

St Stephen's Canonbury N.1

Morning Worship (2nd Epiphany), 11am

15 January 2017

Readings – 1 Corinthians 1: 1 – 9; John 1: 29 – 42

We have found the Messiah

This is the period of Epiphany in the church calendar. Epiphany is the manifestation of the Lord Jesus by the Magi in Bethlehem. It is the annual festival to celebrate the appearance of a divinity. The Messiah was promised in the Old Testament and he is now appearing to a “waiting nation,” Israel as revealed in Isaiah chapters 40 – 66.

It was the arrival of John the Baptist that heralded this fulfilment of God's rescue plan. The passage tells us some important facts about the personality of Jesus. He is the Lamb of God, (Exodus 12). Isaiah 53 – described him as dying an atoning death “like a lamb.” Whereas the Spirit of God came down on Israel Judges but the Spirit being part of Jesus remains with Him (Isaiah 42: 1). Thus the coming of Jesus points to the fulfilment of the two great Old Testament themes that: He is the king who will rule forever: He is the servant who will die for our sins. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit. At God's own appointed time, God will have the sins of his people dealt with and they will be God's people and God will live in their midst (Ezekiel 37:27-28). Christ/Messiah/Son of God: These are titles for God's anointed ruler and king (Isaiah 9: 6-7). The one Moses wrote about that God promised to send Israel another prophet like him. God's covenant with Jacob marked him as the one through whom and through whose offspring “all people on earth will be blessed.”

John is here to identify the Son of God for us.

First a delegation of priests and Levites was sent to John to find out who he was because of the special work he was doing. They were not sure whether he was the expected Messiah or not. His answer was given in Isaiah 40:3. A second delegation went to John interrogating him about his identity this time by the Pharisees. The Jewish religious leaders were now concerned and required the Baptist to reassure them.

The Baptist pointed to Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God. He is the Son of God who is to deal with the problem of sin. It was God who revealed to John who Jesus is and John said “I myself did not know him” John came baptising so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at baptism to anoint him both as Servant and King, and to establish him as the promised one. By so doing Jesus will fulfil the two OT types as indicated above.

In the gospel of John 14:16, 26 John records that the Holy Spirit will come to Jesus' disciples, “The spirit of truth to remain with you for ever. The Advocate will teach you everything.” The promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts.2).

Two disciples of John were with him when he exclaimed ‘Look here is the Lamb of God’ and they started to follow Jesus. Jesus looked back and asked them what they wanted. They wanted to know his place of abode. They were Andrew and another (probably John as his name was not mentioned).

Andrew told his brother, Peter they have found the Anointed One. On seeing Simon, Jesus said he will be called Cephas. Next Jesus found Philip and Philip found Nathanael and told him they have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote and the latter's remark was 'can any anything good come out of Nazareth.' Philip replied 'Come and see.' Nathanael said to Jesus 'Rabbi you are the Son of God – the King of Israel'. The salient point here is that the Baptist identified Jesus as the son of God. He bore witness to Jesus to the delegation of the priest and the Levites. He did same to the delegation sent by the Pharisees witnessing that Jesus was greater than he himself and that his own job was to reveal to the world through baptism, Jesus Christ.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, after Peter and Andrew the Lord called James and John as they were mending their nets, Matthew 4: 18 – 21. They were all from Bethsaida. What is apparent from the four days of activities with Christ at the centre is an expanding circle of friends and disciples. Nathanael's testimony of Christ as 'the Son of God and the King of Israel' was upstaged by the confession of Peter later on in Jesus' ministry (Luke 9:20). Jesus replied that he saw him under the fig-tree demonstrating the Messiah's divine power. The fig-tree served as a place where the Jews could reflect (v. 50), praying and meditating.

But now the disciples could identify Jesus for themselves as he called them to be his followers. Jesus called on Philip and Philip responded without question or doubt, not only that, his witness to Nathanael was instant and convincing. Nathanael recognised Jesus' divine knowledge and described him as true King of Israel. We see that John the Baptist role as the forerunner of Christ has been achieved.

At Christmas we witness to the baby born in the manger. The angels informed the shepherds. They believed and went on to the manger to see for themselves. The Magi saw the star far away in the East, they believed and came all the way to pay homage to the King. Even Herod had no doubt about the coming of the new king as prophesied in the OT. Only he was jealous and frightened that he might lose his power and authority.

What about us who have proclaimed Jesus as our Lord and King? I think we should listen to the witness of the Baptist and open our eyes to recognise the identity and the purpose of Christ the Messiah who set aside His glory to meet us in the flesh. The disciples responded positively to the call of the master. They waited on him for his teachings and message from God the Father. We are their own followers and should obey as they did. We should recognise that He is the Lamb of God. He promises far greater things for those who follow Him: Will see angels ascend and descend; will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians said by believing Jesus and having faith in Him we shall become sons of God and therefore have equal share with Christ as the heir to God the Father (Gal 4:7).

In typical Paul salutation, the apostle prayed for God's grace and peace to be given to the people of Corinth. But this grace and peace is not for the Corinthians church only but for everyone, everywhere who calls on the name of Jesus. The fellowship of believers everywhere receives the blessings of God, as the universal body of God's people. Paul was always praying for the church that has been blessed with every speech and knowledge: that is language of every kind and knowledge. They possess every spiritual gift. They eagerly await the revelation of Jesus. Yes, the Corinthians are earnest in their expectation of the second coming of the Lord. Paul talks of every language and knowledge. What do these mean? They also have spiritual gift. It was a very rich Church to have all

these attributes. They have heard the Good News and have believed. They have found the Messiah through Paul.

Spiritual Gifts: Every language: knowledge:

Paul referred to Spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 as the gift of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophesy, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. All these are given to different individuals to serve God and one another better. Other commentators take the meaning as spiritual persons. A spiritual person will be one who is earnest in the search for God by prayer, worship or by songs. The Corinthians have every kind of knowledge pertaining to the worship of God and the awareness of the world around them, be it philosophy, science or the arts. We too as a people of God at St Stephen's can say that we search for God as much as we are gifted. We live in London a world city. Look around and you will see that we have members of great knowledge. We can confidently say that we have been blessed as much as the Corinthians if not more. Our church membership includes people from different nations and culture.

The point is, can we say that we have found the Messiah individually and as a church? If the answer is yes then we have to follow with action our declaration of faith. At Ashburnham we were encouraged to think of our story that is, how the Lord called us. I believe we met him in diverse situations and circumstances just like the disciples. Whatever background and whatever talents we have, are now being called upon for the work of discipleship.

Our Mission Action Plan has been spelt out. I believe each of us has a part to play. We should not let the sacrifice required to achieve the plan paralyse us. Rather our focus should be on the Grace which has been poured on us as Christians. Surely it is not going to be smooth sailing. But Christ who commanded the turbulent wind on the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8: 22-25), can control the difficulties that may arise. Remember the people of Sychar, they told the woman at the well that their faith in Jesus was not because of her telling them about Jesus but because they have found the Messiah themselves (John 4: 42). It is He we are serving and he will not let us down. This is a New Year and a new beginning. We could resolve to cast in our lot with Jesus and he, sure will see us through the year and our plans. Amen.

Note: Grace- Means God loved them and acted decisively on their behalf. They have become a community of learners. They grow eager in knowledge about God. They are able to teach each other and strengthen their proclamation of the Good News.