

## Expansions on the Gospel of St. John

### Introduction

Not long ago I had finished a similar “expansion” document with regard to the Gospel of St. Matthew. There or in the Introduction I had expressed some hesitation and even fear of undertaking such a task. The reason? So much material had been written on the matter that adding more would be a waste of time. If that were true of Matthew’s Gospel, it would apply equally if not more to the Gospel of St. John.

With this cautionary note in mind, I decided to go ahead with the project to see what would come of it. Actually I thought the document on St Matthew’s Gospel didn’t turn out to be that bad. Why not try out my luck with St John? Regardless of the outcome, at least I gave it a shot. If I had allowed fear or hesitation to get in the way, I would regret it for a long time. Something would have been missing. As for the current document, a comforting thought came to mind. Because it’s an exercise done in the spirit of *lectio divina*, what ultimately could go wrong?

That brings up an important point which qualifies this document as it does with most others on this homepage. It is composed with the intent of reading the Gospel of St. John as an exercise of *lectio divina*. With this orientation in mind, the document isn’t to be read as you would do so with a book. Because of this the series of notations...expansions...verse by verse can make it come across as somewhat choppy. To put this in another way, it comes across as not especially readable. While indeed a defect, this is secondary. The sole intent is to assist the reader to approach the Gospel in the spirit of *lectio divina*. One might call it “*selah* reading.” *Selah* is a Hebrew word inserted here and there in the Psalter as a break or pause. With this in mind, it’s best to read this document as one extended *selah*.

One observation that comes to mind when reading St. John’s Gospel. Much of what Jesus says of himself and his relationship with the Father comes at us in a rather intense fashion. That is, we’re confronted with verse after verse containing so much riches. Jesus presents much of his teaching when confronted with the local religious authorities. They turn out to play an important role insofar as they are an occasion, as it were, for getting these riches out of him. If they weren’t present, we would be the poorer.

John says later in his Gospel that all the books in the world don’t suffice to contain what Jesus had said or had done. This turns out not to be an exaggeration but a

simple statement of truth. It makes sense only in light of *lectio divina*. John had no conception of this phrase but surely he'd agree to its use.

As for use of the word "expansion," it represents a broadening out the text...St. John's Gospel...in order to dispose the reader for the end result, to rest in the presence of God. And so it's a kind of extended prayer which stays within the confines of the text at hand. With this in mind, there's no problem in alternating between doing *lectio* and putting the text down or as noted above, to engage in a *selah*. Both can go on indefinitely which is why it's so wonderful. Thus the approach at hand may be likened to a kind of diffuse awareness enabling one to incorporate a whole variety of insights without getting bogged down in them. If the orientation were more focused, such would not be the case. A person would become weary all the more quickly.

The two English translations referred to are **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV)**, New York 1973 and **The New International Version (NIV)**, Grand Rapids 1985.

## Chapter One

*Arche* or beginning also means a commencement or perhaps better, the first principle of anything from which all else flows. It's one of those untranslatable words best left untouched. Mere mention of *arche* can't help but make one wonder if something had existed before it, and if so, what? This question has a modern counterpart. For example, we can't help but wonder in a childlike fashion what (if anything) had existed before the universe came into being. That's equivalent to asking if there was something before something. Obviously such matters are way beyond us, so best to leave them as such. We will admit, however, that we can't help but continue to ponder such a question in private regardless of what anyone thinks.

The phrase *en arche* bring to mind the opening words of Genesis, *re'shyth* prefaced with the corresponding preposition *b* or "in." Associated with this word is the activity of *bara'* or to create in the sense of fashioning as well as by cutting. *Bara'* implies something well-thought out, not done willy-nilly. Also it's presupposed that some material is at hand, most likely the famous *tohu* and *bohu*, emptiness and waste. For us the prospect of working with it is out of the question but with God, it's suits him perfectly. John amplifies this *re'shyth*, if you will, saying that the Word or *Logos* was present in a reality corresponding to it, *arche* or first principle.

