



## BIBLE STUDY

COME TO THE WATERS SESSION 1

# Water, Water Everywhere

by Karen G. Bockelman

### Theme Verse

Hymn “Crashing Waters at Creation,”  
*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 455

Crashing waters at creation,  
ordered by the Spirit’s breath,  
first to witness day’s beginning  
from the brightness of night’s death.

Parting water stood and trembled  
as the captives passed on through,  
washing off the chains of bondage—  
channel to a life made new.

Cleansing water once at Jordan  
closed around the one foretold,  
opened to reveal the glory  
ever new and ever old.

Living water, never ending,  
quench the thirst and flood the soul,  
Well-spring, source of life eternal,  
drench our dryness, make us whole.

*Text: Sylvia G. Dunstan, 1955–1993*

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### Opening Prayer

The leader addresses the group.

*Joined to Christ in baptism, let us come to the waters and give thanks  
for this gift.*

Water may be poured into a bowl as the leader or the group gives  
thanks.

*We give you thanks, O God,  
for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters  
and by your Word you created the world,  
calling forth life in which you took delight.  
Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.  
Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.  
At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with  
the Holy Spirit.*

*By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons,  
making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.*

*We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life,  
and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.*

*Shower us with your Spirit,*

*and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace and love.*

*To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.*

*Amen.*

*Thanksgiving for Baptism*

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 97*

## Generous Water

Throughout my years as a parish pastor, I delighted in baptisms. I began my ministry using *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* and came to cherish its baptismal service, especially the prayer of thanksgiving over the water. This prayer was new to many Lutherans then, but it reflected a practice of both the early church and Martin Luther. In fact, the *LBW* prayer was an adaptation of the “Flood Prayer” Luther included in his 1523 Order of Baptism. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* continues the use of a prayer of thanksgiving at the font.

In this prayer, God’s saving deeds are remembered, especially those saving acts that are connected with water, emphasizing the baptismal connection of water and word. Not surprisingly, the increase in water language led to an increased use of water—even the practice of baptizing by immersion! It became my own practice, during this prayer, to pour the water from a pitcher into the font or bowl. Holding the pitcher high and pouring slowly, I wanted everyone to see and hear (and for those nearby, even feel) the water. The baptism pages of my *LBW* became permanently wrinkled and water-spotted.

I still remember clearly the definition of a sacrament that I learned in confirmation class: A sacrament is a holy act instituted by Christ in which by visible means God gives and seals invisible grace. Water is the visible means of baptism. The reality of water, seen and heard and felt, leaves no doubt that God’s promise of forgiveness of sin, deliverance from death, and everlasting salvation is real and meant for you and me. These gifts, along with new birth, adoption as God’s children, and membership in the body of Christ—these gifts are what our gracious and generous God gives us. What better way to illustrate God’s generosity than through the generous use of water?

## Sharing

*The hymn and prayer suggested for the opening of this session draw on biblical images and stories of water, deepening our understanding of both Scripture and baptism.*

*Look again at these texts and circle every instance of the word “water.” How many are there? What other watery words do you find?*

## Water Everywhere

Water is all around us and within us. Roughly 70 percent of an adult’s body is water. Somewhere between 70 and 75 percent of the earth’s surface is covered with water. For most of us, water is available with the turn of a tap or the push of a button. We have water in taps, tubs, pools, shower stalls, sprinklers, irrigation systems, car washes, washing machines, rivers, streams, lakes, oceans, and birdbaths. We have water to drink, wash in, play in, nurture animals and plants with, transport cargo on, and admire for its beauty. In the United States, the average person uses 80 to 100 gallons of water per day.

Water is all around and within the Bible, too. From the watery chaos before the Creation, through the Flood and the Exodus, to Jesus’ own baptism at the Jordan, these particular biblical water stories have long been understood to be “types,” or foreshadowings, of baptism. Let’s take a closer look at each of them.

## The Creation

**READ GENESIS 1:1–10, 2:5–9.**

Water plays a significant role in the creation narratives. Ancient peoples believed the world originated from and was founded upon a watery abyss, the “deep.” Just as human beings begin in the waters of the womb, the earth itself is born out of the deep. Job 38 describes the Creation in terms of the sea bursting out from the womb.

Genesis 1 begins with a portrayal of this uncreated watery chaos—the earth as a formless void, covered by darkness, swept by the Spirit of God. All life comes from water. On the second day, God separates the waters from the waters. The sky, like a great dome, walls off the waters of chaos above. On the third day, the waters below are gathered together into seas and dry land appears.

The creation narrative of Genesis 2 also begins with water—a stream rising from the earth and watering the ground, even before the creation of the Garden of Eden.

At the end of the Bible, creation comes full circle with a new heaven and a new earth. The sea is no more (Revelation 21:1) and the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flows from the throne of God (22:1).

