

Fr. Tim

Jan 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022,

## Baptism

Last week we left Jesus a child, away in a manger, being visited by magi from the East. Today we find him full-grown, 30 or so, about to begin his public ministry. In fact more than full grown. It is estimated that in the ancient world less than 5% of the population lived to see their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. He is no longer a young adult, he is middle aged. So what has he been doing all his life? The Gospels tell us nothing other than giving his parents a heart attack during a trip to Jerusalem when he was twelve. That's it.

Well without any facts, our imaginations are free to roam. One thing people have naturally assumed is that he would have followed in his father Joseph's footsteps. For there was no social mobility in the ancient world. The only way up in the ancient world was to find buried treasure or to plunder someone else's. You did not have to ask yourself what you were going to do with your life. All you had to do is look at your parents. If your mother was a homemaker you would become a homemaker. If your dad was a peasant, you will be a peasant. If your mom and dad were king and queen....good for you. You are the favored of God.

Now the Gospels do tell us what Joseph did. He was a *technon*, traditionally translated as a carpenter. But that is a pretty high status translation. *Technon* literally meant a technician, or anyone who worked with material such as wood. So as I have mentioned before, I like to think of Joseph, and Jesus as construction workers. And as construction workers they would have been day laborers. That is, Jesus would have spent every morning walking to the town square looking to get hired on a project. Now sometimes he would be hired for projects that would last months. But undoubtedly there would also be those days between projects when he would be milling around the townsquare all day without ever being hired. That line in the Our Father, Give us this day our daily bread@ could be a reflection of those precarious days in which when he did not find work he would not sleep on a full stomach. For one day's wage was only enough to buy one day's worth of bread.

So I imagine this was the life Jesus was living, a subsistence level, food insecure lifestyle until today, when he goes to check out John the Baptist, this firebrand prophet who is creating such a stir.

Why wait so long? He is supposed to be the son of God, come to save the world, and for the first thirty years he works construction. What's up with that?

Again we are free to let our imaginations roam. I like to think it's because the Son of God first needed to learn what it was like to be a Son of Man. Not learn theoretically or know from a God's eye view, but learn experientially, know what it is like to be human by living a human life. So Jesus spent what ended up being 90% of his life on earth, learning what it's like to be a regular human being.

And what did he learn we might ask. Well for one, he learned how important parents are to children. So much so that when he referred to God, he could think of no better, no more evocative way to do so than by referring to God as a parent, his Father. I suspect that also says something good about Joseph too. Jesus addresses God as he addressed his father. Even to the point of calling God *Abba* *Daddy*. Apparently Joseph did not stand on ceremony. Indeed when you think about it, Joseph must have been a pretty remarkable man. After all he did marry his fiancé after she became pregnant, and not by him. Or when you think of the proverb, *The apple does not fall far from the tree*.

What else might Jesus have learned? That everyone needs a home, everyone deserves to have a home. Maybe not a physical house, like the ones he had been building in the big city down the road from Nazareth, but a spiritual home, a community in which one could feel at home. When you think of the people Jesus reached out to, and who swarmed around him, a lot of them were people without a home, whether because they were too poor, or too sick, or too crippled or too out of control, crazy we would say, possessed they would say. Jesus would preach not only that God was his Father, but that God was everyone's Father, and that as family, we should build at least spiritual homes for everyone.

Today Jesus meets John and is moved to have John dunk him in the river Jordan. As he rises back up from the water he has a revelation. *You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.* Well if that is true, and sons follow in the footsteps of their fathers, then he ought to leave construction and become a prophet. Which is exactly what he does. And by his divine father telling him that he is already pleased with him, God is telling him *My boy, you are ready to do your job. I am proud of you. Go forth and build my people a true home, a world of grace and*

justice, a Kingdom of God.@.

May our time here together at prayer be a kind of homecoming for us all as well. A time to get in out of the weather, warm up, have a little food, and spend some time with Jesus, our brother and companion, our workmate.