

# **Second Sunday after the Epiphany**

**IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING, "SEEING" IS BELIEVING**

**John 1:43-51**

**Second Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Analysis by Bill White**

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 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." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51 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."

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Blinded by Bias**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Prejudice***

Jesus calls Philip to "Follow me." Philip accepts Jesus' call to faith, then proves to be a model disciple, by calling Nathanael to also follow Jesus. Philip brings this word of faith to Nathanael: We have found the promised Messiah! The long-awaited Messiah is here; He is Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.

But Nathanael is understandably skeptical and prejudiced. He cannot see any way that Philip's witness is true. After all, Jesus does not seem to match the words given by Moses and the prophets of God's Anointed One. And so, blinded by his prejudice Nathanael asks, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Doubt***

This message-the Messiah is here and he is Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth-has come to Nathanael from a presumably credible and trustworthy witness. Yet Nathanael has very real doubts about what Philip has told him. That the Messiah could be the son of a poor carpenter from an obscure, backwater village goes against all expectations, not to mention human logic and wisdom. Blinded by these doubts, Nathanael does not believe Jesus is the Messiah.

[Before we are too harsh on prejudiced, bigoted, judgmental Nathanael, perhaps we should ask if we have ever made an evaluation of a stranger based on the place from which they came, the family from which they came, their credentials, or their race. On this Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial weekend, we may wish to recall the United States of the 1950's and 1960's. Many were asking, "Can anything good (e.g. a word from God) come from an African American Baptist preacher from the south?"]

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Blind unto Death?***

The invitation to faith in Jesus has come to Nathanael. His

question “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” reveals not only his doubts but also Nathanael’s desire for proof. But there is no proof! There is only the witness of those who have beheld the glory of the Word made flesh. Philip has witnessed to Nathanael what he has seen and heard. How shall Nathanael respond? Accept the invitation to “come and see” or trust his own reason, intellect and experience? One response leads to seeing, Light and Life, the other to seeing nothing, only darkness and death.

## **PROGNOSIS: Seeing by Faith**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Power to See***

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (v. 51). Clearly a reference to Jacob’s Ladder, here angels descending and ascending as at Bethel (“house of God”) dramatically identify Jesus as the place of God’s presence. As the place of God’s presence, it is in this son of Joseph from Nazareth that heaven and earth are joined. Jesus is the gate of heaven. He is the Word made flesh revealing (epiphany) God’s glory.

Moreover, Jesus has just said, “You will see greater things than these” (v. 50b). THE great thing soon to be seen is God the Father glorifying the Son so that the Son may glorify God (17:1), i.e., Jesus being lifted up on Golgotha’s cross (19:17-18), dying (19:33-37), and resurrected from the dead (21:2). This crucified and risen Son of God will send the Advocate (15:26-16:15), trumping the powers of darkness and death by empowering the recipient to **see** (believe) that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing have life in his name (20:31).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Seeing Is Believing***

Nathanael accepts Philip's invitation to, "Come and see." Filled with doubts and questions he goes to Jesus. As Nathanael approaches, Jesus sees the obstacles to faith: "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you" (vv. 47-48). In the presence of the Messiah, Nathanael's blindness is healed! His doubts are replaced by faith! With eyes of faith he **sees** Jesus for who he really is and confesses, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Seeing Invites Others**

Having embraced God's gift of faith in the Word made flesh, Nathanael is now in the company of those who indeed will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Not only does he **see** that Jesus (son of Joseph from Nazareth) is the Messiah, but empowered by the Holy Spirit, Nathanael will go into the world bearing witness to the "greater things than these" he has seen and heard. He will invite others to look past their own prejudices and to "come and **see**."