

# The Second Half of Life

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Mt 3:16-17

It is a great blessing to worship in the Armenian Church during Christmas time, though at first the way our church does things seems out of line with the way the rest of the world celebrates Christmas. We celebrate Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup>, while most other Christians celebrate on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Christmas in other churches is all about baby Jesus. Whereas today-Christmas day in the Armenian Church-we will dwell little on Jesus' birth, but much on his baptism, when he was already thirty years old!

So for all of you hoping to hear "Away in a Manger" or "What Child is This?" on Armenian Christmas, sorry. The Armenian Church pays little attention to baby Jesus, in fact we basically skip over the first thirty years of the life of the most important man who ever lived. But we are in good company, because so do our Holy Scriptures. The four Gospels have a total of eighty-nine chapters, guess how many are about Baby Jesus. Four chapters total, in Luke and Matthew, the other Gospels say nothing. All Gospels are totally silent on what happened from birth to meeting Jesus as a fully grown adult, at his baptism. We know nothing of how Jesus did in school, whether he was up and coming in the family business, or what his neighbors, peers or even family thought of him.

And that-says our Bible and our church tradition-is just how it should be. The Gospel's disregard of Jesus' childhood is not because Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were bad writers, or some pages dropped out of their scrolls when they weren't looking. We focus on Jesus' baptism on purpose during Christmas, and if we are mindful of why we do, we can recover some life-giving perspective on each of our spiritual journeys today.

In celebrating Jesus' birth as an adult, our church acknowledges a truth about each of our spiritual journeys-that as Franciscan writer Richard Rohr says-there are two halves of life, and the second half is much more important. The task of the first half of life, until around 30-40 years old in Jesus day, around 40-50 years old in ours, is to create a proper container for one's life and answer some central questions. "Who am I?" "What makes me significant?" "How can I support myself?" "Who will go with me?" We all must make a container for our lives, Jesus did too, but that's just the first half of life. The great tragedy, however, is if we stop there. Because we miss out on the second half of life, which is quite simply, to find what fills and fulfills the container of your life with the spiritual life it is meant to hold and deliver.

Jesus could have, and maybe did, build up quite a life for himself by the time he was thirty, we don't know. We do know that wherever he went people followed, he was an unparalleled, motivator, coach and teacher. 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' (Jn 7:46) and 'He does all things well' (Mk 7:31) were a couple of his reviews. Yet Jesus' great temptation and ours, which comes in the wilderness crisis of mid-life, is in clinging on to the success, wealth, and influence we build, the container of the first half of life, instead of moving on to its proper contents. Today on Christmas we renounce that temptation, following Jesus' through adult baptism, rebirth in the second half of life, where God wishes to fill our container, with his Holy Spirit, which we in turn share with others in faith, hope and love.

In the end, the first half of Jesus' life just wasn't that important; where he came from, how he was raised and how he did in life. It is to be the same for us. In the end, no one will care about your or my position at work, whether we were deemed successful, or what neighbors, peers or family think of us. What is important, what is the true starting point of life, is when we let go of who we say we are, and open ourselves to who God says we are "This is my beloved Son or Daughter, in whom I am well pleased." For it is on this day that Jesus was fully born, and that we are fully born and baptized in the Holy Spirit. If we can do this, we will experience the continuing miracle of the birth of Christ, of Christmas, which happens not when we are small, but when we come to know in the largest sense, who God is calling us to be, now and always and unto the ages of ages...amen