



Parish of St Peter & St Paul, Abington
- the Church in the Park -
**Welcome to our February Newsletter
2024**

Rector's Pastoral Letter

One of the characters we meet during the season of Epiphany is Nathanel. He is one of the characters that stands out in John's gospel. Because he appears only in John's gospel.

Most scholars think this Nathanel was the same person as Bartholomew who appears as one of the twelve in other gospels but not in John's gospel. The fact that Bartholomew doesn't appear in John's gospel also supports this.

In fact, Bartholomew isn't really a proper first name. 'Bar' means son, 'Tholomew' comes from Aramaic name, Talmai which means farmer. So Bartholomew means 'son of a farmer'. Whereas Nathanel is a proper first name which means a 'gift of God'. Most scholars therefore think Nathanel's middle name could have been Bartholomew. It could have been like this. Nathanael Bartholomew (son of Talmai) just like Jesus, son of Joseph, of Nazareth.

When Philip came to Nathanael to tell him about Jesus, Nathanael says this.

'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (John 1.46). This may sound a bit mean. But there is an interesting background to this comment.

The word 'good' here in the original Greek bible, is 'Agathos'. Agathos is used to describe something or someone that is godly or divine. It is kind of good that originates from God. For example, when we say 'He is a good man or He is a godly man', that's Agathos.

So when Nathanel says, 'Can anything good (Agathos) come out of Nazareth?' What he means is 'Can anything divine come out of Nazareth?' And there is a reason why he says this.

According to John, Nathanael was from Cana. Now this is important because Cana is only 4 miles away from Nazareth.

If you start walking from Nazareth up the hill a bit to the north for less than 4 miles then on the hill top, there is Cana. Nazareth and Cana are neighbouring villages. And like many other villages, rivalries between villages were common (think of Weston Favell or Moulton!). The distance between Nazareth and Cana isn't that different from the distance between Abington and Northampton Town Centre.

You know what Northampton the town centre is like. Imagine, a friend came to you and said, 'I met a man in the town centre and I think he is the messiah.' How would you respond to that? I would probably say, 'Are you sure? Can anything good really come out of Northampton town Centre?'

I can imagine Nathanael saying, 'Are you sure? I know Nazareth. I have been there many times. I have friends there. There is nothing special about Nazareth. Can anything good really come out of Nazareth?' We can understand him.

But this isn't just about a place like Nazareth or Northampton town centre. For we all have our Nazareths. It may be a person or a situation or a place that feels too ordinary, mundane or even frustrating.

When I was frustrated in a situation, when I was disheartened or disappointed in a circumstance, my response was not very different from Nathanael's.

My Nazareth this winter has been our boiler. It just keeps on breaking. I said those words. 'Can anything good come out of this?'

I wonder what your Nazareth is? Perhaps you have said, 'Can anything good come out of my situation where I am crippled by anxiety?' 'Can anything good come out of this place where I feel trapped and frustrated?' 'Can anything good come out of this time that just feels like a constant struggle.'

Just like Nathanael, we often can't see how anything good can come out of our Nazareths. We cannot believe that God could be present, active, and revealed in our Nazareths whether it be another person, a relationship or situation. For us Nazareth is a blind spot. But for God, however, Nazareth is the place where he reveals himself to us. Christ comes into our life from Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth searches for you.

Did you know, throughout the whole gospel, it is always Jesus who approaches his followers first even before they knew him. It is always Jesus who sees them first. The only person that recognises Jesus first is John the Baptist whose whole life's purpose was to find him and prepare the way for him. Apart from John the Baptist, never a single occasion there is when someone recognises Jesus first and starts following him. It's always Jesus who sees first and calls his disciples to follow him. You can see this in this story of Nathanel.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me'. Philip found Nathanel 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 Philip, '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.' (John 1.43-47)

Friends, God searches for you even before you search for him. And this is what he does as he looks into your heart.

'Jesus said to Nathanael, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.' (John 1.48)

Jesus looks into Nathanael's heart and affirms him with that encouragement. Jesus looks into your heart not to condemn you or to find any dirt. He looks into your heart to encourage you and bring out that is good within you.