At first *Logos* and *arche* might appear as two different things...true but in another way they are not. The very presence of the former within the latter is necessary in order to give it substance, to make it function as a first principle of all that issues from it. Keeping in mind the Genesis verse, *bara'* is the divine creative energy at hand. As for *Logos*, one way to understand it better is to equate it with the Hebrew verb *davar*, to speak but to speak in the sense of giving utterance, not just blurting out words. So *bara'* may be taken as that which is spoken or more accurately, uttered. It's association with the *Logos* means that something magical can happen. In other words, what is uttered appears out of nowhere and is not simply heard.

As for the *Logos* itself, it doesn't live in isolation. Someone has to be responsible for uttering it. That's why John doesn't waste any time about speaking of this source as a cause and effect reality. Instead, he introduces the small but important preposition *pros* which signals direction towards-which. In other words, the *Logos* isn't spoken and left dangling out there. Rather, at all times or from all eternity it has this *pros*-ness. That means that *Logos* is ever approaching God while simultaneously present to God. It's able to hold these two opposites in perfect balance or harmony. As soon as God speaks *Logos* and establishes a *pros* relationship, immediately the *Logos* turns this *pros* back to him. This, of course, goes on continuously outside space and time. Actually this isn't a bad description of *davar*. For this reason John concludes his opening verse with the simple but obvious "and the Word (*Logos/Davar*) was God." Here he omits *pros* because the direction towards-which it represents has returned to God and, as it were, is getting ready for another run at it.

One can't help but wonder where John got all this. He doesn't seem to be fabricating it because his words are too sublime and speak directly to each and every one of us. We can assume that John who was present at the so-called Last Supper, absorbed what Jesus had communicated not just to him but to the other disciples. More precisely, as 13.23 says, John "was lying close to the bosom of Jesus." *Kolpos* also means bosom and is with the preposition *en*, literally "in the bosom of Jesus." Such is the source compared with the other eleven disciples. Now he could spell out Jesus' words—the *logoi* from the *Logos* in imitation of the divine *pros* relationship between Jesus and the Father. In a way, those chapters can be summed up neatly in the first verse at hand. Because *logoi* and *Logos* are involved, John brings to conclusion his Gospel with no mere exaggeration "I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." In other words, these books which contain *logoi* never can fully embrace nor comprehend the divine *Logos*.

A footnote, if you will, with regard to both examples of “in the beginning” as found in Genesis and St. John’s Gospel. Throughout the Bible we find the word “behold” or something similar to it which is rendered as *hineh* and *idou*, Hebrew and Greek respectively. They serve to draw attention to something of great importance the author is about to communicate. In a way the phrase “in the beginning” is like that. It’s ideally suited for such a purpose at the beginning of a text as with Genesis and St. John’s Gospel. *Arche* and *re’shyth* contain much more in that they are designed not only to grab one’s attention but to sustain it for the duration of the text. In fact, it’s helpful to bear in mind the introductory verses containing these words at the end of their respective books in order to bear out this observation.

The first person singular *houtos* opening vs. 2 is translated as “he” but literally as “this” which refers, of course, to the *Logos*. At the same time we don’t have an idea of who (or what) it might be. We know from experience that it’s Jesus Christ, but we don’t receive confirmation of his proper name until vs. 17. Most likely John is primarily concerned about firmly establishing the transcendent nature of this *Logos* as related to (*pros*) God. If he does not, people might have all kinds of distorted ideas about Jesus. Is he God? Is he just a man? Is he a kind of man-God? Again, the first eighteen verses of John’s Gospel represents a desire to “translate” what he heard directly from Jesus at the Last Supper and make it accessible to newly formed Christians as well as those who aren’t Christians.

As for *houtos*, vs. 2 says that “he” was in the beginning or *arche* which was *pros* God. John uses the past tense which in reality doesn’t apply but can be taken simply as the way he presents the matter. So what’s the difference, if any, between this *pros* and the *pros* of vs. 1 with regard to the *Logos*? At first glance it seems John is repeating himself, for *houtos* = *Logos*. Perhaps he’s trying to prime his readers in order to prepare them for making a shift. On one hand are Jews with their monotheistic religion and on the other, those who subscribe to various forms of polytheism. Hopefully both extremes can come to a point where they can accept the person of Jesus Christ as both transcendent and human. Obviously a gamble but what other choice does John have?

