

## **Introduction**

1. Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. **Epiphany means the “manifestation of Jesus Christ.” In another word, Jesus reveals Himself in public after His miraculous birth.** In church tradition, January 6 is the date we observe Epiphany. Usually the message of Epiphany is the visitation of the wise men, and the first Sunday after Epiphany always talks about the Holy Baptism of Jesus Christ.
2. Many early Christian churches celebrated the birthday of Jesus Christ on Epiphany Day because His actual birthday is still unknown. However, **most of the churches started celebrating Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup> after 3<sup>rd</sup> century.** If you still remember, Christian churches were persecuted severely after 70 AD, the Roman government and Jewish societies didn't welcome Christians and considered them as trouble makers.
3. Why trouble makers? To Jews, Christians believed that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah; but the Jews didn't hold this belief even until today. To Roman government, Christians worshipped only ONE God, and no idols; they refused to bow down to Cesar or celebrate any holiday of other religions. That's why they were considered as trouble makers.
4. So, why chose December 25<sup>th</sup> to be Christmas? Well, to many other gentile traditions, including Romans, they celebrated the birthday of sun-god, *Helius or Apolos*, on this day. They believed that sun was also a god who controlled the light, and possibly the power of fire and weather.
5. Therefore, because the early Christians were persecuted badly, and they were eagerly trying to find a date to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, they simply chose December 25<sup>th</sup> to hold the festival to avoid conflicts.
6. Personally, I don't have problem on this. Today, no body remembers the birthday of the sun-god or his name; we all remember that Christmas is December 25<sup>th</sup>. Don't you think it's another victory of Christianity?

## **I. Baptism Is a Covenant**

1. Ok, let's back to the text. This morning we've read a few passages talking about baptism. So I would like to take this opportunity to talk more about the teachings of holy baptism, and I am going to mainly focus on Romans chapter 6.
2. **In the Bible, Jesus did 2 things that can be applied to our Christian identity.** First of all, it's **Holy Baptism.** Even Jesus chose to be baptized (John's baptism is for repentance) although He was sinless. He didn't need to repent, He didn't need to be baptized, but He did it anyway in order to fulfill all the requirements of the Law. He did it to confirm the work of John the Baptist, and He did it for you and for me, to show how important Holy Baptism is for all human kinds.

3. Secondly, **Jesus established the Holy Communion.** In this practice, we are reminded again and again that our sins are forgiven, and our relationships with God and with one another are restored through the presence of Jesus' body and blood.
4. **I think the symbolic action of washing feet is also important.** Jesus did it on the same night before He was betrayed, and before the Last Supper. He washed the feet of His disciples, so that we should learn from Him to serve one another humbly, as a real servant, just like Jesus.
5. Holy Baptism is like a wedding ring. A wedding ring is to remind ourselves that we are no longer single, we have the commitment to our spouses and our families, and this commitment is life long. **Holy Baptism is similar, and it's only a lot stronger.** It is a commitment that God to be our Father, our Savior, our provider, our Lord and true Friend forever. It is also a confirmation to our faith that the blood of Jesus washes our sins away; we are reborn with a new spiritual life, we are committed to live a sacred life to love God and love one another.
6. **Therefore, Holy Baptism is more likely a covenant. God makes this covenant to bless us, and we can live an abundant life to glorify His name, to love and serve one another.**

## **II. Baptism is to Die to the World**

1. We've talked about the first teaching in this passage: **Baptism is a covenant.** Now, we are going to talk about the second teaching: **Baptism is to die with Jesus.**
2. The Bible says, **"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ... We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6: 3, 6)"**
3. Through baptism, we identify ourselves to the death of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the bondage of sin is broken; we are free!
  - A man came to me and ask these questions: "Can we just believe in Jesus without baptism? Why do we have to go through baptism? Does baptism bring salvation?"
  - I answered, "To your last question, **YES, baptism saves you, according to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter chapter 3.** Of course it's not the work of water, **it's the grace of God through faith; water is the visible means of grace to help us believe, experience and receive this blessing.**" I continue, "Can we believe in Jesus without baptism? YES, but why do we reject baptism? Even Jesus was baptized although He didn't have to. He did it to show how important baptism is. And, to be baptized in the name of Jesus means after the ceremony you belong to Him forever; it's a covenant! To the world you are dead, but to Christ you live."

- The conversations went on, and then I said to him, “To human beings, baptism is also a way to visibly show that you really want to become a Christian, and you want to be part of Jesus’ body, a member of the church. It’s also a declaration of your faith to the public and to the spiritual world that you no longer live for anyone else but for Christ alone.”
4. **Baptism is to die with Jesus. We die to sin, we die to the world, we die to our old Adam, we die to our old lives.**

### **III. Baptism is to Live a New Life**

1. Verse 8, “**Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him...The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**”
2. Baptism is not just to die to sin or to the world, it is also to live to Christ, to live a new life every single moment for the Lord.
3. I love another verse from Romans chapter 8, the Bible says, “**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
4. Brothers and sisters. **God wants us to live for Him.** This is the command of God, and through baptism and the power of Jesus’ blood, He has made us capable of fulfilling this command.
5. **To live for the Lord, it also means to be a living sacrifice.** God doesn’t want us to be a dead sacrifice; He doesn’t want us to die for Him unless it’s an extreme condition. He wants us to live for Him, to be a living sacrifice. **Sacrifice means we need to input our efforts, we need to pay prices, and sometimes we need to suffer and do something against our natures.**
6. Personally, I think to die for God is easier, because it happens just at that special moment; but to live for God is much harder, because it is a life long practice.

### **Conclusion**

1. **To live for the Lord isn’t easy, but God has given us a new life through Holy Baptism to fulfill this mission.** With the help of God, yes, we can live for the Lord! And I know God is helping us now to live a meaningful and victorious life.
2. And the peace of God which surpasses all understandings, will keep and guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.