*How do you think the waters of the Creation are linked to the waters of baptism? What themes do you find in common?*

## The Flood

**READ GENESIS 6:11–22, 7:11–18, 8:6–18.**

The Flood is a story of creation and cleansing. The earth has become corrupt because of the wickedness of humankind. In judgment, God causes all the fountains of the deep to burst forth and the windows of the heavens to open. It is a near return to chaos. Water once again covers everything, washing away corruption and evil.

But Noah, a righteous man, had found favor in God's sight. God commanded him to build an ark so that he, his family, and representative animals could ride out the flood. Early Christians explicitly spoke of Noah and his family being saved through water (1 Peter 3:20-21) and of this act prefiguring baptism.

*What relationship do you see between the waters of the Flood and the waters of baptism? What themes do you find in common here?*

## The Exodus

**READ EXODUS 14:10-31.**

The story of Israel's deliverance from slavery into freedom is told as an escape across the Red Sea. Biblical scholars have long debated the geography of the crossing and what kind of natural phenomenon may have made it possible. We may be more likely to see this event in the movie images of *The Ten Commandments* or *The Prince of Egypt*.

What is clear is that once again salvation and new life come from passing through water. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of this event as a baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

### Sharing

*What relationship do you see between the Israel's crossing the sea and baptism? What themes do you find in common?*

## Jesus' Baptism

**READ MATTHEW 3:13–17.**

Like John the Baptist, there are those who wonder that Jesus came to be baptized. He certainly didn't need baptism for the forgiveness of his sins. But by coming to John, Jesus identifies with all those who responded to the Baptist's call for repentance. In baptism, Jesus begins his ministry by passing through the water.

In baptism, we stand with Jesus in the Jordan River. We, too, feel the water and hear the word, God's voice naming us beloved children. For Paul and for Martin Luther, when we are baptized, we are united with Christ. We share in Christ's death and in his resurrection (Romans 6:3-4).

### Sharing

*What connections between Jesus' baptism and your own baptism are meaningful for you?*

## Lots of Water

You may be feeling a bit over your head in all this water, but we've barely gotten a sprinkling. Once you start looking for it, the Bible is soaking wet! There are still and stormy waters, fountains of living water and wells of salvation, thirst for living water and streams in the desert, human groanings are poured out like water, but love cannot be quenched by many waters, the wise are like trees planted by streams of water, justice and righteousness roll down like the waters of an everlasting stream.

In addition to these poetic watery metaphors, there are many well-known, even beloved, stories that happen around water. Hagar is saved from death by the appearance of a well, Moses is drawn up out of the water. God delivers water from a rock in the wilderness. Naaman's leprosy is healed by washing in the water of the Jordan River. Jonah is saved from drowning in the water of the sea. Jesus changes water into wine and washes his disciples' feet with water.

### Sharing

*What other Bible passages or stories do you recall or can you find that feature water?*

## Water Notes

Over the years my daughter has become something of a collector of quotations—inspirational, funny, thought-provoking, challenging. She has posted them on her bulletin board and covered the walls of her room. I'm always on the lookout for new quotations to send her, just to let her know I'm thinking of her. People who

keep scrapbooks or journals often look for an apt quotation or image to capture an idea.


As you have explored these biblical images of water, you may have discovered or rediscovered verses or phrases of support, encouragement, strength, and joy. If a verse or thought is meaningful to you, it may be worth saving or sharing with others.

### Consider

- Compiling a personal collection of biblical water verses, with supporting images, photos, poetry, prayers, or meditations
- Putting together a group devotional for your congregation or women's organization, perhaps for next Lent
- Developing notecards that can be used to mark baptisms and baptismal anniversaries

### Closing

Turn your attention once again to the bowl of water in your midst. Offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's gift of water and for the water stories and experiences shared in this time together. Ask for God's healing presence with any who have need. Ask for God's blessing on any future activities and for the daily lives of those who have participated.

If you wish, sing or read aloud the opening hymn again. 

**The Rev. Karen Bockelman** is assistant to the bishop in the North-eastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. She is presenting an adaptation of this Bible study to the delegates and participants of the 7th Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 8-10 and 10-13.

## SESSION 1

# Water, Water Everywhere

*by Karen G. Bockelman*

First, a word of thanks for your willingness to provide leadership for this session of the summer *LWT* Bible study, “Come to the Waters.” Second, a word of encouragement. Being a Bible study leader doesn’t mean you have to have all the answers. Learning and teaching are the responsibility of the entire group as participants share their own questions, insight, and wisdom.

You can help the group in its study by caring for the details of preparation—setting up a comfortable space and gathering any needed materials. You can also help by welcoming old and new members, encouraging all to participate, and keeping the discussion on track. You may choose to speak as the leader during the opening and closing of each session, but you are also free to invite others to assume leadership at those times.

## Preparation for this session

Whether you’ll be gathering in a room in your church building or someone’s living room or back yard, you’ll want to create a warm, inviting space with enough comfortable chairs for everyone who wants to join in. Create a water focal point, preferably in the center of your circle. For this first session, you’ll need a large bowl and a pitcher of water. You can certainly use whatever is available, but a sparkling clean glass bowl and pitcher would be ideal—that way the water will be visible. The bowl can be set on a low table, covered (if you wish) with a beautiful cloth.