Vs. 2 begins with “he” or *houtos* and spills over into vs. 3 as an extended sentence. So John is aware of being caught in an unavoidable paradox where he has to balance the relationship between the divine and human. Obviously he wants to make this connection in the person of Jesus Christ as he heard at the Last Supper. All in all John is laying the groundwork for what later would develop into a theology of the Trinity. Any misunderstandings lay with those who willfully insert their personal

interpretations or by not reading the text with care. That has been said often and in many ways. In the context of this essay, we can add misunderstandings arise by not adapting the prayerful attitude found up with *lectio divina*.

In vs. 3 note the different sense conveyed by the two prepositions *dia* and *choris*, through and without, as they refer to *houtos*. To the first belongs *panta* and to the second belongs *oude*, all and not anything. So we have a stark contrast leaving no room for any other agent other than *houtos* or *Logos* as being responsible for bringing things into existence. As for the verb “made” as used in the **RSV**, it’s *gignomai*, to come into being. It suggests, if you will, a live type of birth as opposed to something that has been fabricated. The way *gignomai* is presented is that *houtos* doesn’t sit down and decide what is to come into being and what is not. Rather, there’s a spontaneous kind of coming into existence of *panta* or everything. In other words, there’s distance or space between *houtos* and *panta* in which *gignomai* operates.

The question for us is how do we perceive this. It would be absurd to consider an image of Jesus Christ as a human being constantly making decisions with regard to *gignomai*. He’d be so tied up that it would leave no time for other things. Implied, then, is a space we can put in terms of awareness where focus isn’t upon individual things but a perception of their overall commonality. That consists in being begotten, of springing into existence, or in a word, *gignomai*. Once we do, we let the object or objects engage in an almost playful action which enables *panta* or “the all” to freely run their course. Regardless of how wildly stuff differs—to be sure it does so in an almost unbelievable fashion—all have their begotten-ness rooted within *houtos* or the *Logos*.

In vs. 4 John refines what he said in vs. 3 by saying that in him...*houtos/Logos...is zoe* or life in the physical sense. Such life is more specific to human beings, *ton anthropon* or “of men.” However, it is qualified by a close association with light or *phos*. Actually the two are inseparable. Light, in turn, is associated with each and every human being. This is true whether a person realizes or not the connection between himself and *houtos/Logos*. While all things (the *panta* of vs. 3) are made...*gignomai...through the Logos*, it doesn’t mean that human beings as part of this *panta* are aware of the light. In other words, they have it but generally don’t know it or at best have a dim awareness of it. *Panta* obviously applies to all animate beings but simply lack the capacity to be illumined. So with most people not aware of this light-life, they’re no better off than some other animate being.

In vs. 5 John says that the light or *phos* shines in the darkness, *phaino* also as to become visible in its exact opposite, *skotia* more as an all pervasive gloom. So if *phos* = *zoe* as vs. 4 claims, *zoe* is the means by which this *phos* becomes manifest or *phaino*. Note that *phaino* does its thing without attempting to accomplish a goal or intent. Also it doesn't expect a response from those upon whom it sheds light. However, it's very presence in the darkness suggests a struggle. This is a huge insight that easily can be overlooked but must be stressed by reason of its importance. Either light (life) or darkness will prevail. However, as John says, darkness doesn't overcome the light, *katalambano* being a vivid way of putting it or literally to seize or to grasp down, *kata*. The idea is that darkness cannot push down light, for light is immune to such efforts however strenuous they may be.

