

Have you come down from the month of December yet? Feeling bad that you still have holiday decorations hanging around? Well don't beat yourself up, because you are not the only one with some still up. I haven't taken any of my decorations down, but they will be coming down later this week. Now mind you, I didn't have as many as I have had in the past.

We used to put our tree up as early as possible, sometimes even in late November. But on January 1 we began to take the decorations off the tree, but never during the Rose Bowl Parade, usually while the Rose, Sugar or Orange Bowl was playing in the background, because that way we would be ready for the return to school in January.

This year has been a little different. No tree at my place, but one in Burnaby, at Heather's, and one in Ucluelet. My lights are still up and turned on and my manger scene is still up. Christmas will begin to be packed up next week – because the season of Christmas has come to an end.

When I read this week's scripture, I recalled that it was only four (4) weeks ago when we read these verses with expectation and hope as we prepared for Jesus' coming.

I was reading some back ground this week and came across this question - Who baptized Jesus? Most people would say John. But according to what was read this morning, that's what you would answer. But Luke's version of the story, didn't exactly give the details of Jesus's baptism.

According to the background I read, John is out in the wilderness of Jordan preaching and baptizing, and then there is this part; not read this morning:

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

John was arrested, and then we are told that Jesus was baptized. This idea, this suggestion is some scholar asking questions, speculating about what is written. My question goes to this: Does it really matter? What really matters?

God's voice booming down from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

Proud words of a father. It was coronation time, a moment of heavenly WOW! In terms of divine affirmation, there is none better. As an expression of identification, there it is – the Father's pride in his earthly Son.

Everything is taking place as planned. The angelic announcement of Jesus' birth was no accident or chance of fate, neither was Jesus' baptism or his final hours upon the cross or his rising from the dead.

The timeless boundaries of eternity have been vibrating ever since, for that was just the beginning of Jesus' awesome mission. There would be three and a half years of ministry and then our Saviour would be our guiding light for all generations. The world would never be the same again.

That Jesus came down to be baptized by John as did so many others underlines the destiny of his dichotomy – Jesus was God and human. He suffered from no identity crisis, and neither should we. We are brothers and sisters in Jesus' name, saved by his love. Because of this, we can accept our own baptisms with joy and the lives that come afterwards as blessed opportunities to live Godly lives.

Romans 12:2 puts before us our Christian task, an inspired quote for us to chew on and digest in the center of our souls: “Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing** of your minds, so that you may discern **what is the will of God** – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Will we be transformed or conformed? Will we make history or allow ourselves to be made by it? Will we mold society or be shaped by it? Will we be on fire for our Lord or spiritually limp and lukewarm? Will we choose Jesus Christ or be influenced by every idle thought thrown our way by humankind?

We are the recipients of an awesome miracle from heaven that brings an abundance of peace and power to all who follow Christ. How? In Luke 18:27 Jesus promises, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” By prayer to this God, miraculous changes take place all the time.

By way of emphasis, there is a story told about Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. He assigned a slave a most unusual task. Each morning, when the new day was hardly more than a blush upon the horizon, the slave was required to come to Philip’s room and coldly interrupt whatever the king was doing by saying, “*Remember, Philip, thou must die.*”

Confronting the here and now with the hereafter does make one pause to think. Daily looking at our engraved stationery, or our name on the mailbox or office door, or on the little box of tithing envelopes, we are reminded that this earthly life is short.

Remember, Philip, thou must die. And I cry out, “Yes Philip, you must die, but also Philip, you must live.” And Mary you must live. And Jim and Jane and Jerry and John and you and I – we all must live and serve this baptized Lord.

So let’s flex our spiritual muscles, as we read in Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

God did not create us to be timid followers; afraid to think and too fearful to act. Indeed, the thought found in 2 Timothy 1:7 ought to be embedded in our souls: “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

Nor should we forget what Paul writes in Philippians 4:19: “And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). And we, are believers and followers of this Son, humbly pray: Thank you, God, for through your Son we are forgiven and blessedly loved.

We are forgiven without deserving it, forgiven despite our propensity to constantly add to the number of things for which we need to be forgiven. As prodigal children, having stumbled down a thousand wayward roads, we are welcomed back home again and again and again.

The baptism of Jesus is a sermon in symbolism as well as an event in time. It is a call to humility, and we can learn from that. It is a call to obedience, and we can learn from that. It is a call to servanthood, and we can learn from that.

And so this morning, we end where we began, with the voice of God affirming who Jesus was. And we, accepting with awe the coronation of this mission-oriented Christ, are humbled by it. We are blessed by it, and our souls, glow because of it. And as followers of Christ **we will continue our missional activities in our community.** Amen and amen.