

It's hard to come out of the Christmas season without it feeling like a bit of a
letdown.

There are weeks of anticipation, the motivation to decorate and to bake, then
the joy of family and beloved traditions followed almost immediately by a
countdown to the new year and exciting resolutions to make sure we stay on
top of things this year!

And then it's the third week of January.

It's still cold. Except now *we* all have colds as well (gifts were not the only
thing passed around at our family gatherings).

Now we're dreading putting our Christmas lights back in the boxes we pulled
them out of a month ago, and since we haven't exercised since January 4 we
might as well wait till February to restart the resolution train as well.

A bit of a letdown indeed.

It is natural to feel a bit of a lull within the Christian calendar as well.

There is so much anticipation within our advent texts:

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall
be upon His shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the
Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*

And then last week the wise men arrived with Epiphany, and now we resume
the everydayness of our lives.

Take today's text as another example.

John 1 begins:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word
was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were*

made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Powerful. Cosmic in scope. Almost as though the text should be shrinking into a field of stars like the opening text of a Star Wars movie. What an intro!

And then where we pick up in verse 43:
“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee”

It’s a bit jarring!

Ted Smith writes that:

“We stand between the wonder of the Word made flesh and the gritty joy of our attempts to respond”

Today’s text, one of the calling of the disciples, serves as a bridge between the omnipotence of God which is beyond our capacity to fully grasp, and the God who enters into our humble human existence through the person of Jesus, so that we may know and be known by God on a personal level.

Exploring the questions of the nature and person of Jesus is sometimes referred to as Christology.

This is a Christological passage.

Who are you Jesus?

We the reader may have been privy to the prologue, *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* but everyone within the Gospel narrative is encountering Jesus on their own terms and must find out for themselves who he is.

Within this short passage the following terms are used to describe Jesus:

Lamb of God, rabbi, Messiah, him about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, son of Joseph from Nazareth, Son of God, King of Israel.

This is a Christological passage.

“Who are you?” is a natural and important followup to “follow me.” It was a foundational question for the disciples and it is a foundational question for us today.

Nathaniel is the disciple at the center of our text today. We don’t talk about Nathaniel much. He’s only identified as a disciple in the Gospel of John. But his questions and natural skepticism are relatable.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

This might not be as much a dig at the reputation of Nazareth as much as it is a way of saying: “There is nothing at all about Nazareth in our prophecies of the Messiah.” Nazareth was a village of a couple hundred people.

Second, it was located in the north in the region of Galilee, of which there is also no reference made in the Old Testament scriptures in connection with the Messiah. Everyone knew the Messiah would come out of the former kingdom of Judah, where Jerusalem was located.

Immediately we see the tension between the powerful divine nature of God, poetically revealed to us in the prologue of John and the humanity, where all expectations are turned on its head.

God can accomplish great things in unlikely places.

God honors and works through the ordinary.

The divine and unfathomable God will meet *us* where *we* are at.

Philip’s response to Nathaniel’s question is perhaps the best and most concise form of evangelism: “Come and see.”

And so Nathaniel does.

Jesus sees him and says “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” A flattering introduction deserving of Nathaniel’s response: “Where did you get to know me?”

Jesus’ response of “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you” seems on the surface to be a response that only brings to mind more questions, but Nathaniel’s shocking reply is:
“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! The King of Israel!”

What is happening here? What did we miss? What are we to make of this? This is not a decision come to after a logical analysis of facts, proofs and risk analysis (though sometimes we would find that to be nice).
Nathaniel has an epiphany.

Jesus’ concluding words perhaps offer us insight into this:
“Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

This reference takes us all the way back to Genesis, the first text we read today.

Jacob, fleeing for his life after stealing his brother Esau’s blessing, lays down and has a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. In this dream God reassures Jacob that God is in control and is faithful to the promises made to him and to his ancestor Abraham.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

Flash forward to our text today.

Nathaniel is the new Jacob, transformed by his encounter with Jesus.

In the words of Lee Barrett:

“Jesus the Son of Man is the ultimate ladder stretching between heaven and earth. Jesus is the point of contact between the finite and the infinite, the conjunction of time and eternity. Jesus is the place where the heavens are opened and the divine glory can be contemplated.”

Nathaniel is the prototype of a new humanity, reborn in Christ

But this is not just a passage about Christology.

Yes, Nathaniel has an epiphany about Jesus, but one's convictions about who Jesus is does not in and of itself constitute faith.

Jesus is not just a messenger from God but the means by which human beings can have an authentic encounter with the divine.

Today's passage is where Christology meets discipleship.

Epiphanies are nice, but Nathaniel's is only the first chapter of what will be gradually revealed through years of discipleship.

The wonder and majesty of God should be celebrated, but the good news of the Gospel is also that we are given a road map of how to live, and this way of life will transform us and bring us into a truer understanding of the God who made us.

It is the way, it is the Truth, it is the life.

Ted Smith writes:

“Discipleship and Christology fit together so closely because discipleship is first of all a willingness to walk with Jesus. It is not obedience to an abstract set of codes, but consent to a costly joyful relationship. In walking with Jesus, we learn who he is. As we learn who he is, we learn what it means to follow him.”

It is a bit of a letdown to come out of the epiphany season of Christmas into the everyday of January. But we weren't meant to stay on the mountaintop.

Like Nathaniel's journey with Jesus, it marks the start of the important ordinary work through which we, the church, discover who Jesus is.

“The church learns to speak about Jesus in the process of giving thanks, singing praise, sharing good news, and speaking truth to power.”

I conclude with the words of the theologian Albert Schweitzer:

“He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.”