Vs. 6 gets more personal by mentioning John though he isn't identified as the Baptist. Note the passive "was sent" or *apostello* which is the verbal root for apostle, this pretty much summing up John's mission in life. More specifically, his sending is *para*<sup>1</sup>God or more as from the side of God. It's as though John had been there as his companion all along, had left and became incarnate. We have no details as to his identity as in other Gospel texts. In a very real way, John's *para* God suffices more than enough for that. So while John comes from *para* God, he takes his place alongside the *Logos*. As John the evangelist recounts a good number of times, this parallels Jesus as being *para* God, the Baptist being not on the same plane but is as such by way of participation. So in a very real way we have two persons with this special relationship coming on the scene. Again, Jesus isn't introduced by his proper name until vs. 17. Once John has written this, one wonders how his listeners responded to him. It'd come as no surprise that he's speaking not of a man but some kind of heavenly being.

In vs. 7 John the Baptist is described as literally having come "into testimony," *eis* plus *marturia* or witness in the sense of that which is based upon personal evidence. The preposition *eis* suggests that John had been fully present with regard to the light or *phos*. It can be traced to when he and Jesus had met in the womb of their mothers (cf. Lk 1.41). Right after *marturia* comes the verb from which it's derived, *martureo* or to attest, again with emphasis upon personal experience and knowledge. It has a special orientation, that is, everyone believes (*pisteuo*) not so much John but the light to which he is bearing witness. As for *pisteuo*, it occurs frequently and pertains more to

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first mention of the preposition *para* in this document. In a way, it's the most important word because it shows the relationship of Jesus to his Father as well as his disciples to him. If no profit is derived from what's offered here except awareness of what *para* signifies, that is all that counts.

than just believing. Rather, it's an expression of loyalty in and by itself regardless of what one may receive or not receive.

In order to make clear the distinction between light and John bearing witness so the two won't be confused, vs. 8 restates what is said in the previous verse. Again we have John as bearing witness (*martureo*) "around" or *peri* the light. Use of *peri* in this literal sense is interesting insofar that *martureo* (and we can include *pisteuo*) embraces...surrounds...the light.

And so all this talk about light and darkness prepares us to meet the person of Jesus Christ in vs. 17. Darkness means more than evil, the absence of good. Because it infers night, that means it's a time when we can't see clearly. It's opposite is daylight, obviously the light. Thus we can take John speaking of being awake versus being asleep which is more pertinent to the human condition as we experience it. Evil is there, of course, but not as pervasive compared with outright sleeping.

Vs. 9 is careful to call the light or *phos* being discussed as *alethinos* or true. Here it's role is to enlighten human beings, *photizo* as the verbal root of *phos*. Note the way *phos* is presented, *erchomenon* or the present participle of *erchomai*, the common verb to come. Right away you'd think that people would rush out en masse to meet this light, confident that their being as already enlightened or *photizo* would automatically point the way. John gives the *kosmos* or sum total of everything as to this coming. There's no need for anything more specific by reason of *photizo* as within each person which he considers as sufficient. The tragedy is that people are in darkness or as said above, are asleep (snoring might be more like it, out like a light). Instead of looking within, they look without and cannot find this true light. No small wonder they feel frustrated and are ready to take out their anger on anyone who claims to be this light which is exactly what happens later to Jesus Christ.

Vs. 10 shifts gears, if you will, from the previous verse which says the true light was coming into the world to already being in the world. In a way, John is saying that the light which is interior to all human beings has taken on a form outside themselves. That means everyone should be able to spot this person at once but of course they do not. So despite the world being made by this true light, it did not recognize him, *ginosko*. Again, we could apply the idea of being asleep here; not just that but preferring...actually refusing...to be awakened. As for the notion of being made, it isn't quite accurate. Better to put it as being begotten or *gignomai* as noted earlier.

All this talk about being awake and being asleep, light and darkness, is presented in a tragic way as we see in vs. 11. There he came literally “into his own,” the verb *erchomai* with *eis* as it pertains to *idios* which connotes that which is personal as well as private. Here it’s also the people as expressed by the same word. However, they did not accept him, the *para* of *paralambano* suggesting those closest to Jesus did not take him into the intimate embrace, of being beside as well as with them. One example that strikes home early on in his ministry is from Lk 4.29: “And they rose up and put him out of the city and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built that they might throw him down headlong.” What got Jesus in trouble was referring to two historical examples of non-Jews, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. Indeed, both are representative of that *panta* of vs. 3 which the Jews were unable to accept.

