

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

Collect

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation to your glory,
hidden through past ages
and made known In Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Reading 1 Samuel 3.1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." ' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Gospel

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

This is the Second Sunday of Epiphany – notice the word 'of' – not the second Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany is a season just like Advent or Lent. It is easy to think about it as just the time when we think about the visit of the wise men to the Christ child. But it is much more. If you look up the meaning of the word you will find phrases like 'a sudden perception of the essential nature or meaning of something' and 'an intuitive grasp of reality or an illuminating discovery'.

During the season of Epiphany we come to see and understand something of the nature of the baby whose birth we have just celebrated. Our lectionary readings take us to think about Christ's baptism as we did last week and we will go on to look at his first miracle and his teaching and healing. While today we consider the way he was recognised by some of those who heard the call to come and see and would go on to become his closest followers.

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Our first reading tells us about the young Samuel who was serving his apprenticeship with the wise old priest Eli. Samuel had not yet come to know God personally so when he hears a voice in the night he assumes that Eli is calling him. Eli is able to help the boy recognise and listen to the word of God so that he can respond "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening". Samuel grows up to become the last of the great judges of Israel and the first of the king makers. Eli is remembered and honoured as the one who made the introduction that enabled this new beginning.

Ten centuries later the same is true of others – John the Baptist introduces some of his own disciples to Jesus and in today's gospel reading we hear how Philip introduces Nathaniel.

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.' Hebrews 1.1,2.

God has come to us in Jesus to show us his love but in order to understand this we need to get to know him and very often this is made possible by being introduced by others.

Jesus did not directly call Nathaniel to be one of the Twelve but he called Philip. Just as Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, Philip seeks out his friend Nathaniel and excitedly tells him that Jesus of Nazareth is the long awaited Messiah. But Nathaniel is highly sceptical and laughs, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" People of Nazareth were generally looked down on. However, he agreed to go with his friend to meet Jesus. He immediately became conscious that Jesus knew him through and through, even though they had never met before and that was enough to make him believe and offer himself as a follower of Jesus.

We do not hear any more about Nathaniel in the gospels but it is thought that he might be the Bartholomew in the other gospels and Acts. - Bar-tholomew meaning son of Tholomew rather like a surname. Bartholomew went on to become a missionary, carrying news of Jesus to Syria and Asia.

Nathaniel came to faith through his friend. Philip did nothing to try to persuade him but just shared his own excitement and invited Nathaniel to see for himself. Philip did no more; Jesus did all the rest. As soon as Nathaniel met Jesus for himself, he believed.

Many of us can remember people who introduced us to Jesus, or who accompanied us on our journey of faith. Of course, we each have to play our part in introducing others to Jesus but we don't have to be great missionaries to do this. If we believe that Jesus is worth knowing we will bring others into his presence by our quiet witness. The story of Christianity is a story of a great chain of witnesses linked through the apostles to Jesus himself. The Christian faith grows and there will never be an end to it because someone like Philip will bring another person to meet Jesus of Nazareth saying 'Come and see'.

The epiphany continues as Jesus is shown to others as the Christ –
"God in man made manifest."