



Reflections & Prayers for Epiphany 2

17 January 2021



Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Revelation 5: 1-10

John 1: 43-51

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

Reflection from Michael - Bishop of Hertford

I wonder if you can think of a moment in your life when the penny dropped? When after you'd be grappling with a question or issue, you suddenly understood and could see things clearly in a way you hadn't experienced before. Maybe it was when you said to yourself 'I'm going to ask her to marry me!' Or 'So that's how you solve a quadratic equation!' When you realised how to get a top spin on your tennis serve? Or when you understood, for the first time, that to avoid that horrible crunching noise it's necessary to put your foot down on the clutch and to move the gear stick simultaneously!

The Oxford English Dictionary would describe all these moments of the penny dropping as epiphanies. It describes an epiphany as ‘a sudden and surprising moment of understanding’.

Epiphany is the season of the church’s year through which we’re living right now. This time is named ‘Epiphany’ because it’s when we get to think about how people came first to encounter Jesus, and then through what he did and what he said, came to moments of understanding, often sudden and surprising, about who Jesus was and what he was all about.

So Epiphany begins by Jesus being encountered by the Magi, the visitors from afar. Last Sunday we thought about Jesus’s baptism, and what that revealed about his relationship with the Father. Next Sunday we’ll hear about Jesus turning the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, the first of the signs, that showed who he was. The season ends at Candlemas, when we hear about the infant Jesus being recognised in the temple in Jerusalem by Simeon and Anna for who he was to be, the light of all people.

Today’s reading tells about a moment of epiphany in just one person’s life. The encounter between Jesus and the man Nathanael, who in the most amazing penny dropping moment was able to see Jesus for who he truly was, understand what Jesus was to be all about. Let’s look at the story now.

It starts with Jesus making his way back to his home region of Galilee from the Jordan where he’s been baptised by John. And at this stage of his ministry, Jesus is gathering people around himself. So the Gospel says he finds Philip who comes from Bethsaida, up at the top of Lake Galilee, someone who’s in the circle of others who are being called to be with Jesus, Peter and Andrew.

As Jesus has found Philip, so Philip finds Nathanael, who gets this one starring moment in the whole of John’s Gospel, unless he’s the same Nathanael who gets a very brief mention right at the end in a list in Chapter 21.

Who is Nathanael? Well maybe better than being given this particular name, it would be more accurate if he were identified in the Gospel as everyman, John Smith, a good, straightforward, first century Jewish man living in the region of Galilee. Nathanael is representative. He's a man of faith – So Philip introduces Jesus to Nathanael by telling him that Jesus is 'the one about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.' Nathanael is capable of using his judgement. When Philip tells him that Jesus comes from Nazareth, Nathanael says 'Well whatever good came out of there?' When Jesus sees Nathanael he says of him 'Now here's an Israelite in whom there's no deceit!' What you see is what you get. Nathanael is an ordinary bloke, just as ordinary as you me, or any of our family or friends.

And just like you and me, Nathanael has hopes and dreams, imaginations and fears. He wonders what life is all about, what he's here for. He asks what God's up to when the world is like it is. He wants the best for his wife and kids and the community around him. He thinks about stuff.

And Jesus knows that all this is going on in Nathanael's heart. How do we know this? Because when Nathanael asks Jesus 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus replies 'I saw you under the fig tree' – the place in the imagination of a first century Israelite where you went to think about the deep things of life.

In my mind's eye, there's an extraordinary flash of recognition in that moment. In this encounter, Nathanael knows that all that stuff that goes on in his heart, that goes on in each of our hearts, has been seen by Jesus. Jesus has seen through, right to the very centre of Nathanael's being.

And as he is seen by Jesus, the penny drops in Nathanael. In response to being seen to his very core he says to Jesus in a moment of sudden and surprising recognition 'You are the son of God, the King of Israel!'

To which Jesus replies 'You think that was surprising? You ain't seen nothing yet!'

You call yourself an Israelite. Like me, descended from the first Israel, Jacob, who saw his ladder reaching into heaven with the angels ascending and descending on it'. All those promises God made to him, to our people, they're not just about back then! You're going to meet them in me today, just like I met you!

What might be our Epiphany from this story? If he were here today, what would Nathanael say to us? I reckon he's say something like this.

That whoever we are, wherever we are, Jesus knows us. He knows that none of us is ordinary, everyman, John or Joanna Smith. He knows that all of us are unique and special, with gifts and abilities, weakness and failings, with all the potential to be creative and wonderful that's the birthright of every human being, with all the potential to mess things up and be selfish that afflicts every human being. Nathanael would tell us that Jesus knows our hopes and dreams, imaginations and fears. He knows that we wonder what life is all about, what we're here for, that we ask what God's up to when the world is like it is. That we want our best for our families and friends and the community around us. That we think about stuff.

And knowing and recognising all that Nathanael would ask us, 'If Jesus sees all that in you, when will the penny drop in your understanding? When will you see Jesus as your brother, your friend, your captain, your king, your saviour, your God? Will you know him as the beginning of your story and its end? That he is here for you, longs for you, searches for you and has found you.