Was Nathanael so perfect that Jesus didn't find any shortcomings and failings? I don't think so. Think about what he said a moment ago about Nazareth and Jesus. And yet Jesus says, 'Nathanael, you are an honest man. You have no deceit in your heart.' What an encouragement to be affirmed by Jesus that way!

Nathanael asks, *'How did you come to know me?' (John 1.48)*

He is asking this because he knows he is not perfect. He remembers what he has just said about Jesus and Nazareth. He remembers those times when he was at his lowest moment. I imagine this was what was going through his mind. 'Jesus, I appreciate your kind encouragement but if you had really looked into my heart and examined it thoroughly, how could you say what you have just said about me?'

Jesus replies, *'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.'* (John 1.59)

We don't know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree. But we can imagine based on the clues.

If you look up on the internet a fig tree in Galilean region, you can easily find a picture of a big fig tree and a good shade under it. A good shade means a good place to gather. People often gathered under the fig tree in that region. Some people gathered to listen to rabbis' teachings. Some people just sat there to pray. Some more devout people meditated under the fig tree, waiting for the Messiah. Fig tree was often a place where people gathered with their desires, longings, concerns and hopes.

When Jesus said, 'I saw you under the fig tree', Nathanael instinctively knew that Jesus understood his longings and hopes, his troubles and sorrows.

I wonder what your own fig tree might be? The place where you were just on your own with your own grief and sorrow?

Is there any chance that Jesus is saying the same to you today? Whatever you have been through last year and whatever concerns and hopes you might have for this new year, Jesus understands them all because he saw you under your fig tree.

When Nathanael only could see and think about his own Nazareth. Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig tree. When Nathanael looked at Nazareth, he couldn't find anything good. But when he finally came to meet Jesus, his eyes were opened. His question changed. His question was no longer, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth.?' but 'Can God bring anything good out of Nazareth?' And the answer is: Yes, he can.

Can God bring anything good out of Nathanael, son of a farmer? Yes, he can. Can God bring anything good out of your situation? Yes, he can and he will. Why? Because he searched for you even before you searched for him. He comes to you out of Nazareth. And he sees you. So the Psalmist said,

*You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.*

*You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

*You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.*

*Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.*

*You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

*How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

*Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you. (Psalm 139)*

Amen.

This month's preachers

4th February, 2 before Lent: Prester Coleman
11th February, 1 before Lent: Alison Barnes
14th February, Ash Wednesday: Revd. Jun Kim
18th February, Lent 1: Revd. Jun Kim
25th February, Lent 2: Liz Kelly

Readers and Intercessors for this month

4th February, 2 before Lent: Readers: Susie & Simon McKay
Intercessor: Hilary Hodge
11th February, 1 before Lent: Readers: Eric May & Jim Mercer
Intercessor: Liz Kelly
14th February, Ash Wednesday: Readers: Andrew Munns & Alicia Menzies
Intercessor: Donald Loe
18th February, Lent 1: Readers: Jenny Parkin & John Murphy
Intercessor: Jenny Parkin
25th February, Lent 2: Readers: Jill & Damian Pickard
Intercessor: Bob Purser

Forest Church



Palm Crosses for Ashe Wednesday



Please return your palm crosses by the Shrove Tuesday. Ash Wednesday Service this year is the 14th of February at 7.30 pm.

Children and Young People February Update

Christmas now seems a long time ago! However, as I write this, it is good to remember what a special time it was and also to thank God for all the people who came to the Christmas services.

The Christingle service took place on 10th December and 30 children came with their families. We made our own Christingles and then enjoyed a time of worship together, celebrating God's light in the world, and the difference He makes in our lives.

Then on Christmas Eve we held the Crib service. We were delighted to welcome lots of families, and the church was full, with over 180 children and adults. Revd. Tracy had organised the service, which included making some very impressive papier-mâché Christmas characters, who were brought forward by



members of the congregation as the Christmas story unfolded. Esme was the narrator and other members of the Junior Church team were on hand to help during the service. The service was an opportunity to share some of the mystery and wonder of the Christmas story.

Our Little Fishes family also celebrated Christmas, by having a party and enjoying together the story of Jesus' birth. We now regularly have about 22 children attending the sessions on Monday mornings at the Rooms. Due to the success of this group, we are no longer able to accept new families. However anyone who is interested in joining the group in the coming months are advised to contact me and I will add their names to a waiting list. Some children will be moving onto nursery in the spring and at this point we should be able to accept new children who wish to join us.



