

*Notes for a sermon preached for the Episcopal Church of the Nativity, Boyne City, Michigan, on the second Sunday after the Epiphany, 18 January 2026, by the Rev. Dr. J. Barrington Bates, Priest-in-Charge.*

So very often, the gospel passage appointed for a given Sunday contains one major theme, or one simple story. Not today.

Today's gospel is chock full of proclamation, imagery, and narrative. Let's review the major themes in these dozen verses of Scripture:

- John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him and proclaims, "Here is the Lamb of God."
- He reminds us that he baptized his cousin Jesus, where the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove.
- He testifies that Jesus is the very Son of God.
- Then, two disciples call Jesus "Rabbi," or teacher.
- Jesus invites them deeper into the mystery, with a simple phrase, "Come and see."
- And, finally, we have an abbreviated recounting of the story of Andrew and Peter, deciding to follow Jesus and saying "We have found the Messiah."

There's so much material for theological musing that it almost seems as if this should be the subject of many sermons, not just one. Each of these topics could easily be the focus of one sermon.

There are two summaries accounts of events that are much more richly narrated elsewhere: first, the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, of which we heard only last Sunday; and, second, the calling of Andrew and his brother Simon Peter.

And there are these profound theological assertions: "Here is the Lamb of God," "This is the Son of God," and "We have found the Messiah." It makes us want to question not just "Where are you staying?" of Jesus, but "What exactly are you up to?" or "What is your purpose?" or even "What do you want of us?"

To these—and to all such questions—Jesus issues the same gentle invitation: "Come and see."

What exactly is this Lamb of God? Come and see.

Who is the true Messiah? Come and see.

Why should we follow you, Jesus? Come and see.

And—maybe even on this Sunday—what is the Church of the Nativity up to? Come and see.

It is as if Jesus is saying, “Why not give discipleship a try?”

This is a difficult thing for us in the twenty-first century, is it not? First of all, we know that to choose to follow Jesus is a major life decision. Discipleship requires dedication, work, and sacrifice. And, as a consequence, we want that choice to be an informed decision.

For most of us, making a major life decision is an arduous and prolonged process. We need time to do research, to consult experts, to ask the opinion of friends. We may consult *Consumer Reports* before buying a car, or even a toaster. In medicine nowadays, they are very careful to secure your “informed consent” before the most minor procedure, and modern pharmaceuticals come with warnings about their many side effects.

So we carefully sort out the options, search for information online or in books, talk something over with experts and friends—and only then begin to compile a list of “pros” and “cons.”

What are the benefits, and what is the cost? We have all done this at one time or another.

In a manner like this, we may have made a decision to enter into a primary relationship—or to leave one. To buy a house, or take a new job, or move across town—or even across the globe.

Making informed decisions is a worthy endeavor, as it helps us avoid repeating some of life’s biggest mistakes, making a bad situation worse, or facing a mountain of unintended consequences for a poor choice.

In a way, our society’s tendency to encourage us to “do the homework” so thoroughly may be one of the reasons why Christianity appears to be in decline.

Let’s see: it may go something like this: if we choose to become a disciple of Jesus, then we will be expected to work harder than we ever imagined, to give more than we thought possible, and to surrender our stubborn need for control to serve the divine will.

And what do we get in return?

This, of course, is where the invitation to “come and see” becomes so pivotal.

Because, on the face of it, we get nothing—at least nothing the world would consider a “gift.”

Just more work, more need requiring us to give, and more and more opportunities to surrender.

That's because the gift of God's grace is free, and offered to everyone without condition.

There's nothing anyone can do to earn it, deserve it, or be excluded from it.

And in our transactional world, this just does not seem like the kind of situation to which we aspire. No.

In our world things go more like: first I give this, and I then get that in exchange. This is how it is supposed to work, right?

But the gifts of God's mercy, love, and grace: they just are not like that.

They are ours, freely given, without condition. So, if we choose to become disciples of Jesus, and to give our time, talent, and treasure—what do we get for all our trouble?

Come and see.

The values that Jesus puts forth in his gospel do not really make any sense in the system in which the world assesses worth. You really have to immerse yourself in the mystery before you can even begin to understand.

The world cherishes wealth. The world esteems power. The world treasures status.

But the gospel calls us to love the poor and serve the needy, without condition.

And the gospel compels us to surrender our lust for power and give up our aspirations for status. And what are the potential consequences of that?

Come and see.

The Savior of the world, you see, is also the one our Scriptures call “a man of sorrows, ... acquainted with grief” – “despised and rejected by men.” That surely doesn't sound like someone destined for success or greatness, does it?

The spiritual life is full of paradoxes, those seeming contradictions that actually express a deeper spiritual reality.

Paradoxes like: gaining our life by losing our life, enjoying true abundance by giving away our possessions, and becoming followers of the all-powerful one who emptied himself of power.

You really need to “come and see” in order to understand—or even begin to understand.

Without regular experience of the liturgy, our Sunday worship is just an empty ritual. So come and see, again and again.

Without an ongoing discipline of prayer, our utterances are nothing more than endless demands of God. Come and see, and try again.

And without personal sacrifice, our lives can become meaningless, focused more on the accumulation of material goods than on sharing the love that comes from God.

So come and see the Lamb of God, on whom the Spirit descended like a dove, the Son of God.

Come and see Jesus the rabbi, who teaches us the way of salvation.

Come and see Andrew and Simon Peter, who drop their nets, leave behind everything to follow him.

Come and see the Church of the Nativity—the little parish that could.

The invitation is offered to those anonymous disciples so many years ago, and it is offered to us again today.

Come and see—and be enriched in Christ, in speech and knowledge of every kind.

Come and see—and learn again that God is faithful, and that you are called into the fellowship of God's son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Come and see—so that you too can declare with confidence, "We have found the Messiah." Amen.