

It has become the tradition in many stores across the country to have a Christmas in July sale. Now while many people go to these sales, very few likely take the gifts home and wrap them up in good old Christmas fashion complete with ribbons and the like. Few people drag back out the Christmas tree. But today as we sit in the middle of July I ask you today to picture with me a grand Christmas tree with two large gifts filling the ground beneath it. Yes, as you look under the tree you see two on the most amazing gifts you have ever seen. They are huge, and wrapped just perfectly. If you are anything like most people, you are already to jump in and open the gifts right away. And today that is just what we will do as we explore our text.

St. Paul is our text for today talks about all the many gifts God has given to us in our baptism. They are all huge and wrapped just perfectly. I must admit that the word Baptism does not appear anywhere in our text. But while the word baptism is never mentioned, if you know Paul's language, it is easy to know that he is speaking about Baptism in our text. When Paul speaks of being in Christ, of being a new man, and of being reconciled to God, this is baptism talk for Paul.

Most of us gathered here are baptized. For most of us, it is something that happened to us many years ago. For some, it is a more recent reality. But either way, it is always worthy of our time to review all the wonderful gifts that our God gives to us at the font. Perhaps as we think about Baptism today, we should start with what the catechism teaches us about Baptism. In the catechism, the question is asked. "What does Baptism give or profit?" The answer given is this, "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all those who believe this, as the word and promises of God do declare."

As we gaze under our imaginary Christmas in July tree today, we are ready to start opening those gifts. First we must pick one gift to be opened first. So we think to ourselves, “Why not the really big one, the one right in the middle?” Imagine grabbing the package and ripping it open. Inside, we see a bright white robe. What a odd, but precious gift. Truthfully for once in our lives, we can say that we got exactly what we needed under the tree. Because as we look down, we notice that our clothes are dirty, covered with filth. We need new clothes. What a great gift. Paul describes the gift for us this way, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. He made him that knew not sin to be sin for us.” Indeed this is the greatest gift that God could ever give to us. In these words, we realize that all of our dirty clothes covered with every kind of spot, where as seemingly harmless as a curse word slipping out or as grave as murder, can be exchanged at the font for new perfect clothes. God invites us to leave our sin-filled rags in the font, and gives us instead that perfect white robe of Christ righteousness. What a great gift!

As we look back under the tree, we see a very odd gift indeed that we had not noticed at first. It is a black box with no wrapping paper at all. While the other gift sitting to the right flashes in our eye, we just can help wondering what type of gift could be in such an ugly box. So we grab the gift, and rip off the top. In the box, we find a small coffin. What an awful gift! Some gave us the gift of death. Who would do such a thing? Paul tells us. He says, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” Yes in baptism, we get the gift of death. I have to imagine that none of you have ever placed death on your wish list at Christmas. But Paul tells us that at our baptisms, that is exactly what we got, death. But

this is not bad news my friends. For we received Jesus' death: that death that conquered the power of death and the devil. As Paul tells us in Romans 6, in our baptism we are buried with Jesus, we died with Jesus. But that is wonderful news. Because now we are able to consider ourselves dead to sin, to consider ourselves dead to the devil. Paul tells us that what dies at our Baptism is the old sinful self, that old sinful Adam that has mastery over us from the time we were conceived until the day we got to the font. There that man was crucified Paul says. The gift of death to us is good news indeed.

But finally, we look back under the tree towards that final gift. One gift left to open today. Hopefully this gift might be a little more initially pleasing to the eye than the last. As we open it, we see a fully bloomed Easter lily. How beautiful! You see death is not all we get at baptism. We also get life. As Paul says, "If any man is in Christ he is a new creation." Indeed the old things pass away as they die, but all things are made new for us. This beautiful white flower reminds us that we have a new life right now, and that the life we have right now will never end. Being dead to sin but alive in Christ, we are able to go out and do those things that God has for us to do while we remain on this earth. We get to go out and let our new robes shine bright by the things we do, and the things we say. That is great news. Indeed once we were slaves to sin, but now we are servants of righteousness. We were dead, but are now alive. The gift of life is so precious that we might well pick up the lily to behold it more closely. But and as we move the lily, we notice that it has been laying all along on a golden brick as well. This brick reminds us that not only do we get to live new lives for Christ right now, but we also have the golden streets of heaven to call home once our pilgrimage here is done. The gifts of

Baptism are eternal. They are powerful means to live a new life today, conquering means to live life tomorrow, and our surety of paradise to come.

Satan hates this kind of Christmas in July. Satan's goal is to get you to forget what Jesus gave to you at the font. He wants you to run right by the tree as if there was just garbage lying underneath. He wants you to forget that your sins are forgiven. He wants you to live with guilt. He wants you to forget that you are dead to sin. He wants you to believe that you are still just a sinner who has no power against temptation. And he wants you to forget your new life. He wants you to think that this world is as good as it gets.

At times, he convinces us of his lies. And when he does, we live in accord with those lies. We let our past keep us up at night. We sin because we think we have no other choice. We treat this world as if it is the place where our treasures must lie. But every time we fall for Satan's lies, the font remains open to exchange those dirty clothes for new clothes again. We return to the gifts of baptism each day, and in them find our peace.

What does Baptism give or profit? What gifts are under our tree? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all those who believe this, as the word and promises of God do declare. Amen.