In December I made a request for some more volunteers to help at Little Fishes. I am very grateful that Jenny Parkin and Sue Harrison have now joined

the team. At Little Fishes we can often have over 50 children and adults, so it is a busy time and everyone's help is really appreciated!

Looking forward, the next Forest Church will take place on Monday 19th February at 2 pm. We will meet at the church and go out into the park to explore together God's wonderful creation. Thank you to Revd. Tracy for organising this event.



Finally, we plan to introduce All Age Eucharist services every two months, usually on the second Sunday in the month. The first of these will be on Sunday 10th March, which is also Mothering Sunday. There won't be any Junior Church on these dates and the children will be invited to take part in the worship. More information about these services in the coming months.

If you would like to participate in the children and young people's ministry, (perhaps you are new to the church and would like to get involved in this wonderful work!) I would love to hear from you!

Cathy Tinsley, Children and Youth Missioner - 07516 979223 or children@abingtonchurch.org.uk

Rector's statement to the PCC on Living in Love and Faith

**The following statement was made by the Rector at the latest PCC meeting in November 2023 shortly after the General Synod passed the blessing for same sex couples with Prayer of Love and Faith.*

Living in love and faith is an official project of the Church of England intended to provide grounds for conversations about sexuality and marriage.

Recently the synod has been debating about whether to allow an official service of blessing for same sex couples in the Church. The latest synod approved this motion by a narrow margin. This means priests can now choose whether to conduct such service or object to it.

It has caused all sorts of reactions from ultra conservative wings of the church to the very liberal and radical wings of the church. Some parishes are threatening to withdraw their parish shares to the Diocese as a protest. Some are seeking alternative arrangements for their episcopal oversight.

You may have noticed that I have been very quiet about this agenda and haven't introduced the project to the church. It was a deliberate decision made for the following reason.

Let me take myself as an example. I love you all in Christ and you love me as a fellow disciple of Christ. Now I happen to be Korean. Let's say one day someone in the church comes to me and says, 'Jun, you are Korean but that's okay. We still love you.' And s/he asks others, 'Folks, Jun is Korean but that's okay, isn't it? You would still love him. Wouldn't you?'

How would I feel? I would probably wonder why the question is even needed? I felt Living in Love and Faith (LLF) could be a bit like that in our context.

Sometimes actions speak much louder than words. I was convinced that the way the people of Abington love and care for each other speaks for itself. We love and care for each other regardless of our backgrounds, our political views and our sexual orientation. You love someone because of who they are. Sexuality is only part of our identity that is much larger and deeper that was formed and created by God's own hands. Therefore it is not sexuality that defines the person.

It is God who defines the person who s/he is. It is also their response to God that will define who s/he will become. Whether we are Korean or English, whether we are gay or straight, that doesn't change that God himself is our creator and he knows who we are and who we are meant to be better than we do. Our identity was born and is continuing to be formed in Him and His grace. And he holds us in his love even when we struggle to see his hands active in our lives. It is because of God's grace that Jun will be still Jun, John will be still John, Melissa will be still Melissa.

Since the motion is passed by the Synod now, I thought this is the right time for me to clarify my position here to the PCC and invite you to share with me your views if you wish.

When this trial service of blessing is officially introduced, then I will be willing to conduct such service of blessing for any couples who seek God's help regardless of their sexuality. I welcome that the church will send a message

that our God welcomes everyone, gay, straight, citizens, foreigners, married, single, divorced, black, white, Asian. All have place at God's table. All need God's blessing and help.

This does not mean, as the synod emphasised, any change in doctrinal understanding on marriage. The traditional understanding of marriage in the church remains the same. This also does not mean that this matter is now closed and we will not pray about it anymore. This is simply a decision to take a step further in an attempt to respond faithfully towards where God may be calling us to be to share his grace and love in this world.

No one holds the full truth except God himself. Some people tend to say what they believe to be right is the absolute truth. But the only full truth we know which we received from the Bible is this: Jesus Christ is the truth, the way and the life. Only He holds the full truth. We can only try to discern and follow him, acknowledging that God's ways and thoughts are always higher than ours.