Will you be open to that Epiphany? For if we can be, we ain't seen nothing yet. Amen.

Prayers

Collect

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen

O God, our sovereign and our shepherd,
who brought again your Son Jesus Christ from the valley of death,
comfort us with your protecting presence
and your angels of goodness and love,
that we also may come home
and dwell with him in your house for ever. Amen.

A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love.
In Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

As our saviour taught us, so we pray
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours
 now and for ever. Amen

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Anglican Church of Australia
Monday	The Diocese of Aipo Rongo – The Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea
Tuesday	The Diocese of Ajayi Crowther – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Wednesday	The Diocese of Akobo – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan
Thursday	The Diocese of Akoko – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Friday	The Diocese of Akoko Edo – The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Saturday	The Diocese of Akot – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Haynes (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Monday	Parish of Henlow (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Tuesday	Parish of Hexton (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Wednesday	The Parish of Higham Gobion (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Thursday	Parish of Husborne Crawley (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Friday	Parish of Langford (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)
Saturday	Parish of Maulden (Deanery of Ampthill and Shefford)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Dickinsons Field, East Common
Monday	Eastcote Drive, Eastmoor Park
Tuesday	Ennis Close, Fairmead Avenue
Wednesday	Fairway Close, Field Close
Thursday	Fovant Close, Gordon's Walk
Friday	Gorselands, Grange Court Road
Saturday	Green Lane Close, Greenway

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Enid, Chris, Sophie and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Peter Redsell

On their year's mind:

Elsie Woods, George Seagrave, James Holdaway, Angel Rogerson, Jessica Hignall, Barbara Astley, Gladys Girling, Alan Turner, Jennifer Ashley

[A notice from the Churchwardens](#)

An update on the vacancy process and our plans for the recruitment of a new incumbent

Following Bishop Michael's visit to St John's on 13 December last year at which he announced Berkeley's resignation, we wanted to update you on the vacancy process and our plans for the recruitment of a new incumbent.

The churchwardens and the ministry team have met (virtually) with the Archdeacon of St Albans, Jane Mainwaring, and have been in touch with Bishop Michael about the planned timetable for recruitment. As Bishop Michael said when he visited, there is a wish to move quickly towards filling the vacancy with the right candidate for our church and our parish.

With this in mind, members of the church (those who are on the electoral roll) will be invited to an Informal Vacancy meeting by Zoom on Tuesday

evening, 19th January, at 7:30pm. Bishop Michael and Archdeacon Jane will be present at this meeting. This is an important meeting at which we will discuss and agree what we are looking for as a congregation in our next incumbent and to work through how we want to present ourselves in our Parish Profile, the document that we publish that describes ourselves and our future vision when we advertise the vacancy. Please hold this date in your diaries. An invitation with a Zoom link will be provided to people who are on the newsletter distribution list next week.

If you are not able to attend this meeting for whatever reason, you are welcome to provide your input in advance of the meeting. If you choose to do this, it would be helpful if you were to do so by sending your input to the churchwardens, or to the Parish Office, and it would be helpful if you were to focus on answering the following two questions:

1. In many ways not much has changed since the last profile was written, but in many ways lots has changed. How does that need to be reflected in the profile?
2. What are the key gifts, skills and experience that you would wish to see in your next vicar?

Following this meeting, the PCC will agree the Parish Profile at a meeting in February (The "Section 11 Meeting", at which two Parish Representatives will be elected to lead the selection process on behalf of the congregation). We anticipate advertising for the vacancy over a four week period in March and to move towards interviewing and selection of a candidate after that time. The format of the interview process will clearly depend upon the Covid-19 situation, but we will no doubt be seeking assistance from members of the congregation nearer the time.

Most clergy operate to a three month notice period and so there will be a necessary delay between offering the role and our incumbent arriving. In the meantime, we are particularly grateful to Jill Suttie for continuing to provide support and guidance to the ministry team and to the churchwardens, and to David Nye for his efforts in securing the services of visiting clergy to preside for us. We are very pleased to be able to tell you that both Archdeacon Jonathan Smith and Bishop Stephen Venner have offered to preside about once a month for the next few months.

For the time being, we will continue to livestream the 9:30am Sunday Eucharist rather than meeting in person, and will of course let you know if and when we will return to meeting together in church.

Berkeley and Alex have now moved out of the vicarage although they might be around to do a final clear out of their belongings. If you would like to communicate with Berkeley then the best way is to do so via Julie in the Parish Office.

There are many people working hard during our vacancy and towards filling our vacancy and we are grateful to all of you for your additional efforts at this time.

Jane & James

Church opening:

The coronavirus continues to spread alarmingly. It is because of that and in the light of government advice to stay at home whenever possible, that it has been decided to close the church. It is now only open on Sunday after the service (which will continue) until 4pm. The decision will be reviewed as circumstances change but in any event before the end of February.

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).