

SOLE⁺BAY CHURCHES

BLYTHBURGH • REYDON • SOUTH COVE
SOTHERTON • SOUTHWOLD • UGGESHALL
WALBERSWICK • WANGFORD CUM HENHAM

Worship at Home : Sunday 17th January

The Second Sunday of Epiphany

Epiphany Season ↑

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips

All and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Your light springs up for the righteous

All and all the peoples have seen your glory.

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,

king of the nations,

to you be praise and glory for ever.

From the rising of the sun to its setting

your name is proclaimed in all the world.

As the Sun of Righteousness dawns in our hearts

anoint our lips with the seal of your Spirit

that we may witness to your gospel

and sing your praise in all the earth.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All Blessed be God for ever.

- 1 O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth; ♦
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.

- 2 Know that the Lord is God; ♦
it is he that has made us and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise; ♦
give thanks to him and bless his name.
- 4 For the Lord is gracious; his steadfast love is everlasting, ♦
and his faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Psalm 100

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

This opening prayer may be said

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever.

All Amen.

The Word of God

Psalm 96

- ¹ O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;

he is to be revered above all gods.
⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
⁶ Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
⁹ Worship the LORD in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.
¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
¹² let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
¹³ before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

1 Samuel 3 verses 1-10

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he

went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Canticle

A Song of the New Jerusalem

**All Above you the Holy One arises,
and above you God's glory appears.**

- 1 Arise, shine out, for your light has come, ♦
the glory of the Lord is rising upon you.
- 2 Though night still covers the earth, ♦
and darkness the peoples;
- 3 Above you the Holy One arises, ♦
and above you God's glory appears.
- 4 The nations will come to your light, ♦
and kings to your dawning brightness.
- 5 Your gates will lie open continually, ♦
shut neither by day nor by night.
- 6 The sound of violence shall be heard no longer in your land, ♦
or ruin and devastation within your borders.
- 7 You will call your walls, Salvation, ♦
and your gates, Praise.
- 8 No more will the sun give you daylight, ♦
nor moonlight shine upon you;
- 9 But the Lord will be your everlasting light, ♦

your God will be your splendour.

10 For you shall be called the city of God, ♦
the dwelling of the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 60.1-3,11a,18,19,14b

All **Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

All **Above you the Holy One arises,
and above you God's glory appears.**

Scripture Reading John 1 verses 43 to end

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

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."

Sermon

First a question: When was the last time God woke you up in the middle of the night to tell you something? I've been woken by thunder, the phone and my bladder. But never, knowingly, by God.

In our Old Testament reading, Samuel wasn't expecting God to call, even though he was sleeping in the temple. A bit of back story here: Samuel's mum, Hannah, believed she was unable to have children but prayed for a son, who duly arrived.

In gratitude to God, she gave him up to be raised in the temple – in her words, she “lent him to the Lord”.

And so, one night, the youngster wakes up having heard a voice calling him. Our reading began by saying: “The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.”

So, if you're not used to hearing God's voice, it's easy to mistake it for something else. Which was exactly what happened here. He didn't sit up and bed and think, “Voice in the dark. Oh yes, must be God.” He leapt to the more obvious conclusion that it was his master calling. So off he trotted to wake old Eli up.

Hearing voices – especially if they’re from God – gets a something of a bad press these days. Especially when it comes to US Presidents. George W Bush once said: “God would tell me, ‘George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan.’ And I did, and then God would tell me, ‘George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq.’ And I did.’ Mmmm . . .

More recently, a number of high-profile pastors in America claimed God told them that Donald Trump would win November’s election. They believed him to be anointed by God. That went well!

However, I don’t want to deride the idea that God speaks to us. I have friends who claim that God gives them messages in words, but – as Samuel found – you can’t always be completely sure. And if you state with absolute confidence that God has spoken to you, it’s kind of difficult for anyone else to gainsay.

Maybe – and this is my experience – God communicates to us in many different ways. Take Nathanael, one of Jesus' least known disciples, who we’ve also read about today. Nathanael was sitting under a fig tree – a symbol in the Bible of peace and contentment – when his mate Philip enthused to him about Jesus. At first Nathanael was cynical: “When did anything worth anything come out of Nazareth?” But when he actually met Jesus, his prejudices were demolished. But it was through Philip that he heard God’s call to leave his comfort zone.