Vs. 12 comes to the rescue of the just delineated rejection of *houtos* who still is not identified but contained in the verb *lambano*, to take or to receive. That is to say, *houtos* is welcomed by *hosos* or “all,” the RSV translation often rendered as “as much as,” “as great as.” The tiny word *de* is rendered here as “but.” *De* is a conjunctive alternately translated as “whereas,” “on the other hand.” It serves to set off an undetermined number of people from those who are *idios*, implying that they are in a minority. They are distinguished by believing or *pisteuo* literally “into (*eis*) his name” or *onoma*. At this stage *onoma* = *Logos*. Even for a tiny minority of people to make this connection is a big step because it’s destined to take root. Compare *hosos* with *panta* of vs. 7 and *pisteuo*. The former boils down to concrete acceptance whereas the latter may be taken as a looking forward to the future.

As for the *pisteuo* of vs. 12, it results in *houtos* giving a special kind of authority or *exousia* to become children of God. The verb is *gignomai* which as noted several times earlier is translated as “made.” John leaves it up to each one of us to see how *pisteuo* becomes *exousia* and how *exousia* becomes children (*teknon*) of God. So if a child, that means there must be parents. Does it happen at once or in stages? It seems to be neither but a recognition of something that always has been and continues to be with regard to being human. We could say it goes back to vs. 4, *zoe* and *phos* or life and light. Perhaps without realizing it John is introducing a new way of viewing how we as human beings are related to God. While true, at the same time it’s a recognition of something that always has been.

Vs. 13 continues as an extended sentence which develops *pisteuo* → *exousia* → *teknon* but expands what it means to be as such, a child of God. As with a physical child there’s birth, *gennaio*. However, John qualifies this by the negative three “froms” or *ek*:

blood, will of the flesh and of man. The second and third seem pretty much the same. A footnote in the NIV puts both respectively as “natural descent” and “a husband’s will.” *Thelema* is the noun for will and found with both. With regard to flesh it could apply to a union outside lawful wedlock, *sarx* as flesh often used in a negative sense. As for *sarx*, often that’s presented as at odds with God. In the second instance *thelema* can apply to lawful wedlock which is why the NIV has the reference as just presented.

Vs. 13 concludes with *gennaō* as it pertains to God, the fourth example of “from” (*ek*). This birth is set off against the first three meaning there’s a certain parallel but a huge difference. *Gennaō* is a realization of what John states in vs. 3 or *gignomai* which is better rendered as to come into being instead of being made. Actually it’s close enough to *gennaō* in order to draw a parallel. Everyone by default knows what *gennaō* means. Applying it to what’s essential to continuance of the human race is contrasted with regard to something that transcends it. Easily we can imagine these words were confusing to those who first read them, and it’s something of a miracle that their proper understanding has come down to us.

John realizes the difficulty of what he had just posited, of how it can be easily misunderstood, which is why in vs. 14 he’s quick to mention the *Logos* once again, having begun his Gospel with it. This *Logos* became flesh, *gignomai* with regard to *sarx*. He hopes these two words as applicable to human birth will help understand the way *Logos*, despite being of a wholly different (divine) order, participated in the life of a flesh and blood person. Still, does the *Logos* remain separate from *sarx* as one would with regard to putting on a garment or was it the other way around, *Logos* being some kind of ghostly presence? Both misunderstandings are easy to accept, having come into existence fairly soon and in a way, remain present today.

One way of getting out of this uncomfortable dilemma which John knew was a present threat is to come right out and say as clearly as possible and without ambiguity that the *Logos* had dwelt among us. This is put in terms people could clearly grasp, that the *Logos* literally pitched his tent *en* or in us, the verb being *skenoō* which suggests either being a nomad moving from place to place or staying in a place temporarily. If taken literally, the *Logos* is in (*en*) us for the time being, not permanently. At the same time *skenoō* doesn’t detract from the *Logos* being life and light (cf. vs. 4). In other words, the *Logos* is paying a visit and living just like the rest of us, an existence which on one hand is temporary yet on the other, points to that which is permanent or eternal.

