

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached

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 3:13-17)

Today I almost do not need to preach the sermon, for God already has, He is directly quoted in today's Gospel reading at Jesus' baptism. His profound one sentence sermon is, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Why is this the greatest sermon ever spoken? Well there are three things which make any sermon powerful; the platform, the preacher and the prose, and all these things have never been matched from that day of Jesus' baptism.

First is the platform from which a sermon is given. I have a pretty good platform at St. Hagop, the church and altar are beautiful, 100 people came to listen today, for the most part people don't talk or sleep. But God today isn't speaking from St. Hagop or from anywhere on earth. For His sermon, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended and God's voice came from heaven. "Այսօր ձայնն հայրական երկնից իջեալ," the choir will sing shortly, "On This day the voice of the father resounded from the heavens." The God who formed heaven and earth and all things within it, would now reform his creation in Christ through baptism. "Very truly, I tell you," Jesus would soon say, "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." The platform for God's sermon today is as infinitely high and great as our Father in Heaven.

The second source of power in a sermon is the preacher his or herself. I am a pretty good preacher I think and a fairly decent guy. Right? In fact, recently after church a woman went on and on in her praise. "That sermon," she said, "was one of the most wonderful I've ever heard!" Being humble, I couldn't accept such a great compliment. "Oh, it really wasn't me; it was all the Lord." "Oh, no," she said, "don't misunderstand me, it wasn't THAT good."

God is the perfect, all-powerful creator of all things. God preached the world into existence. He said "Let there be light"; and there was light." He said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...So God created humankind in his image and God blessed them." God spoke his laws through Moses and spoke his loving rebuke through the prophets. God is the greatest preacher, his voice, his character, his presence forms the Old Testament; which in turn formed all of western civilization.

And finally, the prose of a sermon, its words, makes it powerful. I am a pretty good writer of sermons, even though to be honest, I can't even read my own hand-writing. But God is the greatest writer, of the greatest sermon ever written, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." How can the greatest sermon ever written be only 12 words? Well actually it is only one Word, the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." Jesus is God's Word, meaning God's mind, will and heart preached in action, in the very life and death of Jesus. So God's 12 words today are more than words, they are the revelation of the Word, Astvatsahaytnutyun. "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This man's life is the only sermon you and I need.

Today, as we celebrate the birth and baptism of Jesus, God is reaching down and pouring himself out from heaven into His Son. He has revealed to us today his heart and his treasure: [saying], "Here you have my Son, my heart, my treasure, and all that I am!" This is a great privilege and responsibility for Christians. God has shown us—not just told us—who He is, and it is our duty in turn to show and not just tell others what it is to be an Armenian Orthodox follower of Christ. There was never a more powerful sermon preached, and there will never be, than God's Word spoken today, Jesus' life lived in perfect faith, hope and love. May we heed this greatest of all sermons today, and preach it unceasingly in our lives, now and always; amen. Kristos tsnav yev haydnetsav!