

Jesus' Baptism

Last week we celebrated the feast of the epiphany. Today we celebrate another epiphany. Jesus own epiphany, where the heavens open and Jesus sees what he was born to do with his life, where he receives his calling.

He is already thirty years old. In a world where life expectancy was 20, that is already old. Infant mortality was also 50%, so if you could make it through your first year of life, you could hope to live into your 40's. this held true through the end of the nineteenth century and the discovery of microbes and antibiotics to counter them. So at 30 could look forward to another 15 to 20 years at best. At 65 I am hoping to have another 15 to 20 good years ahead of me. My current life expectancy is 87. But 20% of those born today are expected to make their 100th birthday. Maybe I can ride on their coat tails.

But I digress... Jesus is 30. He has been a working adult for 15 years. What had he been doing all this time. Following in the footsteps of his father of course, his earthly father, that is, Joseph. And what did Joseph do? the Gospels mention that he was a *tecknon*, traditionally translated as Acarpenter@ but literally applying to anyone who built things. So I like to imagine Jesus as a construction worker. Herod was building a city just 5 miles from Nazareth, Sephoris, when Jesus was growing up. So I like to imagine Joseph and Jesus walking five miles to Sephoris every morning and returning five miles back to Nazareth every evening. Once having arrived in the morning, the two would have milled around the construction site looking to get hired for the day, like those workers in the vineyard. I find it telling that in his parable he favors those who get hired only late in the day. Perhaps he and Joseph know what that=s like too. To get a full days pay after a frustrating morning and afternoon without getting hired would be a good metaphor of Heaven.

But now, after 15 years, Jesus= life takes a turn. Perhaps Joseph had died and that had prompted Jesus to take stock. What was he going to do with the years he had left? In any case Jesus comes to hear of a new prophet, John who is calling for people to take stock of their lives, to turn them around, towards God, and start afresh. He preached on the banks of the Jordan and invited people to re-enact the crossing of the Jordan from Egypt into the Promised Land. Jesus is drawn by what he hears and goes to check him out.

He responds to John=s prophetic call and asks him to dunk him in the Jordan as a sign of his resolve to turn a new leaf. As he rises from the water he has a revelation, a second epiphany

where the meaning and direction of his new life becomes clear to him. The heavens open and a voice booms if not in his ears, no one else hears anything, than in his heart. AYou are my beloved son, with you I well pleased.@

Note the words. God does not say Ayou will be my beloved son, after you do what I am calling for you to do.@ or AYou are my beloved son, *because* I am well pleased with you.@ No its, you are already my beloved son, always have been from the beginning, from your birth, from your very conception.

We too have our own epiphanies, less grand perhaps, but memorable moments when we too come to a recognition of who we are, and what we are called to do with our lives. Or the day when we realize who we meant to spend our lives with. Or the day our child is born. Or the day our last parent dies and we become the family elder, standing before our own grave. Days when our lives enter into sharp focus, when we realize more clearly than ever before who we are and what we are meant to do.

AYou are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.@ Jesus went on to preach that the same words are true for us all, that we are each one of us a beloved child of God. That we all brothers and sisters of the same Father in heaven. Always have been, always will be. We may not always feel like it, or act like it, but at those moments of epiphany we are reminded of it. But what could it mean for God to say that he is also well pleased with us? We are only too aware of our weaknesses, our failures. We know only too well that we each have our dark side, that we are all sinners. So what would it mean for God to still say, Athat=s my boy@, Athat=s my girl.@.

But isn=t that what parents do? And wasn=t that what Jesus was called to do for the years he had left? To tell us, to show us , that we are all God=s beloved children, always have been, always will be. And that God is indeed a pleased parent. Not always with what we do, but with who we are, deep down, beneath the froth on the surface.

God is not in love with perfection. He is already perfect. He=s been there, done that. God did not create a perfect world, he created *us*. He loves *us*. In my philosophy of religion class I talk about contemplation as seeing something, a stream, a tree, a leaf, anything, seeing something as it is, for what it is, not looking beyond it to the ideal it reminds us of, not seeing the stream in so far as it approximates the ideal stream, or much less seeing it in terms of what we can do with it, but seeing it, appreciating it, just for what it is in all its uniqueness. Could it be that God contemplates us, sees us, appreciates us not insofar as we approximate the ideal person, but for

who we are, just as we are, in all our individuality. Seeing our weaknesses but also seeing the history of our struggle with those weaknesses. Seeing our limitations but also seeing how we have lived with those limitations, how we have come to shape a meaningful, caring, loving life in the midst of those limitations. It is technology that seeks to transcend our limitations. Religion is about embracing our limitations, finding meaning, finding salvation, through them not in spite of them..

“You are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.” As with Jesus, at those moments of epiphany we see the true meaning and purpose of our lives because we too at least faintly hear those same words, feel that same love. And it is in feeling loved that we are inspired to love in turn. It is in our struggles with our own limitations that we are able to understand others who struggle similarly. And it is in recognizing our gifts *as* gifts that we feel called to share them. It is in appreciating that we are children of a generous, empowering and forgiving God, that we are inspired to act accordingly and, in word and deed, to spread that good news to all the earth.