

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW APOSTLE 2014
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ACTS 5.12 ST. LUKE 22.24

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Bartholomew...a man about whom we know very little. Even his name...Bartholomew...is something of a mystery.

The mystery surrounding Bartholomew is accentuated by the fact that even the Lesson from Acts and the Gospel reading appointed in the Prayer Book for Saint Bartholomew's Day don't mention his name at all.

"Bartholomew" means "Son of Talmi". "Talmi" is an ancient Hebrew word for "the plowman". Bartholomew might have worked the fields on his father's farm or even alongside his father on another farm. He was...the plowman's son.

Bartholomew's name appears in the list of the Twelve Apostles only in the three Synoptic Gospels and always as a companion of Philip. Nathanael is the name that appears in the list of the Apostles in John's Gospel, also as a companion of Saint Philip. We believe Nathanael and Bartholomew are one and the same person.

"Nathanael" was a common Hebrew name and translates as "God has given (to us)". God has given to us Nathanael Bartholomew. God has given to us the plowman's son. Today we might say God has given to us Nathanael Plowerson. What do we learn from the man whose life remains to this day a mystery?

Bartholomew was an Apostle and the Lesson from Acts does talk about Apostleship---being sent out to do God's work---and the many signs and wonders and healing people witnessed at the hands of the Apostles. Jesus promised the Apostles they would do many wonderful things and share in his healing ministry, something we practice in this parish through the laying on of hands, which is always available to anyone at any time.

Nathanael Bartholomew and Philip were apparently long time friends. John tells us Philip is the one who brought Nathanael to meet Jesus. Philip assures Nathanael is the promised Messiah...the real deal! The dialogue that takes place between Jesus and Nathanael is actually one of the funniest episodes in Scripture. And it certainly shows Jesus had a sense of humor.

Nathanael is at first skeptical about Jesus when Philip tells him Jesus grew up in Nazareth. Nathanael announces that nothing good can come from a backwater, one-street town, without even so much as a stop sign or a McDonald's. When Jesus hears what Nathanael has just said he calls him a really smart guy who is not telling a lie.

Nathanael then asks Jesus how he knows him. Jesus tells Nathanael he saw him sitting under a fig tree before his friend Philip brought him to him. That convinces Nathanael that Jesus is the genuine article and he calls him the Son of Man and King of Israel...two Messianic titles. Jesus tells Nathanael he hasn't seen anything yet...he will see much greater things.

John tells us Jesus appeared to Nathanael and Philip immediately after the Resurrection. Acts also tells us Nathanael and Philip, were eyewitnesses to the Ascension. Except for these brief appearances, Scripture says nothing else about the life and work of Nathanael Bartholomew.

What we know about Bartholomew's later life comes largely from the early 4th Century Church historian Eusebius. In his *Church History*, Eusebius talks about Pantaeus, a philosopher who lived in Alexandria 100 years earlier. Pantaeus became a Christian and went on a missionary journey to India, where he found a thriving Church, and a copy of the Gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew, which he was told was left there by Bartholomew.

Tradition tells us that Bartholomew and another Apostle, Saint Jude Thaddeus, brought Christianity to Armenia, where Bartholomew was martyred. The word "martyr" means "witness". Bartholomew paid the ultimate price for their witness. Both he and Jude are the patron saints of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

God gave us Nathanael Bartholomew... God gave us the plowman's son. He gave him unique gifts to help him be an Apostle and a witness for Jesus. He has given each of us unique gifts so we too can be effective martyrs...holy witnesses...for his son.

And we too will see much greater things.

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