

Epiphany 2

I don't quite know where it came from last week, but my one sentence question: 'Do you know a good motor insurance company?' seemed to get more response than any sermon I've given recently! So it's all downhill from here....

'Do you know a good bank that might stay open in Woodbridge this year?!

Last week I tried to focus, with you, on the meaning of Epiphany and this new season – the 'showing' or revelation of the child Jesus who, today, has already grown up to be an adult. He is setting up his stall in the market place to foster new vocations and partners – to reveal, if you like, the promise of a new kind of life, discipleship and witness to those around him - whom he chooses to seek out and follow him. We are not really told why or what task, or mission is anticipated.

In today's Gospel snippet from John, though, there is a rumour of the new presence of someone who is more than a prophet and Philip instinctively knows and needs to share this exciting news with Nathaniel. In the amusing first exchange when Nathaniel hears that Jesus comes from Nazareth, he sounds like someone from Yorkshire saying "O, e's from down South, they put Rs' after their A's lad, "Barth" instead of bath! You can hear the banter, can't you? It's 5 degrees colder up here...those soft southerners, eh?!

Philip stays with the task in hand and wants to introduce him to this very special Rabbi and, as we are told, he was instantly

smitten – he recognized and, much more than that – he honoured this ‘King’ in his midst. This was not one of the exotic Parthian visitors we remembered last week who constantly irritated the Roman occupation. This was ‘God among us’. This was ‘God, made Man’ – the good, blessed and sacred man, who came from Nazareth, Jesus son of Joseph.

And, John hints and writes quite purposely in his Gospel...this encounter with Nathaniel is not just like someone meeting their favourite celebrity for the first time. What he will experience in his closer company in the future will be truly inspiring and wonderful. He may not have understood all this imagery at the time any more than, last week, the children understood the mystery and wonder and meaning of the Magi’s gifts.

But let’s never forget the beginnings of wonder and awe which only Christ could inspire in those around him, whether they were children, kings, servants, or dreamers like Nathaniel sleeping under the fig tree. My goodness, how he woke up suddenly to encounter someone who would change his life for ever; someone who would lead him and help him discover God’s beautiful kingdom where truth speaks to power and justice speaks to oppression and violence.

It has never been easy to become a disciple of Jesus because we are always caught off-guard and everyday banter and conversation suddenly stops when the voice and calling of Jesus probes much deeper into our hearts and souls. But

surely that is the real 'epiphany' of discovering a Christian life whatever we end up doing or wherever we end up living.

Being awake to God's promises of life in all its fullness and richness, is the best rumour of all to keep alive, where we are, where we live and work or play.

Next week is really important for all of us to recognise that the differences amongst us as Christian communities are a distraction from our call to Christian discipleship – some would say a 'luxury' we cannot afford in such secular times. Our Week of Prayer for Christian Unity certainly has its challenges and distractions but as one of my former Bishop's was fond of saying... "The things which unite us are greater than those which divide us." We must press on for greater mutual understanding and appreciation of our different traditions and concentrate more on our welcoming, and practical hands-on discipleship, which speaks of God's unconditional love.

A big thank you to those of you who have already signed up for our new Friday winter welcoming with soup and 'sarnies' (as they say 'up north') in St Mary's House. In however small a way this is a sign of God's working among us today and lighting up lives with 'epiphany' moments of reciprocal warmth, friendship and care.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier:

Amen.