You will need copies of Session 1 (you can download

extras from [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org)) and Bibles for everyone. Although the study uses the New Revised Standard Version, having a variety of translations on hand can add interest to the discussion. You may also wish to have available one or more Bible concordances. A concordance is an index, with words arranged in alphabetical order, showing the location of each word in the book and often supplying several words of the context in which the word is found. Some study Bibles contain very abbreviated concordances. Your pastor, Christian education director, or church library may be able to provide this resource. You might also ask your pastor or music director about borrowing hymnals for the group, especially if your congregation uses *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Participants may wish to bring their own Bible and paper for keeping notes.

The hymn that is suggested for the beginning of this session will be unfamiliar to many. It is a new hymn in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and appears in this issue of *LWT*. If you have access to a piano (and someone to play!) you can learn this powerful water hymn. You may choose simply to read the words alone or together.

## Overview

This first session focuses on the abundance of water and water imagery in the Bible. From the watery chaos before the Creation, through the Flood and the Exodus, beside the psalmist’s still waters where springs gush forth in the desert and justice and righteousness



flow down, at the Jordan River, with the woman at the well and the Ethiopian eunuch, in the river of the waters of life flowing from the throne of God—from the beginning to the end of the Bible, water, in all its multi-layered meanings, is a constant presence. These are the waters to which we are invited.

### **Generous Water**

In a time of reflection or sharing, participants are asked to make note of the water and water-related words in the opening hymn and prayer. If you have copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* on hand, you will find additional “Thanksgivings at the Font” on pages 70-71. You may want to spend time exploring the riches of the water words in these prayers. Still another suggestion would be to look at water words to be found in the baptism section of whatever hymnals or songbooks you have available.

### **Water Everywhere**

This section of the study takes a closer look at the chief water narratives lifted up in the service of baptism, especially in the prayer over the water. These are creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and Jesus’ own baptism. Read the Scripture passages aloud. Each calls for a reflection/sharing response. You may find members of your group respond more easily to one narrative over another. That’s OK. The purpose is to begin to think more deeply about the connection between water and the Word, between these narratives and baptism.

### **Lots of Water**

This can be a time to have fun—like the lightning round of a game show. How many biblical stories, images, phrases can your group come up with that have water connections? You may want to divide into pairs or groups of three. However, it’s important to be sensitive to those who have less familiarity with the Bible. You may want to have people use a concordance to look up passages with water or similar words. You may want to have your group concentrate on water imagery in the psalms. You may simply want to concentrate on the stories or passages already listed in the session.

### **Water Notes**

This is an opportunity to at least plan for an activity that takes your learning beyond this time together. You are in a better position to know of your group’s interest in these kinds of activities.

### **Closing**

This closing time is designed to be quite simple—centering once again on water and offering prayers. You may choose to lead the prayer, invite others to lead it, or invite the entire group to read it. You also have the option to sing or say the opening hymn together once again. Encourage the members of the group to sing or read with feeling, enjoying the refreshingly wet words even more after spending some time splashing in the scriptural waters!



## It's a Matter of Death and Life

by Karen G. Bockelman

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Hymn

“This Is the Spirit’s Entry Now,”  
*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 448;  
*Lutheran Book of Worship* 195

This is the Spirit’s entry now:  
the water and the word,  
the cross of Jesus on your brow,  
the seal both felt and heard.

This miracle of life reborn  
comes from the Lord of breath;  
the sinless one from life was torn;  
our life comes through his death.

Let water be the sacred sign  
that we must die each day  
to rise again by his design  
as foll’wers of his way.

Renewing Spirit, hear our praise  
for your baptismal pow’r  
that washes us through all our days.  
Come, cleanse again this hour.

Text by and © Thomas E. Herbranson: Used by permission.

#### Opening Prayer

You are invited to begin this session by dipping your fingers in the bowl of water and making the sign of the cross as you say **“In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”**


#### The Sign of the Cross

Making the sign of the cross was not a custom in the Lutheran churches in which I grew up; I’m ashamed to admit we tended to think of it as superstitious. Frankly, seeing basketball players cross themselves at the free throw line didn’t help.

Then, when I was in third grade, I attended a Lutheran school where the sign of the cross was used in chapel. I became fascinated by the gesture. I think there was something about using my body (or at least my hands) in such a ritual way that struck a deep responsive chord in me. However, I couldn’t quite figure out the movements and my attempts left me feeling more than a little awkward and embarrassed.

As a pastor, I learned to make the sign of the cross publicly—at the beginning and the end of the worship service. I learned to mark a cross in oil on the newly baptized and in ashes on Lenten worshipers. I began to notice Lutherans reclaiming the practice as a personal action, but it still didn’t come naturally to me.

Some years later, my daughter attended a Catholic preschool where she was taught the sign of the cross.



