



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Feast of Saint Bartholomew (24th August) 2026

During Lent a few years ago, I set myself the task of reading Simon Montefiore's book, *A History of the World* - and undertaking, which I completed in good time; but it was not without its challenges.

One of the challenges of the book were the names of the *dramatis personae* of the story. To my Indo-European eye, many of them - particularly from ancient civilisations - were apparently little more than a bewildering and random sequence of vowels and consonants. Given that many of them were transliterations from other scripts, I doubt whether they all exactly represented the names as they would have been spoken. Moreover - and even more challenging - was the fact that many of the characters went by different names; and for reasons that the author did explain at the outset, he swapped between them, making it very difficult for a simple mind such as mine to keep up with whose part in the story was being described.

We encounter something similar with Saint Bartholomew. Many New Testament scholars think that he is the same person as the Nathaniel of today's Gospel reading - which is appointed to be read on Saint Bartholomew's Day: and, presumably why there is not a Saint Nathaniel's Day as such. The reasons for this identification are a little more than the observation of many a detective novel that you never see them both in the same place at the same time.

If they are correct, we can only speculate as to why the Synoptic authors went with one name and Saint John with the other. It is possible that they felt that the name they chose had better associations for the audience for which they were writing.

Notwithstanding Shakespeare's rose, which would smell as sweet by any other name, names do have resonances. Parents often spend a lot of time and energy choosing names for their children, hoping to match them with the people they would like to see them become or otherwise creating connexions with their family or others who are important to them for one reason or another.

Over time the association of a particular name with its person makes of the name almost a symbol of that individual: a symbol in the strong sense of a sign that shares in the reality of the thing - or person in this case - which it symbolises. It is for that reason that in the Jewish tradition the Name of God is never uttered - as an indication of the reverence, which is owed to the Reality, which the Name symbolises.

This brings us to the Name above all names, as it is described in the Letter to the Church in Philippi - Jesus. Like Bartholomew, He, too, goes by another Name sometimes: Christ. In origin, of course, Christ was a theological epithet; but over time it has morphed into a quasi-Name: I would not be surprised to find that some think it His surname. On some occasions, the two Names are used together; but as often, one or other is chosen and each has a different emphasis: Jesus takes our minds to the time of His incarnate life, whilst Christ speaks more to His eternal existence.

However, as with Bartholomew/Nathaniel if the theologians are correct, the two Names refer to the same personal reality: Jesus was and is always the Christ and the incarnate Jesus was and is an indispensable phase in the work of the Christ. It is the role of Christians and the Church to ensure that people do not struggle to know and understand that when we invoke the Name of One, we necessarily refer to the Other as well. The tenets of the Gospel are integral to the work of our Redemption and the continuing work of the risen Christ in the world.