

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Philip found Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) and said to him, ***“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”*** Nathanael responded, ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** (John 1:45-46a).

Throughout the Epiphany season, Jesus is revealed to be the Christ, the promised Messiah in various ways.

- First, by the Magi when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and later rejoiced even more when they saw the promised Messiah with Mary and fell down and worshiped Him (Matthew 2:1-12).
- Second, Jesus was revealed as the Christ last week when John the Baptist saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove to which the voice from heaven announced: ***“You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”*** (John 1:11).

Today, on this Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Jesus is revealed as the Christ in another way. Today, Jesus is revealed through the Word – *the Scriptures*. And through the Scriptures, we who trust in Jesus cannot help but say to others about Him: ***“Come and see!”*** (John 1:46b).

Philip and Nathanael studied the Scriptures. Philip studied under John the Baptist. And through his study, Philip was beyond convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah foreseen by Moses and the prophets. Upon Jesus’ powerful words, ***“Follow Me”*** (John 1:43), Philip became a disciple. And upon this great news, Philip could not contain himself, he had to tell others that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Christ.

So, the first person Philip told was Nathanael. But first notice what Philip did not say to Nathanael. He did not say: *“I get this strong feeling when I’m with Jesus that here is a great man of God, if not the Messiah.”* He did not say: *“This Jesus of Nazareth sends out good vibrations that tell me He’s the Messiah.”* No, Philip connected his conviction concerning Jesus with the Scriptures. Moses in his five books, the Pentateuch, spoke about the Coming One. Moses and the prophets foretold of the Messiah through types and symbols. Moses said that God would raise up a prophet like himself from among the Israelites and that everyone should listen to Him, since His words are the very Word of God (Deuteronomy 18:15-18).

To this, Philip knows beyond any doubt that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, since Jesus matches exactly the picture Moses and the prophets drew of the Messiah. Philip was convinced by the Scriptures, and he had to share this good news.

But as Philip shared this good news, Nathanael responded, ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** (John 1:46).

Nathanael was a cynic. But Nathanael was also a man of faith in the promised Messiah. He was serious in wanting to find the One, the One whom ***“Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote”*** (John 1:45). But Nathanael also remembers the past men who claimed to be the promised Messiah. He remembers how they all came and went. The Messiah “wanna-bes” of the past were liars. He was disappointed before, and he didn’t want to be disappointed again.

Plus, Nathanael knew the Scriptures. He knew that there was no word of prophecy connecting Nazareth with the Messiah. All throughout the Old Testament, Nazareth received no mention. So, how could the Messiah come from Nazareth? Nazareth wasn’t important enough to be mentioned before, so why would it be important now?

We all know cynics. You know, those people who are inclined to question the sincerity and goodness of people’s motives and actions. Or those who are always pessimistic, who question everything.

Now, it may be good to have some sense of cynicism. We should all be critical thinkers, after all. But if you live your life with the idea that nothing good could ever come, that isn’t living life.

It's easy to become cynical. When authorities have lied, deceived, or abused you in the past, it's easy to not trust authorities in the future. We remember when we have been wronged. Or, if you consistently douse yourself in bad news – by watching cable news 24/7, it's easy to become cynical. Or a person has had a bad experience in the Church in the past, they can become a cynic. Or a person may say, "Christians are judgmental."

But how does Philip respond to Nathanael's cynicism? Did Philip argue Nathanael into believing that Jesus is the Christ? No! He simply said, "***Come and see***" (John 1:46b). Philip used the exact words Christ said. So, the most effective answer to an earnest cynic is simply to invite him or her.

Simply arguing a person into faith through reason or experience seldom has positive results. But what works? The most effective way to answer the earnest doubter is simply to invite him or her to see Jesus as He presents Himself in His written Word, just as He made Himself known to Philip and Nathanael.

Often, we may think the most effective way to grow the Kingdom of God is to use programs. Many of these programs utilize canned questions to possibly scare the skeptic into faith, such as "If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?" How often does that work? Or: a tactic of some churches is to yell at people through loudspeakers in hopes that the hearer would repent and follow Jesus. How often does that work?

Again, what did Philip do? He didn't yell. He didn't argue. He didn't use fear. He simply said, "***Come and see.***" We can't argue or force someone into faith in Jesus. We can only show Jesus as He has revealed Himself in His Word and Sacraments and leave the rest up to the Holy Spirit. We can simply do no more and no less than Philip. We can invite all who will listen saying, "***Come and see.***"

In the case of Nathanael, the invitation to come and see was accepted. But that may not always be the case for us. Remember, it's the working of the Holy Spirit that causes the skeptic to listen. It's the working of the Holy Spirit that causes the skeptic to come and see.

As Lutherans, we don't urge anyone to "accept Jesus" by their own reason or strength, since we know that's impossible. You see, without knowing you are a sinner, you would see no need for any savior from sin because anyone who is spiritually dead can't make themselves alive.

In this fallen world, our Old Adam – *our old sinful nature* – in us sees no need for Jesus, so we can't by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, or even come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts – His Word and Sacrament, sanctified and kept us in the one true Christian faith as Luther explains the Third Article of the Creed.

All we can do is to invite the cynic – *whether they are a Christian or not* – to “**come and see,**” so that Jesus Himself overcomes their pride and Jesus Himself, through the Holy Spirit, brings them to faith in Him.

Through the accepted invitation, Jesus reveals Himself to be the Christ through the preaching of His Word. And through His written and spoken Word, Christ leads everyone to repentance and faith in Him as He reveals Himself to be the Savior of the world who died for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Here, the Messiah is found – *in His Word and His Sacraments*. Through these Means of Grace, the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus as the Christ and faith that receives Christ's forgiveness and new life.

Now, as you invite others, don't forget to take your own advice. We, like Philip, need to keep coming and seeing Jesus, faithfully and trusting His promise to be present with His people in the Divine Service, in prayer, and in service to our neighbor. In this way, we also strengthen our congregation – *Prince of Peace Lutheran Church* – to be a place where people who come are not hindered from seeing, but see clearly, Jesus, who is the Messiah and Lord of all.

Salvation is only found in Jesus of Nazareth. And the single most important thing we can do for any cynic – *including ourselves and others* – is to issue the simple invitation: “**Come and see.**” Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +