

Some Extra Good News



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I know we are a bit past the season but I wonder, are you a football fan? Who's your team? Are you a fair-weather or die-hard fan? Here's the real question ... will the Vikings ever win a Superbowl? Ha!

All kidding aside, do you watch the Superbowl every year? How do you celebrate—with a few good friends, a whole houseful of people, or just family? If your team isn't playing, how do you decide who to root for? Do you go with the underdogs or the team who is most likely to win?

I am not a football fanatic but I don't hate the game either. Like millions, my husband and I watch the Superbowl every year. I enjoy the excitement of the game and I flipflop in who I might root for depending on the year. Sometimes I go with the underdog, sometimes I go with a past championship-winning team, and sometimes I simply go with the team with the best colors. This admission might have a few of you flying out of your seats—the best colors? Who does that? Well, me. But the truth is, I don't take it too seriously or get wildly excited about the traditional Superbowl event.

What I do take seriously and get wildly excited about is a different Superbowl event—and I cannot wait to tell you about it!

I have been a follower of Christ since my second son was born. Within six months of accepting Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior, I took the next step of faith I believed God was asking of me—I was baptized on June 25, 2000, along with my husband, Jeremy.

Do you know what baptism is? Have you been baptized? What was it like for you? Did you feel the power of the Holy Spirit move in your soul as you came up out of the water? Or were you baptized as an infant without memory of how it made you feel? Have you considered being baptized as an adult?

Baptism is the act of immersion or pouring water on a person's head, symbolizing the washing away of sins and the beginning of a new life in Christ. It is a public declaration of one's faith and in the Word of God it is commanded "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" – Acts 2:38.

Now, I want to pause for a moment to acknowledge that there is some disagreement in the church regarding when a person should be baptized. The decision to be baptized as an adult or infant is a matter of personal belief, tradition, and interpretation of religious teachings. Different denominations and individuals have varying beliefs on this issue.

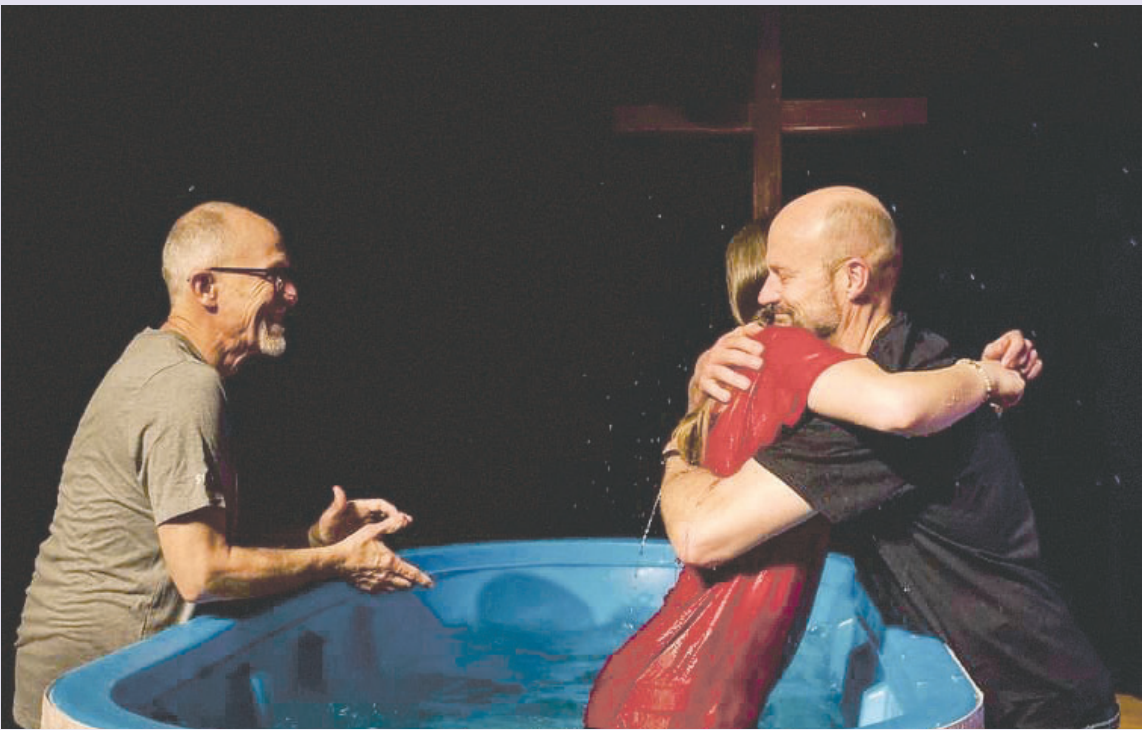
In some denominations where infant baptism is practiced, oftentimes it is seen as a way of dedicating the child to God and welcoming them into the Christian faith. Contrarily, other denominations practice believer's baptism, which means that baptism is reserved for individuals who have made a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ as their Savior. This latter view seems to speak to the verse in Acts that I just shared in that an infant is incapable of repenting and no sin has yet to be committed by the young child.

Be that as it may, I am not here to argue the point or sway your beliefs or traditions. I simply want to share some Good News along with some Extra Good News regarding this in my life.

When I emerged from the baptismal waters, I felt clean and filled with the Holy Spirit. Following that step in my faith, I was on fire for the Lord and had a deep yearning to follow Jesus and do life His way. The only problem was, I was an infant in my faith journey and I didn't yet know all of God's ways.

What does it mean to follow Jesus? How does this differ from simply being a believer?
To follow Jesus means to not only believe in Him as the Son of God and Savior of the world (The Good News), but also to live according to His teachings and example (The Extra Good News)—for when we do the latter, that is how God truly changes us, makes us fruitful, and develops us into who He created us to be as His precious children.

