "Do I identify with one, tiny, small part of my life?"

Go back then to the other struggles that we have of things and people. Do you struggle with putting your identity in things and people, the stuff you have and the things you've accumulated, the name that you have, the respect that people give to you? Those things you can really find your identity in and struggle with that. But then we think about this and all the things that we look at and the wrong thing to put our hope in.

In the Sunday night study and then in our faculty study we've been reading a book called 3 Words That Will Change Your Life by Pastor Mike Novotny. He talks about in Ecclesiastes that it says everything is meaningless, meaningless. Is that the best translation for that? The word there is "hevel" for "meaningless," but what it really means instead of meaningless is like a breath. If you were to go outside right now and take a deep breath outside, you would see your breath. You see it for a second and then "poof!" It's gone. Are these things that we put our identity in good things? Most of the time they are good things, but they are also very temporary. Sometimes even though they might feel like they last a long time, the truth is they still are earthly and temporary, like things. If you look at houses and material things—if you have any news on and see what is happening in California. I watched some people react and they said "One day we are swimming in our pool. The next day, as the fires come into California, it's all gone." If you find your whole meaning, your whole purpose in stuff, there is a problem.

But then the last one is maybe the most important that we struggle with. It's our identity in people, you're relationships with others. That's most often how we define ourselves, either with work—you introduce yourself and say "This is what I do," but then you say, "I'm a husband... a father... a child... grandparents." These relationships are very meaningful and awesome and amazing. We can cherish those and pour our hearts into them, but also understand that there is something greater and more than that. Are you

defined only by that relationship? That's really the question. Or think about it in this way. If someone makes your life, if it's all about the joy that person gives you, what would happen if that person was taken away? If that person defines your life, can they also break your life? What if God chooses to take home a child? What if God chooses to take home a grandchild? Is God still good? Do you still have an identity if that thing you put EVERYTHING into is taken away? Again, it's not saying don't love those people or cherish those relationships, it's understanding that there is a more eternal identity. The blessings with the family and the relationships are there is an aspect of those relationships that CAN be eternal, when we focus on this eternal identity.



These are two of my identities. You can see they are a little bit old. One is from Martin Luther College. I look a little bit different there. Someone asked, "Is that natural blonde hair?" Yes, it is. I didn't dye my hair. I worked outside and now I just don't get any sun. The other one there, you can see there is Chinese on there. That's one of my college ID's from being in China. Are these identities worth anything anymore? Not really. Those cards are pretty much worthless. But do they still have value? Did I gain something from that, of being a student? Yes, but it's not eternal. It's a temporary identity. They have value. They have good things. But that's not who I am anymore. I think that helps put it into perspective that so many of our identities are temporary. But there is one that is lasting.

We look at what Paul writes when he talks about how God saved us. **...<sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...** Notice over and over again it says He saved us. He saved us. Then it says **...<sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** Most of our identities are not lasting, but we do have **a lasting identity in salvation**, and that is Baptism. It is our identity in Christ, this thing that takes just a few seconds. The second service will have the short ceremony, these words spoken and then water poured on a child. That actual Sacrament just takes a few seconds. But the results are eternal. We have an eternal hope because He has made us His heirs, because He has washed us. He has given us His forgiveness.

We can look to all sorts of different identities, but understand, in Baptism, God makes us His child and that is an ETERNAL identity. What I've done, if I'm struggling with the

good, if I'm too proud, I can look and say every one of us, every person needs to be washed because we are born sinful. And if I'm struggling with the sins that I committed and say "I'm not worthy," I can say "God has redeemed me and washed me clean. They are erased. They are forgiven. God loves me." And we see how this is done, that He has given us this grace and mercy. He has justified us by His grace. We see it's by mercy. So this identity is *a daily grace filled identity*. Yes, it happened once, but don't forget your baptism.

Sometimes people say to celebrate your baptism more than your birthday because your baptism gives eternal blessings. But also understand what happens in your baptism. Your sinful flesh is drowned and your new self rises new every day. Do you need to be reminded that you are forgiven? That this is your true identity? It is! In Baptism you are given the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit makes you a new person. Some days you might not feel like that new person, but our feelings don't always mean the facts. The facts are God has redeemed you. God has given you this truth. You can focus on it at all sorts of times—any time in the morning when you are using water. Look at the blessings of every time in church when we begin "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." That is to remind you of your baptism.

When we look at what it means to be a Christian, I heard this idea that if my identity is not in Baptism, in a Gospel identity, you are always going to be grasping for something else. As Augustine says, our hearts will be longing until they are filled with God. You could say there is this cross-shaped heart in your soul and until you find your greatest identity in Christ, you are always going to be unhappy, always going to be looking for something else.

Finally, I heard this great picture. In the early church, Christians were described as fish. That was the symbol for Christians. You can see this on cars. People will put the Jesus fish on all kinds of places. If you're a Christian, you're a fish, and the water that you swim in daily is the waters of Baptism. Don't jump out of that water. Don't try to escape. Don't try to say you don't need that. Keep on swimming in that beautiful water that gives you your true identity. You are washed. You are redeemed. You are given grace and forgiveness every day. Find your identity in the identity that won't change—the forgiveness of sins in Baptism that connects you to your Savior, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.