

## What benefits does God give in Baptism?

In Baptism God Forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised.



## What is God's promise?

In Mark 16 our Lord Jesus Christ says: *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*

This past September I was surprised to hear a significant discussion on the radio about baptism. What made it even stranger is that this conversation wasn't on a Christian radio station, but a sports talk program. As it turned out, De Andre Hopkins also known as "Nuke" Hopkins, an outstanding wide receiver for Clemson, was baptized on the football field after practice. The other football players and coaches were invited to witness his baptism.

One sports commentator immediately complained about the inappropriateness of such a baptism. Since Clemson was not a church related college, he claimed it was a misuse of religion and it sent the wrong message. "Besides he said, what if a Muslim student wanted to observe some similar rite, would that student be allowed the same privilege? Don't these religious practices belong in a church or a mosque, and not on a football field?"

His partner on the radio took a different position. He said, "You know Nuke's baptism took place after practice and no one was forced to attend. What is wrong with this young man wanting some of his closest friends, teammates and coaches to share this important moment in his faith journey? And why not on the practice field where he and others share their passion for football?"

My first reaction was a rather cynical one. It seems to me that we already treat the sport of football too much like religion. I couldn't help but wonder for a moment if this baptism was more about bowing down to the "gods" of football, success and glory, rather than being joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The more I thought about it, however, the more I begin to see it differently. After all isn't every baptism a public act bearing witness to God's grace? Why not be baptized at a location where you are living out one of your gifts and passions? Why not invite your friends into a familiar setting to share with them how much God's love in Jesus Christ means to you? Why not let all the false gods and powers of the world be put on notice that there is no place where the light and love of Christ cannot be manifested? What kind of message might it send if Christians held baptism in public places, like shopping malls, or city park fountains, or after work in an office building? Why not let the world around us see and know the freeing power of God's forgiving love in Jesus Christ?

An image that reflects Luther's words about how in baptism God forgives sin and delivers us from death and the power of the devil is the Twin Tower memorial pool that was recently dedicated. When I saw this reflection surrounded by walls with the names of all people who died that tragic day, I couldn't help but think about the significance of baptism. Somehow it seemed to me that in the collective unconscious of whoever designed this tribute to the firefighters, to the police, to the rescue workers and the victims of this tragic day of darkness and death, there was the significant symbol of flowing water. Perhaps this water reminds us of the tears that were shed that day, but this same life giving water also reminds us of the many loving sacrifices of total strangers seeking to save anyone they could reach. At the same time this image of flowing water also reminds us of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the total outpouring of his life and love to overcome sin, death and the power of the devil once and for all. In an incredible unexpected way this Twin Tower Memorial Reflection Pool vividly reminds us as Christians of God's redeeming and cleansing love in Jesus Christ for our hurting and broken world.