

Jesus, the Life of Jesse's Tree

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Jesse Tree / Life; Darkness; Baptism / Matthew 3:13–17

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Coming Advent King. Amen.

A Seed was promised at the beginning of the Bible, and that was the beginning of the story of our Salvation. The Seed was preserved when God protected the life of Isaac, the promised son of Abraham and the bearer of the promise of the Seed of the woman. Through the centuries, God had protected His erring and sinful chosen line. From Jesse, the descendant of Abraham and Isaac, He gave the promise of the Seed to David, the son of Jesse and the great king of Israel. And so it continued for generation after generation.

And when it seemed the darkest, when the promises of God appeared to be only a distant sound echoing to deaf ears, a daughter of Adam, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jesse, and of David brought forth a Son. This Son grew to be a man and lived among his creation. Not as a mighty king like David. Not in the palaces of the powerful. But as one who was from the backwater village of Nazareth, unknown, unacclaimed, unheralded.

On the Jesse Tree is a scallop shell, an ancient symbol of Holy Baptism. It reminds us not only of our Baptism but also of the One whose Baptism sanctifies our own. John was the final prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God, which was coming into the world. And then, Jesus appeared at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. As Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended as a dove upon Him and a voice proclaimed Him to be not just Mary's Son but the Son of God. Here at last was the true Seed promised from the beginning. Here was life!

Though HE was among them, the world could not see who Jesus really was. For Israel, their present circumstance was a daily grim reminder of a much more glorious past. They remembered the days of David and Solomon when they

were a mighty nation, united and powerful. But that was then. Now they were under the thumb of a foreign empire—Rome!

What they did not and could not see was who this man really was as He came to the Jordan to be baptized. He was just another man by all outward appearances. By those that knew him, he was the son of a carpenter, Joseph. In fact, He was less esteemed than most simply because He was from the little village of Nazareth. When Jesus called Philip to follow Him and Philip went to tell Nathanael about Jesus, Nathanael's response sums up the social standing of Jesus of Nazareth: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Yet here He was—the Seed and Root of Jesse's tree. Hidden from the human eye but still present was the very life that gave purpose to the tree of Jesse.

The Lord had raised up a prophet named John to prepare the way of the Christ through proclamation and Baptism. Through Palestine ran the Jordan River, a live-giving source, as its waters irrigated land and quenched the thirst of all. At this river, John stood and preached repentance and baptized all who came.

Then one day, it happens, Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by John, who sees Him, recognizes Him, and states the he, John, should rather be baptized by Jesus. Yet Jesus had come to fulfill all righteousness. At the River Jordan, the truth of who Jesus was would be revealed, no matter what the human eye saw in this Nazarene. St. Matthew tells us:

English Standard Version Chapter 3

16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Human life can seem to be lived in an arid and barren world. We dream of a better day that we imagine once existed for past generations. But in truth, in many ways, the golden eras of the past were not as golden as we might imagine. People then, as now, struggled for meaning and hope. Society wrestled with morality and oppression. The Church struggled to find her voice and identify in the midst of an unbelieving world. As the old adage has it, "The more things

change, the more they stay the same.” This is so true, even today. I have heard people say, “Things are getting worse.” There has always been morality issues...all the way back to the Fall of man when the Seed was promised. There has always been Oppression against the faithful followers of God. Now with what we are experiencing today is nothing new...it could just be new to us.

Yet, just as Palestine had the Jordan River in its midst, so the Church has her source of life-giving water. Always present, even in her darkest days of past, present, and future, is the font of water with the Word. As the Church prays in the Rite of Holy Baptism, “Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You Sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.” Humble water is applied through all-too-human hands of a called and ordained servant of the Word at the command of the One baptized in the Jordan. But just as the glory of Jesus was cloaked in human flesh, so the glory of Baptism is cloaked in water. Here is the unseen but eternal truth of your Baptism expressed in the words of St. Paul:

English Standard Version Chapter 6

4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Here is life—true life—arising from the water sanctified by the life of Jesse’s tree, the life of the world.

The world had long awaited its redemption. As the horror and darkness of human sin descended at the fall, a promise was made by God—a promise of redemption and life in the midst of death. As Abraham prepared to offer up his son of promise to the Lord, God Himself prepared a substitute. As generations passed, the promise of redemption was never rescinded. A promised Seed was carried by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Jesse and David to Mary, their descended. And in Jesus, the Son of Mary and Son of God, the Redeemer came to His broken world. In the midst of death, He came as the true life.

This is the life that defines you and me in a world of death and sin. It is a life that comes from the Creator. It is the life that nourishes the children of God as His Word is proclaimed. It is the life that comes to every altar in every places as the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharistic feast with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. It is a life that has already defeated our great and final enemy, death. As Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, our own Baptism is made sure and certain union with Christ in His death and resurrection. For as St. Paul writes:

English Standard Version Chapter 6

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6

To Jesse's tree came the life of the world, and now that life comes to you and to me!

In the name of Jesus, the life of Jesse's Tree. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our coming Advent King. Amen.