She began to insist on crossing herself as part of our table prayer. After all, her teacher said you were supposed to! Sometimes children are our leaders, and so making the sign of the cross became part of our family practice, and, increasingly, my personal practice.

It should come as no surprise that Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and Roman Catholic priest, was accustomed to making the sign of the cross. It may come as a surprise to some that Martin Luther the reformer not only continued that practice, but in his *Small Catechism* encouraged its use at the beginning and ending of each day. For Luther, the sign of the cross was not only a reminder of baptism, but a powerful act of daily remembrance that we have been marked with the cross of Christ forever.

### **Sharing**

- > *What is your experience with making the sign of the cross? What are your feelings about the practice? Have they changed over time? What references to the sign or mark of the cross did you note in the opening hymn?*
- > *If you have a hymnal handy, glance through the rite of Holy Baptism in the front of the book (page 121 in Lutheran Book of Worship and page 225 in Evangelical Lutheran Worship). Where do you see the sign of the cross called for? (Look in the parts printed in red.)*

### **A Matter of Death and Life**

Last month we swam through the Bible, focusing on the richness of water imagery and stories, especially those that show us water as life-giving. But, in Scripture, as in our present world, water is not only a blessing. It is a source of life, but it can also mean death. In

the Creation, the waters of chaos are reined in and held back; they are not eliminated. What is life for one may be death for another. Noah and his family are saved, but the waters of the flood blotted out everything else. Israel walked through the sea on dry land, but the waters came back upon the Egyptians and Pharaoh's army was drowned.

Human beings cannot survive long without water, but drinking too much water too quickly can lead to water intoxication. Farmers need water for their crops and livestock—but are in trouble when there's too much or too little or it comes too soon or too late. Water can make the dry land blossom but the waters of a hurricane or tsunami can make a wasteland.

Death and life is also the message of the cross. According to the ancient Jewish law, anyone “hung on a tree” was cursed. The Romans perfected the cross as an instrument of execution, designed for protracted suffering and public humiliation. They considered crucifixion the ultimate penalty, the most wretched of deaths, and reserved it for the lowest classes (such as rebellious slaves) and the most heinous crimes (like treason). The cruel horror of crucifixion was meant to be a deterrent, and crucifixions were carried out along major roads and in other public places so that no one could miss the message. No wonder Paul wrote of how foolish and scandalous a crucified Messiah would seem to both Jews and Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 1:22–23).

The ancients would have found it nearly impossible to imagine that a cross could ever be called wondrous, represented in fine art or beautiful jewelry, seen as a sign of faithful identity, a badge of honor rather than a symbol of shame. Jesus himself hints at this mixed message when, in John's Gospel, he speaks of “being lifted up from the earth” as an indication both



of the kind of death he would die and of the salvation his death would bring to the world (see John 3:14–15 and 12:32–33).

Baptism is a matter of death and life as well. As Jesus and his disciples journeyed to Jerusalem, Jesus spoke of the suffering that awaited him. James and John asked for places of honor and Jesus responded, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:32–40) As Jesus spoke of judgment and the end of the age, he said, “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (Luke 12:50) It is clear that in these verses Jesus is not speaking of his baptism by John at the Jordan River, but of his death. Jesus tells us directly that if we mean to follow him, we are to take up our own cross (see Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

What does that have to do with us, baptized with water? Read Romans 6:3–8 aloud. Paul writes of baptism as dying and rising with Christ. When we are baptized we are united with Christ, sharing in both his death and his resurrection.

Martin Luther referred to Paul’s words in *The Large Catechism*, and went on to say that baptism consists of two parts: first, being dipped completely under the water—the drowning of the old sinful self—and second, coming up from the water—the resurrection of the new person.

In Luther’s day it was customary to immerse the candidate three times in the water of the baptismal font, and baptism by immersion is not unknown among Lutherans today. I have heard more than one speaker imagine a baptism where the person being baptized would be held underwater long enough for the congregation to start to panic, then be triumphantly lifted up to sputtering, breathing life. I doubt any pastor could ever really get away with that, but it certainly would communicate dying and rising in a vividly unforgettable way.

### Sharing

- As you think back on the water narratives from Scripture that we discussed in the first session—the chaos before Creation, Noah and the flood, the Exodus through the Red Sea—where do you see images of death-and-life? How do you understand the death and life images of the cross?
- Where do you see or hear death and life in what happens in baptism? Have you ever witnessed a baptism that made that death-and-life image clear? What was it like?

### Daily Dying and Rising

Martin Luther understood baptism as a once for all event, just as God’s action in Christ was once for all. To repeat baptism would be to focus attention on our human actions and faith (which are always inadequate) rather than on the unfailing grace and promise of God.

Luther was baptized on St. Martin’s day, November 11, 1483, at St. Peter’s Church in Eisleben, Germany. Throughout his life, he drew strength and comfort from the certainty of that. When in doubt or despair, oppressed by sin and conscience, he would say, “But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body” (from *Large Catechism*, Baptism, 44).