Vs. 14 continues with the Greek text saying first that “we have beheld his glory.” The verb is *theaomai*, more along the lines of perceiving or seeing beyond with the physical eye. As for the object, it’s *doxa* or glory or more specifically, the glory of the only Son from the Father. Here John is moving away from emphasis upon the wholly transcendent *Logos* to *Logos* which has pitched his tent in us and on to seeing his glory. Now this glory is *monogenes*, literally only or alone (*monos*) with regard to one who has been begotten, *gennaō*. As for the relationship, it’s put in terms as *para* the Father or from-alongside the Father...very close but not identified with the Father. While John may be expanding on this from the Last Supper discourse, surely he can’t but recall his presence on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured. Again, it’s an example where John’s memory has been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost or more precisely, his faculty of *anamnesis*, the ability to recollect fully in the sense of being present-with as it informs the present.

The **RSV** has vs. 15 in parentheses though such is not the case with the **NIV** perhaps because Jesus won’t be introduced properly for several more verses. However, he finds it necessary to introduced John as a witness, the verb *martureo* as found in vs. 8. The difference is that in the verse at hand the Baptist is quoted, a pre-insertion if you will, of a mission statement with regard to how he relates to Jesus Christ. Upon seeing Jesus (though his name isn’t mentioned ), John immediately exclaims that he comes after him temporarily speaking and by reason of his divine status is ahead of him. I.e., we have a distinction between *opiso* and *emprosthen*, after and in front of. These words reveal that John has a proper understanding of what was said thus far as the *Logos* being the light and life of a man. Both are within each person yet exist beforehand. To realize that is John’s essential mission which he puts in terms of repentance. So for him it consists of being aware of dependence upon a reality that not only is before him but after him. In other words, John is communicating a new way to perceive oneself here and now with regard to transcendent reality.

While the **RSV** begins vs. 16 with the conjunctive “and,” the Greek has *hoti* usually as “because,” also as “although.” *Hoti* as “because” is better in that it shows why the *Logos* pitched his tent in us, that is, going back before vs. 15 which as noted, is in parentheses. This *Logos* is endowed with fullness or *pleroma*, the totality of his being. By reason of being full, it implies that it needs to spill over somehow somewhere. Also implied is that if a person has this *pleroma*, there’s nothing to do; being it is sufficient in and by itself. All else who share the same *pleroma* by this very awareness. John puts this fullness as something which has been received (*lambano*), that is, grace upon grace or *charis* (also as favor, kindness) with the preposition *anti* which also can mean instead of. *Anti* suggests replacement while the first *charis* can refer to the former

covenant whereas the second *charis* is the new covenant. Although the two differ, still they consist of *charis*, so it's a matter of degree.

This difference between two types of *charis* is spelled out in vs. 17 where John distinguishes between the law or *nomos* (i.e., *Torah*) and *charis* along with truth (*aletheia*). Both are associated with two persons. The first is Moses and the second is Jesus Christ, this being the first and long anticipated mention of his name inferring his presence not so much as an abstract entity but as a flesh and blood person.

John brings to conclusion this association of the *Logos*-as-Jesus Christ in vs. 18 before describing the activity of John the Baptist and Jesus coming to him. He takes care to establish or to reestablish the complete transcendence of God by saying that nobody has ever seen him, *horaō* also as to perceive, catch sight of or to notice. Then John adds *monogenes* or only-begotten as in vs. 14 which modifies God and that he is present literally “into (*eis*) the bosom” of his Father. The *kolpos* of Jesus is found above in reference to 13.23 where John had rested, a good a place as any enabling John to transfer this over to Jesus in the Father. And so the first eighteen verses of his Gospel which introduce Jesus Christ as *Logos* conclude with Jesus as being the one responsible for manifesting the Father. This is true despite all the emphasis placed on Jesus thus far and sets the stage for speaking of the Father. That, of course, is necessary in order to introduce the Holy Spirit.

