

30 Years In
January 13, 2019

I've been using this image of a discarded Christmas tree since last year, December 30th to be exact, 6 days in to the 12 days of Christmas. I've used this theme of how far in to the life of Jesus we've come each week since Christmas; do you know how many days it's been? So then **how many days until** *next* Christmas?

With only 345 days until we celebrate Christmas again, there's only so many Sundays to highlight other aspects of the life of Jesus, so today the liturgical calendar has us jump all the way to 30 years in, *which event is that?* Here we are 20 days in after celebrating Christmas and we commemorate the *Baptism of the Lord* 30 years later.

Wouldn't it be **nice to know** more about Jesus' first 30 years? There's only a few stories like him teaching in the Temple when his parent's couldn't find Him, and we **might speculate** on the years in between, yet those years are not nearly as significant to Humanity as what commenced 30 years in to his life.

What was played out 30 years in only lasted about 3 years, yet those are the most well-known and studied 3 years in all of history. It was the destiny of the little baby Jesus born in Bethlehem. Scripture demonstrates that God prepares his chosen ones for the roles which he will one day need them to fulfil; there are many prominent biblical leaders who were called up to service when the time was right, including Jesus.

God also prepares and uses each one of us in similar ways, though we don't arise to the same level of acclaim. I hope you are personally inspired each time you read of someone's calling in the Bible, words like *before you were formed in the womb I knew you, I have called you by name- you are mine, I will help you to speak and I will tell you what to say, You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you, For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

One of the characteristic traits of God's greatest leaders is extreme humility and ascribing all greatness to God; and I don't mean just the ones in the Bible, think of the best examples of Christians that you personally know and you will recognize those same virtues.

One of God's exemplary leaders like that from the Old Testament began his life as a lowly shepherd-boy yet became powerful, mighty in battle, and King of Israel. The legacy he left in the eloquent words of so many Psalms attributed to him reveal where he received his strength from, and the lectionary provides us some from Psalm 29:

Psalm 29 Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. ³ The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. ⁴ The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. ⁵ The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. ⁸ The voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh. ⁹ The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" ¹⁰ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever. ¹¹ The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

>>> And God over and over promises peace to his people, the one who is so all-powerful prefers peace and we should do likewise. We should seek peace not only for ourselves, but seek to lead others to peace as well.

Just 20 days ago, society celebrated Christmas, the message of *peace on earth good will to all* is not interwoven into the season as much as it used to be, yet it is still there. Each year about this time, as New Year's resolutions begin to fade away, the glow of peace on earth, good will to all fades as well and so it is part of our calling as Christians to carry it forward into the year.

For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. An eternal life of peace, that is his will for all mankind – how are we helping that along?

God is always preparing a way for us, laying out paths we can choose to follow or not – that's the free will thing he put in us. The challenge, of course, is recognizing those paths because they don't often have the same sort of signage that we're looking for. An important thing for us is to not exclusively focus on what signs God places in front of us but be aware of how He might be making us a sign to others.

Think about that: how might we participate in preparing a way for others to know Christ more fully? How might we be in a position to lead another to know of God's mighty power and grace? How might we be a sign to someone that the Holy Spirit is available to them as well?

We can and should do that on a regular basis, for if no one had ever done that for you, where would you be this morning? Think about it, God still needs to rely on those like us to help along the good news of the Gospel.

The one who came 3 months before the birth of Christ was born for that like no other, and should be an inspiration to us. Who is ___? (the voice of one calling in the wilderness) For John, his 30 yearlong path fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah, Malachi, and the Angel Gabriel. His path was cut out by the River Jordan East of Jerusalem, and his cry was ___? (repent, and sin no more).

He was "wildly" popular and many journeyed out there to hear his message and be baptized by him as he prepared the way, and we pick up his story today in Luke 3:

Luke 3:15-22 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them....²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

>>> With Him He is well pleased, *For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* (John 3:16) We just read Luke 3:16, ***What did it say?***

There's that humility thing, pointing to one far greater than oneself. **Even Jesus** did that didn't he? I've said before how much I like this story and imagery which is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and alluded to in John. I like it because it is so Trinitarian – you've got Jesus the Son coming out of the water, The Holy Descending like a dove, and the voice of God the Father coming out of heaven.

I imagine those there that day did not need any more affirmation than that. They heard what every son yearns to hear from their father; *with you I am well pleased.* As I wrote this down, the lyrics in my playlist again rose to my consciousness. The line was *Word of God, Speak. Would you pour down like rain?*

Would you like to hear the word of God speak such words about you? *You are my child whom I love, with you I am well pleased.* We know that the first part of that is natural: *You are my child whom I love.* So we kinda get that affirmation automatically from God whoever we are.

Yet the second part of the statement is more elusive for most parents at times and may often be *I'm disappointed in you*, have you ever heard or said that? How many of us have given God cause to say such words about us? (I'll be available in my office for confessions after the service)

I propose that we each strive daily to be able to enact such a scene as this one on the screen: living into our baptism, cleansed from those disappointments, filled with the Holy Spirit, and being affirmed by the word of God speaking, *with you I am well pleased*.