If, in baptism, we have been united with Christ, then the worst is over. Death has no more power over us; we need not fear it, because we have already died. And if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, as Paul says, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. This is at the heart of our Christian faith; this is at the heart of what baptism means.

But although we are reborn children of God in baptism, we remain subject to the brokenness of sin. We are at one and the same time saint and sinner. Martin Luther insisted that the Christian life is a daily dying and rising: “The old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow

for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand . . . daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (*Small Catechism*). Each day is an opportunity to die to sin and rise to new life.

How can we do this? This daily dying and rising can be encouraged in a number of ways, including

- confession and forgiveness
- reading Scripture
- participating in worship
- daily prayer and the sign of the cross
- reading Luther’s catechism
- professing our faith by reciting the Creed.

These practices can be used by individuals, families, small groups, and larger gatherings. Several of them are combined in Luther’s Morning Blessing and Evening Blessing. See page 34.

Even with a daily habit of baptismal remembrance, there are significant times in our life journey when we, with Luther, might want to remember, “but I am baptized,” and be strengthened and sustained. The public ritual of Affirmation of Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 234–237; *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 198–201) is one way the community of faith can mark such times. This is most often used at confirmation and the reception of new members. But there are other times—moving into a nursing home, becoming a parent or grandparent, changing occupation or location, diagnosis of a chronic illness, retirement—when the community together can help us lay claim to the sure and certain promises of the God who has already claimed us in baptism.

### Consider

Baptism is at the foundation of our faith. How can we become conscious of this sacrament in our daily lives?

- Look again at the list of practices for daily baptismal remembrance. Pick one to make your own, perhaps using Luther’s Morning or Evening Bless-

ing (see page 34). Covenant with one another to do this for a specific period of time—perhaps until next month or your next gathering—and then share your experiences.

- What do you know or remember about your own baptism? Do you have photos, a certificate or bulletin, a gown or other clothing, a shell or candle, or the like? Set aside a special place for a visual reminder of your own baptism. Tell friends or family members about it; ask them about their own baptism.
- With the group, make a list of significant life changes that participants have experienced or that they anticipate. Consider how you might use an affirmation of baptism (public or private) to help you through such times of change. Talk with your pastor or other leaders about ways the congregation might acknowledge such times in the lives of its members.

### Closing

Gather around or turn your attention to the bowl of water in your midst. Together, offer prayers of thanksgiving for the gift of baptism, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Scriptures, the teaching of Martin Luther. Give thanks for those who have gathered for this time of study, for their insights and sharing. Remember especially any who are in times of transition or change. End as you began, by dipping your fingers in the water and making the sign of the cross as you close, saying “**In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**”

If you wish, sing or speak the opening hymn again. 🌿

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### The Morning Blessing

In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: “God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well: “I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and my actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

After singing a hymn perhaps (for example, one on the Ten Commandments) or whatever else may serve your devotion, you are to go to your work joyfully.

### The Evening Blessing

In the evening, when you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: “God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well: “I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.”

Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully.

*From Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*, included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1160–1167.*

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LEADER GUIDE

# It's a Matter of Death and Life

by Karen G. Bockelman

## Preparation for this session

Once again the group is invited to gather around a water focal point. You may wish to fill a large glass bowl with water and place it on a table in the center of your group. You might place a cross and Bible near it (but not where they will get wet as people dip their fingers in the water). Fresh flowers or greenery from God's good earth will add to the beauty of this reminder of baptism.

You will need copies of the session (either copies of the magazine or downloaded from the magazine's Web site, [www.lutheranwoman.today.org](http://www.lutheranwoman.today.org)) and Bibles. Hymnals for everyone and copies of Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* (included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1160—1167) are nice but not required.

## Overview

In baptism we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This session will explore that reality through Scripture, the service of baptism and related rites, and Martin Luther's catechisms.

## Hymn

The suggested hymn includes references to the mark of the cross and to dying and rising each day.

The hymn may be sung to the familiar tunes *LAND OF REST* or *NEW BRITAIN*, which is also used with "Amazing Grace."

## Opening Prayer

To open this session, the members of the group are invited to dip their fingers in the bowl of water and make the sign of the cross as they speak the traditional words of invocation. This may or may not be a practice with which your group members are familiar. It is, however, a very ancient practice—the small sign of the cross on the forehead goes back to the second century, and the large sign to the sixth century. Martin Luther recommended it too. It's worth trying.

## The Sign of the Cross

There are a number of ways to make the sign of the cross. Perhaps the most common is the large sign: Hold your right hand with the thumb and fingertips together. Dip the fingertips in the water, and then touch your fingertips to your forehead, heart, left shoulder,

right shoulder, and back to the center. A slow, mindful gesture that reaches all the way up to the forehead and all the way out to each shoulder has a more prayerful feeling than a quick flutter like shooing away mosquitoes—someone in your group who is familiar with the practice may be willing to demonstrate.

