

The Baptism of the Lord – 08 January 2017

Isaiah 42:1-9; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

Simply due to the placement this year of Christmas Day on a Sunday, it seems to me this year, more than any other, that the season of Christmas and these early days of Jesus' career on earth, so to speak, are so very poignant, yet so often overlooked. A short two weeks ago, we celebrated the birth of God's self into the world in the form of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, whom we profess to be our Lord and Saviour. On New Year's Eve, a few of us gathered to celebrate the Naming of Jesus – important because in being 'named' Jesus became just that much more just like us. Emmanuel – God with us – became God *like* us. Then the following morning, last Sunday, we celebrated Epiphany, that moment when the Wise Men gathered around the boy Jesus to acknowledge him as their Lord and Saviour too – and in the Epiphany, came that long-awaited truth that God sent Jesus for all of us – Jews and Gentiles alike. And oh, how the world began to change! And now here we are, gathered to celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. In two short weeks, we have moved from babe in arms to man about to begin his ministry. How can all of that happen so very quickly? ...

It seems that time moves quickly, doesn't it? Yes, of course, we are remembering, or commemorating events that happened 2000 years ago, so we have the luxury of condensing that timeline and just hitting on the highlights, but there is something very familiar about this sense that things moved quickly; that a lot happened in a short amount of time. Our perspective on Jesus' life and growing up is influenced by what we hold to be important. The way we hold time is relative – sometimes it seems to race past us at the speed of light, and yet at other times we perceive that time seems to drag on. Time of course, never changes – at least in our everyday, non-scientific-physics way of understanding. What does change is our perspective and those things that influence our understandings or perspectives.

Time seems relative. Just last week I received a notification on Facebook that my nephew had tagged me in a photo. When I looked at it I was taken aback to see his smiling face wearing cap and gown. It was his Grade 12 graduation photo. As I looked up from my iPhone I saw the same child but he was a 6-week old baby I was holding in my arms the night I was ordained a priest. For a moment, I could have sworn that time stood still as I looked from the picture of an innocent baby in a newly ordained priest's arms to the face of a young man preparing to take on the world as a grown man. Where did the time go? Within a single instant time both stood still and shot right past me carrying memories of laughter and tears, hopes and dreams, pride and even fear. One single moment held an eternity of love and care and potential ... All that in a single moment

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In a single two weeks, the Christian Church has celebrated a life grown from infancy to adulthood as we have celebrated the birth of Jesus right through to this moment of acknowledging his entry into formal 'adulthood ministry'. We know very little about who Jesus was as a child, a teenager and a young adult, but we hear a great deal about the next three years of his life – from baptism to the cross. And we have spent and will spend centuries trying to understand and discern his life *after* the cross.

That three years that Jesus spent gathering and teaching his disciples, healing the sick, casting out demons, caring for orphans and widows seems to carry with it a sense of great importance – after all, the Church does spend great portions of the year retelling these stories. But why does time slow down in the Christian Church right now? Why are we focussing so much on this period of Jesus' life rather than getting caught up on all those missing years?

The simple answer could be that we just don't have the information we need to flesh out those missing years. The scribes of Jesus' day didn't leave us anything to work with, to study, that we might better understand what Jesus' life was like as a child and teenager and young man. But the more complex answer would tell us that, like all eras of human history, the important things are recorded and retained for posterity. While it might be nice to know who, Jesus played stickball with or how he reacted to a skinned knee or when he was denied permission to stay out past curfew, these aren't pertinent facts for the purpose of Jesus' life. What is important is the very work that Jesus did that led him to the cross and beyond it. That is why we spend so much time on Jesus' ministry and not on his early life.

Today is a hallmark day because it places before us a milestone – today we acknowledge that Jesus grew up and began that work that God had given him to humanity for in the first place. In his baptism, Jesus is anointed and commissioned to do what God intended him to do all along. Finally, the time had come. After 30 years of time marching on, Jesus started the clock on a new way of understanding time. He began to introduce all of humanity to God's time, which is eternal. In Jesus' baptism, God pronounced a new era beginning – one which threw away the time of understanding that time ended when life ended and which gave to all who would believe the new truth that time only begins in eternity when new life is embraced.

When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, God began a brand-new thing for us, but it wasn't brand new for God. Jesus, anointed at his baptism, entered into time for humanity in that moment, but in reality, Jesus had been since the world was begun. Jesus' life, like time, is all relative. There is no start time in Jesus. Jesus has always been. It is people, human beings, who need to have beginnings and endings, so God gave us a new beginning. When Jesus was baptized, a new thing was begun – a new time was born.

The same thing happens for us in our baptism and confirmation. Salvation and eternal life with God in Christ have always been available. We, however, aren't always attentive to these truths, and so God, in his divine wisdom, invites us to do as Jesus did. He invites us to enter into that new understanding of time which has no beginning or end through our initiation to eternity through baptism.

When we are baptized, and again when we make our own proclamation of belief and faith in our Confirmation, we are entering into that 'new' time: a time of eternity; a time of hope; a time of love and forgiveness; a time of joy and peace' and indeed, a time of new ministry. Our baptism and our confirmation are not moments in time that are frozen and static. Quite to the contrary, they are openings in time through which we enter more fully into the kingdom of God. They are our moments, which become lifetimes, of committing ourselves to the service of God through our lives as Christians.

Just as Jesus began his earthly ministry upon the occasion of his baptism, so too do we begin ours. Our ministries are not static, nor are they finite. Like time itself, our call to serve God simply because we believe, is eternal and gloriously unending. Each one of us are called to live our lives in a state of being that grounds us in the moment – seeing God's presence right where we are – while at the very same time, jumping up to move forward quickly, serving God as we live out our faith as Christians.

Every moment we have is an opportunity to live in the seeming impossibility of living in a single instant of time that both stands still and shoots right past us carrying the eternal possibilities of laughter and tears, hopes and dreams, pride and even fears, but also, always, doing what God calls us to do in and with and through Jesus Christ . One single moment holds an eternity of love and care and potential ... All of that is in a single moment ...