

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Creation, Re-creation and New Creation”

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The Baptism of Our Lord—January 10, 2021

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:1-3).

In our first text from Genesis 1, we have the creation of the world. In our second text, through the flood we have a re-creation of the world. And in the Baptism of Jesus, we have a foreshadowing of the new creation. These texts are all tied together.

First, there is water in all three texts. In the creation account, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. In the Flood account, there is water everywhere. It kills but also saves. It drowns out the unchecked wickedness of mankind, but lifts the ark above all that death, and within the ark there is everything needed for the recreation of the earth. In the Gospel, Jesus steps into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized. Water connects the three.

Water is a symbol of life. Before we were born, we grew in the water of our mothers’ bodies. Gushing water is a sign that a baby is about to be born. After we are born, we depend on water for life. No one can live beyond a few days without water.

But water is also a symbol of death. People drown in floods, or when the boat overturns. People die when too much water builds up around the heart, or in the lungs, or around the brain. Water is a symbol of death and life. So, when Jesus goes down into the waters to be baptized, it foreshadows what He was going to do at the end of his public ministry, when he freely went down into death for us, and then rose out of it, back to life.

Second, note the Spirit of God is present in all three texts. In the creation account, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, sort of like a bird or butterfly would flutter over the waters. In the flood account, a dove is present there too. Remember how Noah sent out a dove to see if it could find any dry land? Genesis 8:9, but “the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to the ark . . . So he reached out his hand and brought her back into the ark with him” (Gen. 8:9). He waited seven days (note the number seven) and again sent forth the dove, which this time came back to Noah with a freshly picked olive leaf (Gen. 8:11), a hopeful sign that there was dry land nearby. Noah waited another seven days and again sent forth the dove and she did not return to him. She had found a place to nest. The waters were abating; the ark would soon come to rest on dry land, and all those living things within would be able to disembark and start multiplying on the earth. Ever since, the dove has been a sign of peace with God and a symbol of new life.

So, at the baptism of Jesus it is hardly accidental that the Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, not as an eagle or a falcon or a hawk, but a dove. It links the Baptism of Jesus to the creation and flood accounts. It also foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, because doves were the only *birds* that could be offered as acceptable sacrifices in temple. Similarly, only Jesus, God’s Son, could be an acceptable sacrifice to the Father.

Third, note the presence of God's Word in all three texts. God speaks, and life is the result. For example, in the creation account, God simply says, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures. . . And it was so." When God speaks, life is the result.

In the flood account, God tells Noah to build an ark for his family and two of every kind of animal. God's Word saved Noah, his family, and all creation from total destruction.

In the Baptism of our Lord, the incarnate Word goes down into the water and comes back up again, foreshadowing His death and resurrection. John's is a baptism of repentance. But Jesus has no sin to repent of. He's doing this for us and for our sin. He's identifying Himself with our sin which will take him eventually to the cross so that we can have life. That's why Father says, "You are my beloved Son." God's spoken and incarnate Word brings about life.

Now let's talk about the numbers a bit. God created all the world in six days, taking the seventh day as a day of rest. Seven, therefore, has become the number associated with creation, and of fullness and completion.

In the flood account, when the ark was finished, God gave Noah seven days to gather pairs of all creatures. (My guess is God did the gathering; all Noah had to do was welcome them into the ark.) And Noah waited seven days between multiple attempts to release a dove to find dry land. "Seven" links the recreation of the flood to the creation account.

But a new number also shows up, the number 8, and it is the number of new creation. Eight people were saved by the Flood. Circumcision, which marks a child as being a child of God, that always happened on the eighth day. The resurrection of Jesus happened on the eighth day. Jesus died on Friday, the sixth day. Saturday was the day of Sabbath rest, so Jesus also rested in the grave on the seventh day. Jesus rose again on Sunday, the eighth day.

So eight is the number for new creation. Ever since, Christians have moved their worship services mostly to Sundays, as a weekly celebration of resurrection and new creation. Because eight is the number of new creation many baptismal fonts have eight sides. This symbolizes how God has made us a new creation through baptism. Our Epistle lesson says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:3ff). That is, Holy Baptism gives us new life in Jesus. It washes us clean of sin and turns a child of the world into a child of God. It gives us the victory of Jesus' death and resurrection. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

To summarize water ties together the creation, the flood, and the Baptism of our Lord. Second, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters at creation. A dove plays a prominent role in the flood account. And in the Baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descends on Him in the form of a dove. Third, the Word of God creates life in Genesis 1, preserves and recreates life during the flood, and at the Baptism of the Lord Jesus, because of the new life he came to bring us, the Father says "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Finally, seven is the number of creation and re-creation, but eight becomes the number of new creation because eight souls were saved on the ark, and because Jesus rose from the dead on the 8th day.

So today, we thank and praise God for creation, re-creation, and new creation! Amen.