In vs. 19 John the Evangelist turns “historical.” That is to say, he has successfully introduced Jesus-as-*Logos* and now confidently can move on to his ministry. In a way, the first eighteen verses are a substitute for the accounts of Jesus’ early life. Perhaps John figured that the three synoptic Gospels would provide the necessary details far better than he, freeing him up to take a more theological approach. Thus before Jesus comes on stage, we have the testimony (*marturia*) of John leading us off. However, the evangelist is keenly aware of the connection of his opening verses and now in vs. 19 which he begins deliberately with the conjunctive *kai* or “and.”

The *marturia* of vs. 19 is put into practice when John had to deal with some priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem. As soon as he got word of their impending visit and before they arrived, he prepared himself by becoming more fully aware of that light or *phos* spoken of in vs. 7. If he failed to do this, chances are this delegation would walk all over him because as official representatives of the Jewish religion, they were far more sophisticated than he or anyone who was at the Jordan River being baptized. Actually many present must have felt intimidated at the prospect of their arrival and stayed a healthy distance away from them.

The priests and Levites wasted no time. They had to find out who John was, what he was about and hurry back to Jerusalem as quickly as possible to file a report. Authorities there would decide the next step. “Who are you?” are the first words that came out of their mouths. Such words signal the conflict between John and religious authorities that later will apply to Jesus Christ. The response is interesting. John doesn’t reply in the conventional sense but confesses, *homologeō*. It means to share a common view or mind about a given matter as inferred by the adjective *homos* (like, similar) prefaced to the verbal root. In the verse at hand it’s followed immediately by the fact of affirming that he’s not the Christ but adds *homologeō* for a second time. This shows his commitment and determination to be at service to the Christ who has yet to appear on the scene. After all, that’s why the priests and Levites came to John or more accurately to garner information about who, what and where is this so-called *Christos* or Anointed One.

The authorities from Jerusalem snapped right back at John in vs. 21, *oun* translated as “then” and alternately as “really” and shows not so much surprise but contempt as well as impatience. Right away they fire off two questions as to his identity:

Is John actually the prophet Elijah? In the popular imagination Elijah was expected to return and announce the coming of the Messiah. Such is the concluding verse of the Hebrew scriptures with Mal 4.5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”

The second question has to do with the prophet. No identity is given but can be traced to Dt 18.15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed.” Somehow this had stuck in the collective memory of Israel and over time morphed into something akin to the Malachi verse just above.

To both John replies with an emphatic “no.” Still in vs. 22 the priests and Levites press him, John knowing that he’s in charge because they were manifesting considerable anxiety which was written all over the faces. Just the fact of asking the above mentioned questions was sufficient proof. If they didn’t get a proper response or better, something in line with what their bosses in Jerusalem were expecting, they might as well not return. Finally one last burst of desperation in vs. 22: “What do you say about yourself?” John pauses for a second. At first he doesn’t wish to explain away what he was doing out in the wilderness but on second thought, why not give a response, albeit a cryptic one? In that way those in Jerusalem might stay off his case. After all, reports had been filtering back as to his activity.

John does respond pretty much in the spirit of Elijah and the Deuteronomy prophet. At the same time he had to make known to a wider audience what he was about. If he were in a town or city, it would be different, but being out in the desert roused suspicions because so many people made their way there at some risk to their lives. Not only that, they came back transformed which scared the authorities. Now John gives a response which was of no real comfort to his interlocutors. In fact, in vs. 23 he quotes Is 40.3 which runs according to the verse at hand: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" He's quick to mention the source, Isaiah, which certainly was familiar to the priests and Levites. As for the verse in full, it runs as "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

There is no specific identity as to this voice (*qol*) which could be Isaiah himself and is used with the verb *qara'*. Actually the two words sound the same, *qol qore'*. Indeed, that must have puzzled the delegation sent to interrogate John. Within desert this voice bids those who might be listening to prepare or *panah* which fundamentally means to turn and thus intimates repentance. *Panah* has two objects, *derek* and *mislal*. The former can apply to a way of life whereas the latter suggests a raised embankment and is used with the preposition *l*, literally as "to our God."