I learned from a seminary worship professor that it might be easier to try crossing yourself if everyone in the group agrees to try first with their eyes closed. That way no one has to worry about doing it wrong in front of the others!

People may alternatively make a small sign of the cross on themselves or on another person: Dip your thumb in the water and trace a cross on your own or another person's forehead.

### A Matter of Death and Life

When we hear the phrase, “It’s a matter of life and death,” we hear a sense of urgency, the need to take immediate action. Some people think of baptism as a matter of life and death, a ritual necessary to avoid the death of eternal damnation, a kind of “fire insurance.” There can be an almost superstitious sense that baptism will keep us safe.

Turning the phrase around—it’s a matter of death and life—highlights the radical nature of baptism as both dying and rising. Being joined to Jesus is not a safe way to live. Jesus said that following him would mean taking up our own cross. Dan Berrigan, Jesuit priest and social activist, once said, “If you want to be a follower of Jesus, you better learn to look good on wood.”

This is an opportunity to really explore the depth of the meaning of baptism. If you have a hymnal handy, take a look at the baptismal service in it. Encourage your group to reflect on what baptismal practices they have witnessed or experienced (in your congregation or another). Are there practices that seem to emphasize the death-and-life nature of baptism? How would your group react to immersion baptism? of an adult?

of an infant? Conversely, are there practices that seem to diminish the significance of baptism? I once heard of using a rosebud to sprinkle baptismal water on an infant's forehead. What would your group think of such a practice? Between those extremes, how can we, in Luther's words, “make baptism a true and complete sign of the thing it signifies” (“The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism,” vol. I, *Luther's Works*, 35:29)?

### Daily Dying and Rising

Although a person is baptized once, the gift of baptism continues throughout a Christian's life. There are two emphases in this section of the study. The first is that the baptized can confidently claim God's action in baptism. Baptism does not depend on us but on God. Occasionally I have had pastoral conversation with someone who has discovered a new (or renewed) sense of the meaning of baptism and has asked to be baptized again because “now it will mean something to me.” But to do so would put the emphasis in the wrong place—on human action rather than God's action.

Of course it's possible to live as though we are not baptized or at least as though being baptized has no meaning for our lives. But we can also live as though being baptized makes a difference. Doing that may take some practice, practice at daily dying and rising.

This section provides an opportunity to explore personal or community practices that encourage daily baptismal remembrance. It's not that individuals or your congregation aren't already doing many of these things, but there may not have been intentional thought about their nature as remembrance of baptism.

### Closing

The closing is designed to be quite simple—a time of prayer, baptismal remembrance, and perhaps song. 🌸





## Living Water, Walking Wet

by Karen G. Bockelman

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Hymn

“Come to Me, All Pilgrims Thirsty,”  
*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 777*

“Come to me, all pilgrims thirsty; drink the water I will give.  
If you knew what gift I offer, you would come to me and live.”

*Refrain:*

Jesus, ever-flowing fountain, give us water from your well.  
In the gracious gift you offer there is joy no tongue can tell.

“Come to me, all trav’lers weary; come that I may give you rest.  
Drink the cup of life I offer; at this table be my guest.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, believers burdened; find refreshment in this place.  
Come, receive the gift I offer, turn to me and seek my face.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, repentant sinners; leave behind your guilt and shame.  
Come and know divine compassion, turn to me, I call your name.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, distressed and needy; I would be your trusted friend.  
Come and seek the gift I offer, come, your open hands extend.”

*Refrain*

“Come to me, abandoned, orphaned; lonely ways no longer roam.  
Come and take the gift I offer, let me make in you my home.”

*Refrain*

#### Opening

*The leader addresses the group.*

Do you desire to affirm your baptism?

*The group responds.*

**I do.**

Do you renounce the devil and  
all the forces that defy God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the powers of this  
world that rebel against God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the ways of  
sin that draw you from God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe.**

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,  
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,  
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,  
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,  
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

**I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.**

(Affirmation of Baptism, text reprinted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 234-237  
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## Lake Effect

Washington Island lies off the tip of Door County, Wisconsin. One of the most striking sights on the island is Schoolhouse Beach. I've seen sandy beaches. I've seen the pebbly beaches of Lake Superior. But never before have I seen a beach covered with smooth, round white stones—washed, rolled, tumbled, polished for God only knows how long in the waters of Lake Michigan.

The first time I saw the stones, I identified with them. I, too, had spent a lifetime in the waters—the waters of baptism. I wanted so badly to pick out just the right stone and take it home, a reminder of the experience and what it meant to me. That is, until someone pointed out the sign announcing a \$25 fine for taking rocks from the beach! I had to be satisfied with a photo and the memory.

I have come to realize that the rocks need to stay in and by the water, ever shaped by the waves. In just the same way, I need to stay in and near the waters of baptism, ever shaped by the covenant God made with me in holy baptism. It will be a lifelong process.

## Sharing

> Can you think of an event that has had a deep impact on your life? An event that has continued to shape your life, or perhaps changed your life? What does that feel like? How would you be different if that hadn't happened?