Samuel heard God speak directly. Nathanael heard God via his friend. Personally, God and I aren't exactly on speaking terms. He's never talked to me – not in so many words. More of a nudge.

I do have a sense of vocation, of calling: to write, to paint a bit, to explore the tangled forest made up of earth, mind, body and spirit, and to try to speak about it. And to live here. Quite handy, actually, since those are all things I quite like doing.

My sense of calling chimes with something the wise old American theologian and novelist Frederick Buechner says. He wrote:

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and the pain of it no less than the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it. Because in the last analysis all moments are key moments and life itself is grace.

I reckon that a sense of calling isn't reserved for disciples, priests, doctors and teachers. It may not be to do something specific at all, but to be a close friend, a good employer, a generous giver. It's my hunch that God *can* speak to us in our deepest desires and our most profound instincts. If you listen to your life, you might just hear God – recognise his voice.

The poet and mystic Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk, called to silence. He said:

Vocation does not come from a voice 'out there' calling me to be something I am not. It comes from a voice 'in here' calling me to be the person I was born to be.

That rings true in my experience. Vocation comes from understanding who we are. I actually think the same may have been true of Samuel. He'd been given over to the spiritual life from a child: he absorbed it, lived every moment in the Temple. But there came a moment when he had to own this for himself, and not just lean on his mother's devotion. This was when he heard God calling to him in the night. Maybe it confirmed something that was already taking place.

Perhaps – when he said that the word of the Lord was rare in those days – the writer of 1 Samuel misunderstood what was going on. Could it be that God was speaking, but no-one was listening? It took Samuel to wake up to his voice.

While I believe it's possible to hear from God, I don't think there's any formula for the way it happens. The way God speaks to us may well depend on how we listen. This varies according on our culture, church tradition and habits. We may hear God in the words of the Bible, in a clarinet cadenza, or in the sea on shingle. Maybe in all of them.

A new calling can beckon at any stage in our lives. Mary Wesley, who wrote her first novel when she was 70. The folk artist Grandma Moses didn't get going until she was 78.

There's a surprising line in the story of Samuel: "Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." He needed to tune in. The old priest Eli gave him good advice. He told the boy to say to God, "Speak, Lord, I'm listening".

God is calling. Our job is to listen. He want us to pursue something that our life's already telling us to get on with.

The poet W H Auden once said, "You owe it to all of us to get on with what you're good at." I think that might just be a word from the Lord.

Amen

Silence may be kept

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;

All let the whole earth tremble before him.

Tell it out among the nations that the Lord is King.

All O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Tell out his salvation from day to day.

All Let the whole earth tremble before him.

Declare his glory among the nations
and his wonders among all peoples.

**All O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth tremble before him.**

from Psalm 96

Gospel Canticle

The Benedictus (The Song of Zechariah) is said,

Refrain:

**All This is the Christ, the Chosen of God,
the one who will bring healing to the nations.**

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: ♦
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦

by the forgiveness of all their sins.

9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦

the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, ♦

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1.68-79

All Glory to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now

and shall be for ever. Amen.

All This is the Christ, the Chosen of God,

the one who will bring healing to the nations.

Prayers

From the rising of the sun to its setting, let us pray to the Lord.

That the people of God in all the world

may worship in spirit and in truth,

let us pray to the Lord: *R*

That the Church may discover again that unity which is the Father's will,

let us pray to the Lord: *R*

That the nations of the earth

may seek after the ways that make for peace,

let us pray to the Lord: *R*

That the whole creation, groaning in travail,

may be set free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God,

let us pray to the Lord: *R*

That all who with Christ have entered the shadow of death

may rest in peace and rise in glory,

let us pray to the Lord: *R*

Let us commend the world, to which Christ showed the way,

to the mercy and protection of God.

These responses may be used

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

(or)

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Silence may be kept.

The Collect of the day ([here](#)) or the following is said

Almighty God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your heavenly glory;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Believing the promises of God,

let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

**but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

The Conclusion

May Christ, who sends us to the nations,
give us the power of his Spirit.

All Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.