

The unexpected appearance by the Magi began a season's worth of epiphanies. Our January Gospel readings shed more and more light upon who Jesus is, revealing his identity and power week by week.

In today's reading, Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to follow him. He gives Nathanael a glimpse of his divine power by telling him exactly where Philip found him: under the fig tree. Nathanael then appears to take in who Jesus is and what he is about, in a flash. But in actual fact Nathanael's insight is the result of a genuine searching - for the fig tree was where he had gone to meditate, presumably on what was already being said in Bethsaida about Jesus. Nathanael is faced with the question: should this new movement and this new teacher be rejected or should they be welcomed as from God?

Jesus is not what the people of Israel have been led to expect. Nathanael is particularly troubled by the fact that he comes from Nazareth. Perhaps he has in mind a common insult in the local rivalry between Nazareth and Bethsaida when he blurts out 'Can any good come out of Nazareth?' (Perhaps there are similar local rivalries here?) Nathanael ponders his questions and wrestles with them: the news about Jesus then strangely fits in with his own thoughts. *That* is what Jesus knows about Nathanael, that Nathanael had been genuinely wrestling with his faith even *before* he'd been told to approach Jesus. The reason that Nathanael believes *now*, is because of his previous honest wrestling with doubt. With sudden insight Nathanael just blurts out: 'You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' This is the fullest title yet used of Jesus. Nathanael sees that

Jesus is more than just another figure in the life of God's people; he is the true *king* of Israel (as later proclaimed on the Cross, 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews', John 19.19).

Jesus speaks about himself. The disciples will see greater things to come: they will see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This brings to mind the vision of Jacob at Bethel, (as told in Genesis) of a ladder between earth and heaven. Now, however, there is no need for intermediaries or a complex hierarchy of angels. The living God is present in a new way with his people in his Son. That is what is meant by saying that the angels of God ascend and descend upon the Son of Man.

Jesus longs to share the vision of glory (John 1.50) and the rest of John's gospel will show how this gradually comes about. There are moments when the disciples show clear insight and moments when they are astonishingly slow to understand (John 14.4-14). God's invitation to full knowledge is a work in progress, a slow transformation, to which today's collect is a powerful accompanying prayer:

Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory. **Amen**