It is crucial therefore to approach this kind of matters with a great sense of humility and with an attitude that leaves space for God and His mystery to inspire us and enlighten us as we continue to journey on. Sometimes we will succeed, sometimes we won't as we try to get closer to His truth and live by that truth which is why we will always have to be prepared to seek forgiveness and guidance at every step of the way.

LLF is not perfect. It has, I am sure like many other things we do as human beings, flaws and shortcomings. However, the Church invites us to take this step together not because it's perfect but because we want to find a way to respond to God's calling and to meet the challenges and needs of this world faithfully.

I am reminded of the command that our Lord gave to us.

"A new command I give you: Agree with one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you agree with one another."

No, that's not quite what he said. He said this,

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13.34)

Regardless of our personal position over this issue, we can and should continue to seek God's guidance, His forgiveness and healing for ourselves and for each

other. In a sense that is much more important than which position we stand. How we love each other even when we disagree is more important than what we disagree about. Because there has been and always will be a disagreement in church if not over this issue then over another issue. *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

So if you disagree with me, that’s absolutely okay. I would just ask you one thing. Please pray for me as I pray for you and let’s stand together on the common ground of God’s love and His Kingdom that overcomes all barriers and differences. If you agree with me. I would ask you the same thing. Please pray for me as I pray for you and let’s stand together with those who may disagree with us but still loved by God.

We all need God’s forgiveness and His guidance. As long as we remember that; As long as we focus on following Him, our Great Shepherd, seeking His guidance and grace not achieving our own agenda, then I am confident that He will build His Church with us and through us and we will be led closer to Him who is the way, the truth and the life.

**After the Rector’s remarks, supportive and appreciative comments were made by the PCC, saying, ‘Thank you for saying that.’ ‘We will support you.’*

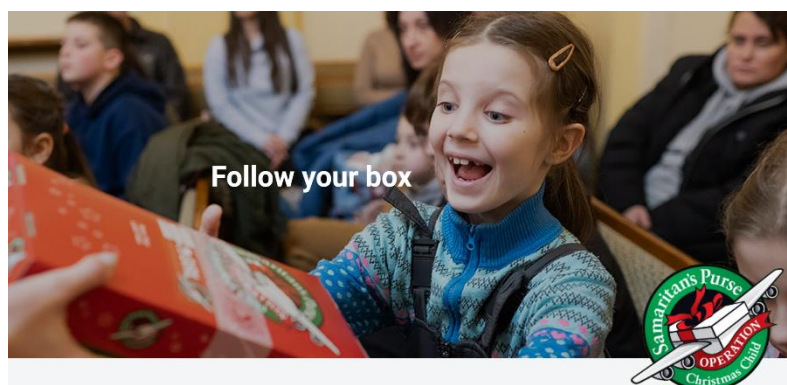
Our Christmas shoeboxes have arrived their destination!

Our shoebox gifts packed in the UK are now bringing joy to children living in the Balkans!

These shoebox gifts are helping to show the love of Christ, planting seeds and building goodwill between communities of all faiths and none.

However, while political and religious sensitivities

continue within some parts of the Balkans, for the safety of our ministry



partners living in restricted areas, we are not able to disclose details about the specific country your shoebox was sent to.



Please know that even though we are not able to disclose exactly where your shoebox gift went, we are confident that it will bring great joy and hope to the precious child receiving it, both now and for many years to come.

Your lovingly packed shoebox gifts make such a difference! We've shared some of our favourite videos, photos and stories from the wider Balkans region of children who received shoebox gifts just like yours.

More photos can be seen here: <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/the-balkans>

This is one of the stories from the Balkans.

Ivana's Shoebox

"Hello, my name is Ivana. I am sharing my story as I believe it can encourage some people. Many years ago, at the orphanage I grew up in, a woman came and brought us gifts in a box. It was the first time we saw such gifts. They were very decorated and beautiful and full many things. Inside was a letter from a family in England. It was a wonderful feeling that someone from afar was thinking of us other children in not so nice surroundings and conditions. An orphanage is a place where no child should be. The people working there gave their best and I thank them, but growing up without parents is hard. The shoebox gift led me to meet my saviour Jesus Christ and even after 25 years and I continue to follow Him and pass this on to my children. I teach them to share, to give, to give gifts and to be friends to those who need it. We thank you because year after year you continue to make many children of this world happy, including me."