## Living Water

One of the most vivid scenes in John's Gospel tells of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. We have all too often gotten stuck on the woman's supposedly shady past, but the story is about much more than that.

## READ JOHN 4:1-15.

Jesus' first spoken words in John's Gospel (1:35) are a question: "What are you looking for?" This is perhaps the unspoken question at the beginning of his conversation with the Samaritan woman. What is she looking for? Certainly she has questions of her own, religious questions, even theological questions: How is it that a Jew would ask a drink of a Samaritan woman? Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than Jacob who gave us this well?

There's a part of her conversation with Jesus that focuses on the practicalities of her daily trek to get water. The well where they met was located on the edge of town, a long and inconvenient journey. It was deep, not easy to draw from. Who wouldn't want to know about an easier source of daily water?

But the conversation quickly takes on deeper meaning with Jesus' talk of living water, gushing up to eternal life.

## READ JOHN 4:16–29.

It is the talk about many husbands that has led more than one commentator to focus on the woman's past. Some consider her words to Jesus a smokescreen to keep him from probing too deeply or even an attempt to seduce him. It may be that the obvious is true, and indeed she was the village scandal. Others have suggested that she was unable to have children, and this led one man after another to divorce her until finally, still needing a man to survive in a patriarchal society, she didn't even seek the courtesy of marriage. Still others contend that the husbands are not literal, but symbols of Samaritan infidelity, worshiping many false gods instead of the true God of Israel.

Whatever the truth of her life—religious, sexual, or otherwise—she continued in genuine dialogue with Jesus. She identified Jesus as a prophet, recognized the truth of worship in spirit rather than place. She longed for the coming of Messiah, who would proclaim all things. To this woman, and for the first time in John's Gospel, Jesus revealed himself as that Messiah.

### Sharing

- > *What do you think the Samaritan woman was looking for? What kinds of needs are described in the opening hymn? What are you looking for? How is Jesus living water for you?*

### Walking Wet

There are certainly baptismal themes in this story. There is catechesis—religious instruction—in the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well. Although Jesus does not baptize her, he does promise the gift of living water. Her response is to leave her water jar and return to the city to testify to her experience. I like to imagine her rushing off with drops of water still clinging to her skirts and splattering among the people of her town.

Later in John's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the festival of Booths or Tabernacles (John 7). Part of

the celebration included the daily carrying of a golden pitcher of water to the Temple, reminding the people of the water God provided in the wilderness and looking forward to the day when all nations would come to worship on God's holy mountain. On the last day of the festival, Jesus, who had been teaching in the Temple, stood and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37b–38).

If Jesus is indeed living water for a thirsty world, can we his followers be anything less? We are called not just to be faithful disciples in church, but to live our faith in the world: to proclaim the Good News, to serve all people, to strive for peace and justice. These are our baptismal promises, promises we renewed together at the beginning of this session.

This is our Christian vocation, our calling. Home and school, community and nation, work and leisure, citizen, friend, colleague, family—all are places and relationships where God has called us to witness and to serve.

### Sharing

- > *Think again of what you (and others) are looking for. What are the needs you shared? How are you called to meet those needs for others?*

### Holy Water

#### READ MATTHEW 25:31–46.

In this familiar scene of judgment, Jesus identifies his followers as those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited the imprisoned, and—notice—*given drink to the thirsty*. We give of ourselves. We are called to be a cup of cool water for one another.

In some traditions, water that is set aside and blessed for use in baptism is called holy water. I would prefer to say that all water is holy. It is holy because it

is God's creation. It is holy because it sustains life. It is holy because God has chosen it to be a visible sign of grace. It is holy because Jesus speaks of himself as living water.

There is a water crisis in the world today. More than a billion people in the world have no access to safe drinking water. Many women and girls must walk as much as six miles every day to get water for their families. The southeastern United States has experienced the worst drought in a century. Elsewhere in our nation, water tables have been dropping, sometimes precipitously. Battles over water—both at home and abroad—are likely to be the source of major conflict in the century ahead.

### Consider

How might you (personally, as a group, as a congregation) engage in learning about and taking action on water issues?

- Collect newspaper, magazine, and Internet stories related to water issues. Look for local, regional, national, and international stories.
- Do an “audit” of your personal, family, and congregation water consumption. Covenant with one another to make some changes toward a wiser use of water resources.
- Staff a water station at a local event (such as a marathon or outdoor concert.)
- Clean up a nearby stream bed or lake shore.
- Check out the ELCA Good Gifts Catalog or the Lutheran World Relief Catalogue for giving ideas related to water.
- See the Women of the ELCA Web site for programs and initiatives related to water. Go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).

### Closing

Gather around or turn your attention to the bowl and pitcher of water, along with the empty glasses. Take

turns pouring a small glass of water for one another, offering it with these or similar words: “Receive Christ’s living water; be water for others.” Let the extra glass of water represent those beyond your group who are in need of the water you give.

