

You probably don't know this...

But I have a water collection.

This one's from the Vatican... supposedly blessed by Pope Francis

This one's *dehydrated* water... *just add Water!*

This one from the Holy Land...

The label says... *Water from the Jordan River*

I could add a drop or two to the baptismal font...

For authenticity...

But I know there's nothing mystical about Jordan River water.

Water is water. And *any* water...

Whether it's from a remote spring in Fuji

A collection of drippings from an ancient glacier...

Or right out of the tap in Titusville...

It's all water... and it's all just fine for baptism...

We take water for granted... it's just ordinary stuff...

But in actuality... water is spectacularly amazing

Created by God at the beginning of the world

It's *essential* to *all* life

When we launch rockets from the cape

And they travel to distant planets

They look for *water*

Because *with* water

Life is possible

With water, life is created

With water, life is renewed

With water we are refreshed

When the people of Israel fled from slavery
They approached the Red Sea
And the water parted
Pushed to the side by God
They moved across the sea bed on dry land
And they were transformed
When they stepped onto the land on the other side
They were no longer slaves... They were *free!*

And like those ancient people
With water we are also made free
Through baptism, our sins are washed away
Even though... we *don't* deserve it...

A few years ago a pastor received a \$20 bill with instructions
Use the money as you see fit.

He had that \$10 bill in his wallet when he stopped at the grocery.
In the checkout lane next to him
was an older couple speaking in a thick foreign accent.
They didn't have enough money to pay for everything,
which all appeared to be essential... nothing frivolous or extravagant.
They were arguing over what to put back...
when he secretly slipped the cashier the 20 dollar bill.

It covered their deficit
and allowed them to keep a few dollars in their pocket.

As they walked toward the door
They were gratefully confused

When *we're* baptized and *our* sins are forgiven
 We're also *gratefully confused*

We know we can scrub away filth and grime with water
 We do it every day
 but *water?* to wash away *sin?*
 Sin lives *inside* us, not on the *surface* of our skin
 How can water *do* that?

I'll tell you how...
It's *not* just the water!
 Water *alone... can't* do it.

Martin Luther attributed the effectiveness of baptism
 To the *Word of God... in* and *with* the **water**

We are baptized *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*

It is not just the water
 But the *power* of God in the water
 That transforms us

So that brings up another question...

If Jesus was truly perfect...
And we believe he was... and is... perfect in every way...
 If Jesus was truly perfect...
 And had no sins to wash away...
Why did he need to be baptized?

Jesus didn't wade in the water of the River Jordan
To wash away his sins...

Jesus went into the water...
To offer *himself*
As the *answer*
To John the Baptists call to *repentance*

Jesus showed the world
that God became human
and in this *baptism*
restored water to its *proper* role:

This essential water for all life
Became the essential water of *baptism* into *everlasting* life
And in that moment...
the heavens opened and the voice from God was heard
This is my Son
The beloved
With whom I am well pleased

Henri Nouwen said...

When the heavens opened and God Spoke...
You are the beloved...
and on you my favor rests.
Jesus listened... and heard.
He heard His Father's voice.

I want *you* to hear that voice, too.

It is a very important voice that says,

You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter.

I love you with an everlasting love.

I have molded you together in the depths of the earth.

I have knitted you in your mother's womb.

*I've written your name in the palm of my hand
and I hold you safe in the shade of my embrace.*

I hold you.

You belong to Me and I belong to you.

You are safe where I am.

Don't be afraid.

Trust that you are the beloved.

That is who you truly are.

I want all of *you* to hear that voice.

It's not very loud... it's intimate.

From a very deep place... soft... gentle...

Listen for it... work at it... and gradually... you *will* hear it.

Claim it for yourself... that still small quiet voice of God...

that tells us who we *really* are.

Hear it... and claim it...

That voice... that calls *you*... *the beloved*

That *is*... who we are

That *is*... why God became human

That *is*... why Jesus was baptized in the Jordan

That *is*... why he took on the sins of the world

That *is*... why we are granted everlasting life

That *is*... the kingdom of heaven

That *is*... *wonderful*.

Wonderful...

unless you think that your relationship with God

ends with baptism

A few years ago... In another church
 A 9th grade boy wanted to be confirmed
 He faithfully attended all the classes
 He engaged in the discussions
 and he learned about baptism... and confirmation

His parents attended church with him every Sunday
 And they seemed to be growing in their faith as well

He was baptized and confirmed on one Sunday morning
 And they *appeared* to be *filled* with the *Spirit* of God

But he didn't come to church the next week... or the week after...
 or the week after that...

When the Priest saw them in the grocery... He asked why they left...
 the mother said, *Oh well, I guess we thought he was all done.*

Baptism is *not* the end
 Baptism is the *beginning* of our lives in Christ
 It's the *entrance...* into *membership...*
 in Christ's one holy catholic and apostolic church
 Where our relationship with God is *proclaimed!*

Adopted into God's Holy Family
 With all the authority... and responsibility
 And *privileges.*

So rejoice...
Membership... has its privileges!
Amen.