

February 16

A Mysterious Gift

When I was a kid, I loved to read mysteries; a series called *Encyclopedia Brown* was a favorite of mine. It was about a very smart kid who ran a detective agency out of his parents' garage, and all the neighborhood kids came to him when there was a mystery to solve. I checked one of those books out of my school library every week, I think. One of the things I really liked about the series was that the solution to every mystery (there were three or four stories per book), could be found in the back of the book. I would often check my hypothesis before getting to the end of the story by peeking at the last few pages – sometimes I'd be delighted that I was on track, sometimes dismayed that I was way off base.

It's difficult to be patient and let mysteries unfold on their own. We've all been given a curiosity – a desire to know – what things are, how things happen, what things mean. God has given us a great deal of information to work with through His prophets and apostles, but there is still a great deal of mystery, as well. Unlike *Encyclopedia Brown*, if we turn to the back of the Bible looking for answers, we, instead, get a lot more mystery in the book of Revelation!

As Christians, we live in a mystery every day: our Baptism. How can a little water forgive my sins? How does it rescue me from death and the devil and give me eternal salvation? And how can something that happened (for many of us) when I was a baby, still be doing those things today? Luther succinctly points out in his Small Catechism that it's not just water, but water and the Word of God received in faith that does this. But... how?

When St. Paul tells us that Baptism washes us into Christ, buries us with Christ, and that we will be resurrected like Christ (Romans 6:3-5), but that we also are raised with Him already (Colossians 2:11-12), it's hard wrap our heads around it. How does water + Word + faith = salvation? It's a mystery.

The closest we can get to solving this mystery is simply to trust that it is true. Sometimes that's hard. I don't feel sanctified (1Cor. 6:11) most of the time, to be honest. Fortunately, the effects of Baptism aren't contingent on our feeling them, but on our faith that Baptism does what is promised. Faith itself is a mystery. The Lord has blessed us with many gifts that we may never fully understand on this side of His return. Yes, we can study the countless writings of the greatest theologians to ever walk the earth and reach a respectable grasp on things like Baptism – but there will always be a degree of mystery making us ask, "Okay... but, how? And why water?"

The Lord is merciful. He has given us good gifts that we don't have to understand to benefit from them. Think of it like this: Do we need to understand how an engine works to drive a car? No. (And thank goodness). So, it is with Baptism. It does what the Lord promises it does – it saves us (1Peter3:21). Embrace and live in this mystery. It is ours every day.

Prayer: *Almighty God, we thank you for the grace you mysteriously work in our lives through Baptism. Strengthen our faith that we may always trust in your mercy, even when it is beyond our comprehension. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Feb 16 TH – Philipp Melanchthon (birth) Confessor