Give thanks for this time together and pray that your study, sharing, and learning may bear fruit in the days to come. Pray for those who witness and serve in Christ’s name and for your own opportunities to do so. Pray for the needs that have been shared in this gathering. Pray for those who experience drought or flood, those who do not have access to clean water, those caught in water conflicts. Pray for the healing of God’s creation, especially God’s gift of water.

And in closing, if you wish, you may read or sing the opening hymn again.

### Looking Ahead

In the next issue, we begin our nine-month study “The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther.” To learn more, see “What’s Coming Up in *LWT*” on page 14. 🌿

**The Rev. Karen G. Bockelman** is assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. She is presenting an adaptation of this Bible study to the delegates and participants of the Seventh Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 8-10 and 10-13.

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

*has a blog!*

Go to [www.lwtmagazine.blogspot.com](http://www.lwtmagazine.blogspot.com) to read notes from the editors and Bible study writers, and comments from readers. Coming soon: video clips of “The Hidden Hand of God” writers talking about the new study.

LEADER GUIDE

# Living Water, Walking Wet

by Karen G. Bockelman

## Preparation for this session

Once again the group is invited to gather around a water focal point: a large clear bowl of fresh water, perhaps with shells, sea glass, or tumbled stones around it or in it. The closing ritual calls for a pitcher of cold water and enough small glasses for each person in the group, plus one extra.

You will need copies of the study session (you can download it and this Leader Guide from the magazine's Web site, [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org)) and Bibles for everyone. Hymnals for everyone would be useful, but are not required.

As leader, be sure to read the study in advance. You may wish to gather some resources related to water issues. The Women of the ELCA Web site has background information, prayers, and links. Go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org). The decade 2005-2015 has been designated as the United Nations Water for Life Decade ([www.un.org/waterforlifedecade](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade)); there are resources at that Web site.

## Overview

This session centers on John's account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. Her story and other Scripture passages that speak of living water will help us consider what it means to live a baptismal life. Although a person is baptized only once, living out of what baptism means continues as the Christian's primary vocation or calling in the world.

## Hymn

The text of the suggested hymn echoes the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. However, the words go beyond the specifics of that woman's situation. The words are new, but they are set to a familiar tune, BEACH SPRING. If your congregation sings "Lord, whose love in humble service," you know that melody.


## Opening

The opening ritual is an adaptation of the Affirmation of Baptism as found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The emphasis is on the last part, affirming our intention to continue in those actions that are how we live out our baptism.

## Sharing

Throughout this session, the sharing questions encourage the group to share more deeply. It is certainly possible to have a lively discussion without much personal sharing, but there is the invitation to speak of life changing events and intensely personal needs.





Some will find this easier than others. As leader, take care that participants are not pushed to share beyond their comfort level. It may be helpful to have the group covenant to keep in confidence any personal sharing.

### **Lake Effect**

If the experience at Schoolhouse Beach appeals to your group, you might add to the bowl of water some smooth, rounded stones—perhaps one for each participant. You could also use sea glass, shells, or driftwood—anything shaped over time by the action of water.

### **Living Water**

Ask someone to read the Gospel story of Jesus and the woman at the well aloud. If participants have different Bible translations at hand, invite them to point out any differences they discover in the way the story is told or heard. Sometimes a very different retelling, such as *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, brings new insight to a familiar story.

Give some attention to getting past the woman's apparent sexual history. Does her story take on new meaning when you consider other possible interpretations of her situation? Does that make it any easier to identify with her? Let the words of the opening hymn help lead you into reflecting on what she and you are looking for.

### **Walking Wet**

Note of the Samaritan woman's response to her conversation with Jesus—witnessing to her neighbors. I think of her action in going back into town to tell what had happened to her in meeting Jesus as “walking wet”—that is, living out of Jesus' gift of living water.

John 7:38 may be a bit puzzling to some in the group, especially if they are seeing a different translation, for example, “out of *his* heart shall flow.” The original Greek word (*autou*, “his”) could refer to either Jesus or the believer, and scholars have disagreed about the precise meaning of this sentence since the earliest times.

This study uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It allows us to emphasize our baptismal calling to let Christ's living water flow out of us into the world.

### **Holy Water**

We have come full circle in our study, back to a consideration of water itself. Through this exploration of Scripture and baptism, ordinary water becomes holy water. Christians are called to pay attention to and address the water crisis in our world, both personally and as communities of faith. The activities for consideration are suggestions for long-term action, not for activities to be carried out today.

### **Closing**

The action of giving water to one another is to connect water to our serving Christ as we serve our neighbor. The extra glass reminds us that there are others not among us today whom we are called to serve in Christ's name.

You may lead the prayer or invite participants to offer petitions. You have the option to sing the opening hymn or another hymn. “Rise up, O saints of God!” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 669) would be a good choice.

If you have placed stones, shells, driftwood, or sea-glass in or near the bowl, invite participants to take one home as a reminder of this study.