News from Abington Park View Care Home

Here are some pictures of the Messy Vintage Service held in December. Everyone made beautifully decorated stars and after we'd listened to the story of the Wise Men visiting Jesus, we sang the much loved carol, 'We Three Kings.'



We held the first Songs of Praise Service of 2024 on 10th January, and we thought about how many new years we'd all seen. Bob is 99 years old, so we looked back at events in history every ten years from 1925.

Charlie Chaplin appeared in the film 'The Gold Rush' then. In 1935 the 30pmh speed limit was introduced; VE Day was 7th May 1945; and in 1955, Bill Haley's 'Rock around the clock' was in the hit parade. As we listened to it again, tapping our feet, Kelly and Shirley got up and showed us how it was done!

We discovered many more facts from 1965 to the present day, and we played the Beatles song 'Yesterday' as well as singing some familiar hymns. A good time was had by all!

Then on 24th January, we held a more reflective Holy Communion Service, in which we commemorated the Conversion of St Paul and sang 'Amazing Grace', 'Just as I am', and 'To God be the glory'.

Thank you to Sarah, Lisa and all the staff who make us so welcome. We shall be visiting again on 7th February for the next Songs of Praise Service and then on 21st February for the first Messy Vintage session of 2024.



Charitable Giving

Thank you for your incredibly generous response to our Christmas collections to help others. We have raised the following amounts for our nominated charities.

Read Easy	£1,100
Christians Against Poverty	£1,200

In addition, the collection at our Christingle Service raised a total of £61.65 for The Children's Society and we have a further £100 to donate to Baby Basics. Thank you so much for your kindness.

Lent Lunches

We are hosting three Lent Lunches this year, all on Saturdays, on 17th February, 9th and 23rd March. They will begin between 12 noon & 12.30pm.

If you are able to help on Saturday 23rd March, please contact Hilary Hodge for more information.

[Draft Minutes from the last PCC Meeting](#)

Please click the title above to access the link.

Antiques Fair



Abington Antiques,
Vintage & Collectors Fair
Saturday 3rd February 2024
10am – 3pm
Abington Church Rooms,
Park Avenue North,
Books, Coins, Stamps,
Old Bottles, Jewellery, Collectables, etc
Enquiries: 01604 622497

The Northampton Philharmonic Choir

The Northampton Philharmonic Choir are hosting a Come & Sing: Choral Classics event on Saturday 16th March at St Michael's & All Angels. For more information please visit the website on the bottom of the poster.

A purple poster for a choral event. The background features a large treble clef and scattered musical notes. The text is white and centered. At the bottom, there is a QR code and a website URL.

**Northampton Philharmonic
Choir**

**COME & SING :
CHORAL
CLASSICS**

**St Michael's & All Angels Church,
Perry Street, Northampton, NN1 4HL**

SATURDAY 16TH MARCH 2024

**Tickets £15 including music – online or
on the door**



Come along and join us for the day and enjoy singing
some choral classics.

Timetable for the day:

- 10:30 – 11:00 Registration
- 11:00 – 13:00 Rehearsal
- 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch
- 14:00 – 17:00 Rehearsal
- 18:00 Concert

www.northamptonphilharmonicchoir.co.uk

Zoom Compline

This is a weekly service at 7.00pm on Tuesdays. In case you don't know, Compline is a quiet, reflective service at the end of the day and includes an open prayer time, so we are able to continue to support one another. The joining details are: Meeting I.D. 815 8020 8528. Passcode 409450 Please talk to Liz Kelly if you want to know more about this and to receive a weekly invitation by email, which enables one-click joining. Her contact details are: lizmk@outlook.com or telephone on 07745 604591.

How to get your contribution or event into the next Abington Newsletter

Please send content to Matthew George, **not** to his personal email address, but to abingtonbulletin@outlook.com by the 21st of the month for guaranteed inclusion in the next edition. If you send it after the 21st, it may not be included. If you wish to have a printed version delivered to you, please contact Bob Purser 785836. There will also be a small number of copies in church for visitors.