

Sunday, January 8, 2017 (Baptism of our Lord)

## **“Living My Life to Please God”**

Matthew 3:13-17

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Not long ago we celebrated the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

Today, we are already celebrating his baptism.

It seems like he went from that infant laying in the manger and surrounded by Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and animals to a thirty-years old man within just a few weeks.

The reality is that the gospel does not tell us much about Jesus’ young age between his birth to the day of his baptism.

From his birth in the manger,

We read that eight days later, he was taken to the Temple by Mary and Joseph so he would be circumcised in accordance with the customs.

And there, at that moment, something great took place.

There was present a man named Simeon whom Luke describes as righteous and devout. Luke also says writes about this man that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he saw Christ the Savior.

Moved by the Spirit, Simeon recognized in the baby Jesus the Savior of the nations, the one whom Israel had been waiting for.

When he saw and held baby Jesus, Simeon declared, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

The scene about baby Jesus in the Temple does not end with Simeon.

There is also a prophetess named Anna. About her, Luke says she was very old and was a widow. She never left the Temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

We all may know some “Annas.”

There are some “Annas” in our congregation and in every church.

Some female and male “Annas” – those members of the church who are at the church night and day, cold or hot, when all is well and when things don’t seem to go well.

Scripture praises Anna’s consistent presence in the Temple.

And we thank God for the “Annas” who are not only in this church but in churches throughout the world.

We thank God for the annas who are there, praying and fasting.

The annas who are there mowing the lawn and keeping the church clean.

The annas who are there setting the altar and preparing for worship.

The annas who are busy preparing for Sunday School, getting the music and many aspects of worship together.

The annas that are there making sure that there is something for people to eat and drink in fellowship.

The annas that are busy counting offerings and preparing records for the good functioning of the church.

What happens with these “Annas” is that when they get old and are called to be with God in heaven, people often feel that it will be a little strange not to see them at the church.

Our church and the Church of Christ throughout the world is blessed with the Annas who love the Lord and care enough about Church that they devote their time, their strengths and their resources in service to God and to the body of Christ, the Church.

When the prophetess Anna saw Jesus, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

From this moment, we also learn about Mary and Joseph fleeing with the baby Jesus to Egypt where they found refuge from Pharaoh’s attempt to kill the baby Jesus.

And then, the next we know, Jesus is twelve years old and decides to stay in the Temple following his family’s worship there, listening and discussing Scriptures with the teachers.

## **Baptism**

From this occurrence, Scriptures take us to what we are celebrating today: the Baptism of Christ.

Our Lord is about thirty years old and comes to the Jordan river where John the Baptist baptizes him.

When he is baptized, a voice is heard from heaven.

The Father speaks, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

(Matthew 3:17).

Why was God the Father well pleased with His Son?

I believe the answer is simple: The Son had truly honored the Father with his life.

I am sure that all of us, parents, can relate to that.

When our children do the right things, perform well in school, do their chores, we are pleased with them, aren't we?

Our heavenly Father had sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the world to be a pure sacrifice for our sins and reconcile the world with Him.

For thirty years, the Son did all the right things and now with his baptism he was about to begin his public ministry.

What a joy it was for the Father!

He didn't hold his joy and declared at Christ's baptism that He was well pleased with him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

*Is my heavenly Father well pleased with me as He was with the Lord Jesus?*

*Is our heavenly Father pleased with the way we are living our lives?*

*Could He look down at you and I now and say, “these are my sons and daughters with whom I am well pleased?”*

Our deeds will not save us, and that is loud and clear in the Bible.

Thank God, that He won't base Himself on our deeds to grant us life in heaven. If He did, no one would enter heaven.

But our deeds are not meaningless;

When we do the right things:

When we are like Simeon who was devout and righteous, our heavenly Father is well pleased with us;

When we are devoted to the church like prophetess Anna who prayed and fasted and spent her time at the Temple, God in heaven rejoices and is well pleased with us.

When, like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we honor our heavenly Father with our lives,

He is happy and well pleased with us.

### **Pleasing God in the New Year**

We have begun a new year and many people make new year's resolutions.

New year's resolutions often get a bad press because many people would confess that they're usually materialistic and don't last long.

While a new year represents a unique blessing from God who allows us to transition from the previous year to a new one, a new year also in a unique way provides us with the opportunity to look ahead and aim for something better, a better life, a healthier relationship with our families and friends and all people, a better relationship with our heavenly Father who loves all people but who is only pleased with those that do what is pleasing to Him.

What if today, our commitment was to please our Father in heaven?

That commitment does not need to be one we make for the year but one we can make every day when we wake up in the morning.

That commitment would be about doing only what is pleasing to our heavenly Father throughout the day.

When, like Simeon and Anna,

When like our Savior Jesus Christ who spent his life on earth doing only what was pleasing to his Father, our heavenly Father is well pleased with us and declares upon our lives: “You are my son, you are my daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”

May our lives today and throughout 2017 be pleasing to our Father in heaven.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Written by Pastor Stéphane M. Kalonji*