

Baptism of the Lord

Homebuilding

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Last week we left Jesus as a child, away in a manger, being visited by magi from the East. Today we find him full-grown, 30, 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 50th 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 fact, our imaginations are free to roam. One thing people have naturally assumed is that he would have followed in his father's footsteps. There was no social mobility in the ancient world. 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 is a homemaker you will be a homemaker. If your dad is a peasant, you will be a peasant. If your dad is king....good for you.

Now the Gospels do tell us what Joseph did. He was a technon, traditionally translated as carpenter. But that is a pretty high status translation. Technon literally means anyone in the construction trades. 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 town square 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 futile days when he did not get a chance to earn his daily bread.

So I image this was the life Jesus was living, 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 the son of God, come to save the world, and for the first thirty years he sits on his hands. What is up with that?

Again we are free to let our imaginations roam. I like to think its 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 its like to be a human life on earth.

What did he learn? 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 to refer to God as a parent, his Father. I suspect that also says something good about Joseph too, effectively naming God after him. Joseph must have been a pretty remarkable man. Especially when you think that "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 he had been building up to now, but a spiritual home, a community where 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 a home for everyone.

Today when 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." It's the Father telling his son, "my boy, you are ready to go. I am proud of you. Go forth and bring my people home."

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, spend some time with Jesus, Mary and the family.