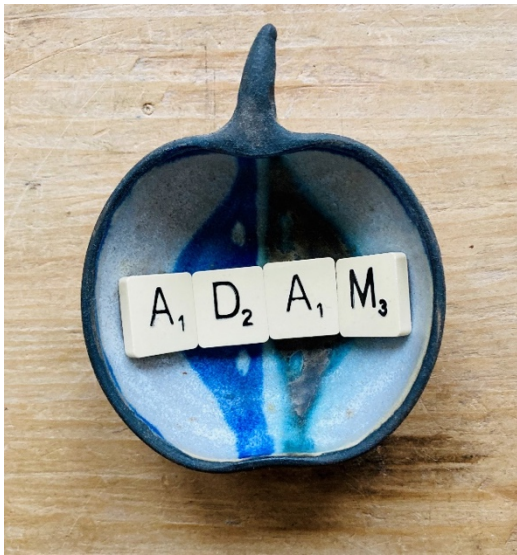


Advent Thought for the Day 13-16 December by Geoff Oates, Lay Reader

Sunday 13 December



And he was called... 'The Second Adam'

'The first Adam, made of earth, came from the earth; the second Adam came from heaven.'

(1 Corinthians 15. 47)

You probably know this better from John Henry Newman's hymn, Praise to the Holiest (from The Dream of Gerontius)

O loving wisdom of our God!

When all was sin and shame,

A second Adam to the fight

And to the rescue came.

Paul's theology in his letters to the Church in Corinth is complicated. He calls on us to identify ourselves with Adam (if he'd been writing today, he would have remembered Eve as well!), who is made in the image of God (as is Eve). Paul calls on us to recognise in Jesus a new Adam, like the first Adam an expression of the Father's love, again in human flesh and

blood. Through Jesus, God grants to us the same status as His (Her?) sons and daughters – a status that was always meant to be ours.

Maybe it's best just to leave it in Paul's own words; words you may also know very well from Handel's Messiah, and from the Easter Anthems in the old Prayer Book:

'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

Monday 14 December



And he was called... 'a Nazarene'

'Joseph made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled; he shall be called a Nazarene.'

(Matthew 2. 22)

The scholars puzzle over this one. There is no record in the Old Testament of the prophecy Matthew refers to.

But the important message for us is that Jesus was **from** somewhere. Jesus of Nazareth lived in human history and geography. He knew streets and buildings and hillsides and he thought of them as home. We can go and see where he spent his childhood.

But Nazareth itself apparently had little to commend it. When the future Apostle Philip first hears about Jesus (John 1. 46) he is scornful: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'

To the Metropolitan elite of Jerusalem, or even to the more cosmopolitan communities around Lake Galilee, Nazareth was right out in the sticks, in the hill country up by the Samaritan border; provincial, uncouth and uncivilised. In the places of power, wealth and culture, Jesus appeared as an outsider, with a northern accent and suspect manners.

I suspect we all share something of Philip's lazy prejudices about people who don't 'look like us', or sound like us. But isn't that just the place where we are most likely to hear the voice of our God?

Tuesday 15 December



And he was called... 'the Good Shepherd'

'I am the Good Shepherd' (John 10. 11)

The shepherd is a key figure in ancient Hebrew heritage. The people looked back to the times of Abraham and Jacob when their ancestors led their flocks from pasture to pasture, from brook to brook.

What was Moses doing when God called out to him from a burning bush and commissioned him to lead the Hebrews out

of slavery? He was looking after his father-in-law's sheep. What was David doing when the prophet Samuel sought him out to anoint him as King? He was looking after his father's sheep. When the prophet Ezekiel spoke of the promise of a new King for Israel, he declared that that king would be a Good Shepherd. When Jesus claims the name for himself, the people knew exactly what he was talking about.

It is a misfortune for Christianity that we see many images of Jesus the Good Shepherd looking serene in a freshly laundered white cloak and a neatly trimmed beard, surrounded by placid fluffy white lambs. But real sheep look greasy, ragged and grimy. They take a lot of looking after, they have a troublesome knack of getting lost. Real shepherds don't look like those sentimental pictures either. They look weather-worn, their clothes shabby and practical. People who expect to get their hands dirty. That's how I picture my Good Shepherd.

Wednesday 16 December



*And he was called... **'the Lamb of God'***

'See! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'
(John 1. 29)

Make your mind up Jesus – are you the sheep or the shepherd?

To be fair, it is John the Baptist who uses the name 'Lamb of God', Jesus never claims the name himself. It is typical of the rich layers of imagery that make John's Gospel so expressive.

Right at the beginning of the Gospel story, John the Evangelist binds the story of Jesus to the old Hebrew story of the Passover – the sacrifice of a lamb on the night of their escape from Egypt.

John's story reaches its climax in his narration of the crucifixion. Not many preachers draw attention to it, but in John's narrative the Last Supper takes place not on the night of the Passover festival, as it does in the other Gospels, but a day before it (check that out in John 13 :1). The crucifixion itself then falls on the day of Passover. Jesus himself becomes the Passover lamb.

The whole idea of giving sacrifices to buy God's favour is troublesome to the modern mind. St John agrees with us. It is not our sacrifice that restores us to communion with God. It is God's sacrifice of Himself.