The "Extra Good News" involves a personal relationship with Him, in which we seek to grow in our understanding of His teachings and develop a deeper connection with God. This relationship involves prayer, Bible study, and participation in a faith community with like-minded believers. In



developing this relationship and making a personal commitment to a life of faith and discipleship, we seek to live out the principles of love, compassion, and service that Jesus taught.

In contrast, simply being a believer may involve acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, but not necessarily making a commitment to live according to His teachings. Oftentimes this looks like following our own will for our lives instead of seeking God's will but having a safety net "just in case". Perhaps He even becomes our Genie in a bottle—we get with Him when we want something or we need something because we know He has the power to do big things, but we don't cultivate a relationship with Him in order to live out His purpose for our lives.

What is your relationship with Jesus? Do we need to be baptized to be saved? No, we do not. It is clear throughout God's Word that we must only believe that Jesus was the Son of God who died for our sins and we will be saved (The Good News!). See Romans 10:9, Acts 16:31, and John 3:16.

How wonderful that we get to celebrate The Good News during this Easter weekend and receive the free gift of salvation as believers!

I don't know about you, but I'm a gal who likes a double blessing. For me, that is what baptism did—it gave me a double blessing. Following that powerful filling of the Holy Spirit, I had a great desire to learn all I could about Jesus and follow Him in all of my ways.

I will be the first to admit—I screwed up in the beginning—often and big! But the thing is, we don't have to be perfect to become a believer, we can come as we are and allow Jesus to perfect us over time as we develop and foster a relationship with Him.

I still sin—daily—though I hope not as big or as often as I did in the beginning! But because I know I am a sinner, I also know that I desperately need Jesus's grace and mercy—daily. In knowing His love for me, I can confess, turn from my sin—in my thoughts, actions, and attitudes, learn from Him, and ask for His help to do better next time.

I mentioned that my husband, Jeremy was also baptized at the same time as I was twenty-three years ago. This would have been great news if He had the same experience as I did. Unfortunately, he was a believer and not a follower—even after his baptism.

Fast forward 20 years to 2020.
Over our many years of marriage, I can't count the times I heard Jeremy say "I don't understand what a relationship with Jesus is?" and I can't count the times that I prayed that the Lord would show Him. I could encourage Him, I could explain my experiences, but I could not do the work needed in that relationship—because it is personal.

What needed to happen is that Holy Spirit needed to powerfully move in Jeremy's heart and give him a yearning to follow Jesus. What needed to happen is for Jesus to show him how much better life could be if he relinquished control and submitted his life to God. These are the things I prayed.

In January 2020, Jeremy informed me that he had made the decision to be baptized as a new follower and he was going to sign up to do it the next month. My heart was thrilled! He then decided that it wasn't the time—he'd rather do it in the summer in a lake rather than in a great big bathtub on the stage of our church. I did not judge or push him because I knew it was a decision for Jeremy only.

On February 2, 2020, what many know as Superbowl LIV (54), we attended church together with our two youngest children who were still living at home. As I listened to the sermon, I prayed that Jeremy might change his mind and reconsider baptism. I remember feeling the tension mounting in my husband by the way he was moving and breathing. When our pastor invited those who felt moved by the Spirit (who had not planned to be baptized) to come to the stage and do so, Jeremy

grabbed my hand and told me, with tears in his eyes that he needed to do it. Oh, joy! My heart was ready to burst wide open! Tears flowed down my cheeks as I watched my husband enter the baptismal waters and come out with a smile and resolve to follow Jesus.

Oh, friends, I cannot speak to what the Spirit did in him that day. But I can speak to the man that has changed over the last three years right before my very eyes. He went from a believer to a follower. He has grown in huge ways—were I to tell you even snippets of the changes, you would be blown away. That's not only Extra Good News for my husband and the relationship he now has with Jesus—that's Extra Good News for his wife—for I have been greatly blessed by the fruit that God is producing in his life!

Fast forward 3 years to 2023.
In January of this year, my daughter, Briella called me from college. We were FaceTiming as we do often and were just talking about normal things. At the end of the conversation, she told me that God had put it on her heart to be baptized at the next planned baptismal service in February. Instantly my eyes filled with tears of joy.

On February 12, 2023, what many know as Superbowl LVII (57), Briella sat in church with us, prepared to be baptized at the end of the service.

And then something happened that I could not have foreseen. We were told before the service that we could go backstage with her so that we could hug her after she was baptized. So, we followed her back and as we did, one of our pastors pulled Jeremy aside and told him that he could help baptize her.

How could this be? My husband, a follower of Jesus was about to baptize my daughter who had made a decision to follow Christ too. When she came out of the water, she hugged her father and my heart burst wide open. Tears. Great big alligator tears streamed down my face.

Team Jesus for the Superbowl wins!
I now get to live life with these two followers of Jesus. What's more, I get to be with them both for eternity. I really don't know what news could be any better than that!

Where are you in your faith journey? Do you know Jesus yet? Are you a believer? Are you a devout follower? Have you taken your next step of faith into the baptismal waters?

I'd love to tell you how glorious a life lived in Jesus is—for you and for all you love. But you won't fully believe it until you experience it.

Oh friends, won't you consider getting to know the Savior of the world? Won't you consider putting your faith in Him? Won't you consider developing a relationship with Jesus and following Him so that you can live out a glorious life with great purpose? Where might you start?

There are so many services planned this Easter weekend at so many great churches. I encourage you to go—don't just watch online—go in person and feel the moving of the Holy Spirit as you worship and learn about Jesus. If you don't yet have a church home, you are most welcome to join me at mine!

Eagle Brook Church services are this evening at 4 pm and tomorrow at 9 am and 11 am at the Mayo Civic Center in downtown Rochester. I hope to see you there!

