

When we use the expression ‘heaven on earth’ we can use it disparagingly: ‘So you want your heaven on earth?’ meaning ‘So you want fulfilment, completion, full joy – now?’ with the implication that it’s a dream, an impossibility: life is just not like that. *What good can come from Nazareth*, in this sense, is taking a realistic look at life. Can the Messiah come from such a place? It’s a cynical look but also has a positive take because, in Nathanael’s case, it reveals someone who speaks his mind, says what he thinks, speaks the truth as he sees it, so that, when he does meet Jesus, we are able to trust what he says next: this man, without guile, who says what he thinks, who says what he sees before him. This is not to attribute to him any special knowledge but rather the gift of transparency: it’s really Jesus speaking through him; seeing through him; seeing him as he is. And Nathanael reflects this back, this loving trust in who he is: the man *under the fig-tree*, whatever that might mean. He feels known, accepted, loved – a taste of heaven, now – and he tries to put a name on it: *Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the king of Israel*. But Jesus, in similar vein in this searching for the truth, goes one better: you haven’t seen anything yet:

I tell you most solemnly you will see heaven laid open and above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending.

This is heaven glimpsed, now, by those on earth with purity of heart, but its fullness, its completion, is yet to come: this full knowledge of the New Jerusalem with *all the radiant glory of God and glittering like some precious jewel of crystal clear diamond*.

It takes a diamond to cut a diamond, apparently, and here we have two diamonds at work on one another.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour