

## **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’**

In our first reading this morning from the book of the prophet Samuel, the young child Samuel hears the voice of God in the local Temple. The story tells of how he mistook God's voice for Eli's - he was so accustomed to responding to the needs of the old man. Samuel comes to the realisation, with Eli's help, that God was speaking to him directly, and from this we hear those famous words, "Here I am." This small child, born out of the prayers and beseechings of Hannah, apprenticed to the priest, hears God's call to become a judge in Israel - and he responds, 'Here I am.'

In our gospel reading from John, we hear of the calling of Nathanael, he himself comes from Cana, and speaks another group of famous words, " Can anything good come out of Nazareth." Now Nazareth was the rival village to Cana and hence the strange outburst when Philip tells Nathanael that they have found the one who the prophets and Moses predicted would come - the Messiah. "Surely that can't be true - the Messiah, from Nazareth - no way!"

But God is full of surprises - Mary a poor peasant girl giving birth to God's Son, Jesus born in a stable where animals are kept, visited by shepherds and Kings, Jesus following his earthly Father into the trade of a carpenter - not exactly the stuff of royalty - not exactly the way a conquering hero is expected to be raised?

But Nathanael gets up from under the tree, he walks out from the protective shade, out into full sun, out into the blinding light - and he meets Jesus, who immediately surprises him by knowing all about him. The blinding light will show him much more than knowledge of what he has been up to - it will eventually show him something far greater than a mere Messiah, because when you are with Jesus it is as though you are in the very house of God - in the Temple, just like the boy Samuel - with God speaking to you directly, opening your eyes and your heart - and you may even see angels coming and going, like Jacob and the ladder - why? Because God's own presence is right there beside you. No wonder Nathanael says, "You're the son of God! You're the king of Israel!" He could have said, 'Behold the Lamb of God' - as John the Baptist had, seven verses earlier. For God, again, full of surprises, would sacrifice his son, just as a lamb would regularly be sacrificed in the Temple - sacrificed for our sakes - for our benefit. God's glory is revealed once again in what the world would consider weakness - a little lamb - the manifestation of the lamb in Revelation 5 our second reading, the lamb is the only one who can open the scroll and breaking the heavenly seals. What John thinks should be a strong and majestic lion, is actually a meek and humble lamb, standing as if it had been slaughtered. This echoes Nathanael's discovery that a king could come out of Nazareth - a lamb could rule the world - a man hung on a cross could save us all.

God works in surprising ways, he continues to shock us in where he is to be found - he continues to bring glory out of disaster or great sacrifice out of what appears to be a catastrophe. God makes his voice heard and his presence felt in word and sacrament, he is available for us when we need him, he is there for us and loves us, however far we journey from him. May our response to the love God shows to us be like Philip's - as we tell others of the God who came to earth, the God who became like us, the God who understands us and therefore the God who is love - may we like Philip say to others "Come and see." Come out of the shade, into the light, and meet the God who is love. "Come and see, and follow him."

Amen.