

Our readings today are both about people hearing from God so that's what we are going to be looking at today.

In our first reading we're told that King David was sitting at home, putting his feet up after gaining peace in the land of Israel. He had obviously been thinking and decided that he wanted to build a church, a temple for God as a permanent place for him to live among his people. However, like any good religious leader, he knew that he needed to check this out with God first. To this end he calls Nathan. This is the first time we hear about Nathan, but he is identified as a prophet, someone that was recognised as speaking for God.

This is the first point that I would like to draw out today, it is always good to have someone that you can go to if you need guidance. This is true in the secular world as well as in church, but as a Christian, to have someone that you recognise as speaking God's word that you can go to for guidance is invaluable.

However, as our first reading shows, just because someone is recognised as a prophet, that does not mean that they are always right. Nathan, when he is approached by King David responds with words of affirmation. Whether this was because that was what he believed God wanted him to say, whether it was because that was what he believed David wanted him to say or whether it was just an automatic response we will never know. What we do know is that that night God spoke to Nathan to give him a different message.

Nathan was now left with a difficult task. Having given David a response saying that God approved of his plans he now had to go back to the King and tell him No. This great plan David had of building a luxurious house for God was not something that he was to be allowed to do. David though was to be given an encouragement as well. Instead of David building a house for God, God was going to build a house for David. Instead of a physical house, God was going to give David a dynasty, a promise that his descendants would reign. It was going to be one of David's sons that would be the one to build the temple, a promise that saw fulfilment in Solomon, but the promise was for much more than just that.

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.” (v16) David was to be disappointed in not being allowed to honour God but was given a promise that went far beyond anything he could have hoped for.

This is then, the second point I would like to make. While it is always good to receive a positive response from God, a confirmation that we are doing the right thing, that is not always what we will hear when God speaks to us. Sometimes the message from God is that what we are doing, or planning to do, is not what we should be doing. We can receive a message that we are not expecting or that reverses our current understanding.

As I discussed last time I spoke, we may not understand at the time why we have received the response we have. It may feel like it makes no sense, but God does want the best for us and his directions will lead us to the best outcome for our lives.

Moving to our Gospel reading, this trust in God's will leading to our best outcome was something that Mary had to rely on since the message she received was one that was going to change her life.

We are not told what Mary was doing when Gabriel met her, but we can deduce that she was not expecting to hear from God. When Gabriel greeted her, particularly when greeted as “You who are highly favoured” we are told “Mary was greatly troubled at his words” (v29). I guess it would be like someone coming up to you and greeting you as “Hello my most helpful friend”. We

immediately wonder what they are after, what they are going to ask us to do.

This is my next point, that we may not be expecting anything when we hear from God. We may be going about our daily lives when God drops in to speak to us. While making time to listen for God certainly helps us being able to hear when he speaks, it is not something God requires before he can speak to us. We have to be open to listen when God speaks, whether we are expecting it or not.

The next to last point is that it is OK to question. Mary, after being told that she is to give birth to a son, and not just any son, but a son that will not only be recognised as the “Son of the Most High” but who will also fulfil the promise given to David in our first reading of a son that will reign for ever, asks how it could happen. She wants confirmation that what she is hearing is true.

She's not the only one that, when hearing something unexpected from God, wanted confirmation. One of the most famous is probably Gideon in Judges. He asked to receive confirmation through the well known story of putting out the fleece and receiving selective dew. Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband and father of John the Baptist, asked for confirmation and was unable to speak for 9 months. Mary asked for confirmation and was reminded of Elizabeth's pregnancy as a proof that with God unexpected pregnancies could happen.

Asking God for confirmation is generally not something he will reject. He knows what we need and if we need something to re-assure ourselves that we have heard him correctly he will supply us with what we need.

My final point is that when God speaks to us we need to act. We see this in everyone we meet in our readings today. “Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation” (v17). David accepted that he wasn't to build the temple, but it didn't stop him making preparations. Mary responded “I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled”. After hearing from God we have to make a decision about whether we will obey what we have heard. It's not always going to be easy to follow, but we can be sure that it will lead to blessing.

So to summarise. God does speak to us. He doesn't always wait until we are expecting it and he doesn't always say what we want to hear. It's good to have someone that you trust to speak for God that you can go to speak to for guidance and confirmation. Then once you have heard and confirmed that God has spoken to you it's time to act. Who knows maybe it will be you that is then called “Most highly favoured”.