Epiphany 2B 2021 Heaven Opened when Jesus is Revealed

John 1: 43 – 51

When Nathanael met Jesus, he learned there is more to Jesus than meets the eye. He saw a man of Nazareth, whose father was Joseph. However, Jesus saw Nathanael when no one else was there, sitting under a fig tree. In this Epiphany text, Jesus reveals that he knows intimately the one whom He calls.

Who could know everything about anyone else but God? This got more than Nathanael’s attention. He opened his mouth and confessed Jesus to be God as he said to Jesus: *Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*”

Three things are revealed about Jesus in his confession. The first is Jesus as Rabbi. This was the Jewish term referring to the one who taught in the synagogues. It literally means my teacher or my master. It is a title of respect of one who was learned and qualified to teach.

But Jesus was no ordinary average Rabbi. For Nathanael rightly confesses Jesus to be the Son of God. This confession as all others does not come from below but is revealed from the Father above. For the Father in heaven has one Son who was always with Him and has come into the world.

Son of God is a Messianic term that captures Israel’s hopes of deliverance and fulfills God’s promises of salvation. It leads to Nathanael’s third confession that Jesus is the King of Israel. This too does not come from flesh and blood but can only be revealed by God, for Jesus does not look like a king. He wears no crown, sits on no throne, has no palace or gold, yet Nathanael claims that Jesus is the king, his king.

What Nathanael here claims is revealed to him during the Lord’s Passion. Roman soldiers mocked him as they hailed the king of Israel, sticking a crown of thorns deep into his brow and beating him mercilessly. Pilate, after having Jesus flogged, presented him to the angry mob of Abraham’s children as their king, “Behold your king!”

The mob denied Jesus as their king and pleaded their loyalty to Caesar. What Nathanael and the other followers came to know is that Jesus is most clearly seen as king on the cross. From the cross we see Israel and her king reduced to one. One who has no beginning and no end. One who knows all things and intimately knows everyone whom he calls.

Where the lordship and kingship of Jesus advances, then death must recede. Where Jesus is proclaimed king, then sin and Satan are beaten down, crushed and rendered powerless. In this way, the greater revelation or epiphany occurs. What Nathanael would come to see is heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on Jesus.

Now when exactly did he see that vision? Was Nathanael present when Jesus was baptized and the heavens were torn open as the father declared his beloved Son and the Spirit anointed Jesus as Messiah?

When Jesus was transfigured as true God, Nathanael was not there. Only Peter, James and John saw that vision.

So when did Nathanael see Jesus as the nexus of heaven and earth? Did he have to wait together with all of creation until the Last Day to see heaven opened and the glory of the Lord Jesus?

Let’s begin by pondering how heaven became locked to us. It is the same reason why the garden of Eden was closed. Flaming sword of the angel kept us out at God’s command. What does sin have to do with God? How can a sinner stand in the presence of the all holy, blessed Trinity?

When Jesus is revealed as the suffering Saviour for the sin of the world, heaven is opened.

Is this not the greatest Epiphany? Jesus died on his royal throne and in death, revealed his glory of saving you! In this way you too become a member of the New Israel as total gift. By grace you are counted as an Israelite indeed. In Jesus heaven is opened to you. Every time the good news of Christ crucified is told, heaven is opened to sinners.

As God’s Son, the king of Israel, our Messiah died, so we too died with him and continue to die so that we rise with Christ in His newness of life. There is certainty and a clarity in hearing that all your sin is forgiven and you are assured eternal life in Jesus of Nazareth, for then you together with Nathanael will see heaven open to you.

Jesus is the Ladder between heaven and earth. He came down to be lifted up on a cross and crowned as Saviour of sinners.

What a relief to hear that even though the Lord knows you intimately, better than you know yourself, you are still loved and forgiven, a member of the New Israel, blameless and holy, belonging to God in every way.

So do not offer yourselves to sin and lawlessness but offer yourselves in grateful thanksgiving to God, who knows you and has opened heaven, the greater garden of Eden. This is the place that still holds greater things to be revealed to us.