Vs. 24 gets more specific as to whom had sent the priests and Levites, that is, the Pharisees, literally "from (*ek*) the Pharisees." They had to get an answer from John and get it fast. They accept that he isn't Elijah, the Christ nor the prophet which puzzles them as to why he is engaged in baptizing. Although the act of *baptizo* isn't spelled out, we can assume that it's for repentance, of restoring one's relationship with God. The delegation must have gotten John during a break in his activity while those awaiting baptism stood in line nearby somewhat apprehensive that these men would shut down John's operation and make them go home. Actually that's why they had come out out to John. Behind all this lurks the threat of violence, that the Pharisees would use force should John persist.

In vs. 26 John really puts it to the priests and Levites. He says outrightly that he's baptizing with water but someone is already present in their midst. Although he doesn't identify this person, John infers that he will baptize not with water but use another means. As for this mystery man already present in their midst, *mesos* is the adjective but more central, if it can be put as such, that is, in the middle. Despite this centrality, those from Jerusalem don't have a clue as to his identity. And so the mystery deepens.

While John continues with cryptic-like talk, the text says nothing as to how the priests and Levites respond. You'd think they would ransack the area and search people lined up along the banks of the Jordan looking for this man described only as *mesos*. However, they do not which makes them slink back all the way to Jerusalem, too embarrassed to continue questioning John. En route desperately and compulsively they rehearsed how they would communicate to the Pharisees what they had been sent out to accomplish. We have no answer to this but can presume that the Pharisees roundly chastised the priests and Levites, having at once sent more of their own to the Jordan. This time they wouldn't speak with John but secretly spy on the crowd to at last get to the bottom of what was going on out there in the desert.

To those sent out to John, he had provided a clue as to this person in their very midst. That is to say, in vs. 23 he says that this man will come after him. John being unworthy to untie the thong of his sandal which is the task of a slave. So that means anyone else coming out to spy on John would have to watch for him making that gesture. While this gesture may be taken not in the literal sense, the general idea is to be on the look out for someone to whom John gives obeisance.

In vs. 29 action shifts from talk about Jesus Christ by John as *Logos* and as a mystery man for the priests and Levites to him at last coming on the scene. John sees (*blepo* or to have the faculty of sight) Jesus coming toward him, *pros*. From where isn't specified but keeping in mind *mesos*, he emerges from the very midst or middle of those waiting to be baptized. The atmosphere possibly had a festive quality about it, people having made their way to the Jordan River and perhaps staying there for a few days. Such was the *mesos* from which Jesus emerged...*pros* his cousin John.

Upon seeing Jesus John exclaims in vs. 29 "behold" which is the verb *horaō*. Compare with *blepo* just mentioned as regular seeing, if you will. *horaō* is more a recognition, a sharper type of perception which takes *blepo* into consideration and centers in upon the object of vision. Although Jesus and John were cousins, this recognition didn't depend upon seeing someone familiar, for John has been in the desert for a very long time. It depended upon something only the two would recognize immediately, that *skirtao* or leaping or when the two were fetuses in the wombs of their mothers (cf. Lk 1.41).

John doesn't call Jesus by his proper name but hails him as Lamb of God. Not only that, this lamb will take away the sin of the world, *airo* being the verb which suggests a lifting up or removal. Reference to the Passover lamb is obvious to all present. Note

the singular *hamartia* or sin of the world, that the world (*kosmos*) is burdened with this singular weight which makes it all the more heavier and burdensome than if it consisted of multiple parts. Also in a way the singular sin makes it more convenient for the Lamb of God to focus upon as well as to bear.

Right after this acknowledgment which John makes to all present in vs. 30 he repeats what he had uttered earlier in vs. 15, that at last there's present one who ranks before him. In both instances the adverb *emprosthen* and adjective *protos* are used, before and first. Nevertheless, John had that indelible *skirtao* or leaping etched in his being when he and Jesus were fetuses as noted just above. Surely the same applied to Jesus. John contrasts this in the next verse by saying that he did not know him, *oida* also as to have information about which could pertain to Jesus as Lamb of God. He qualifies this *oida* in the next breath by saying that he came specifically to baptize with water. Such a rite of purification will reveal the Lamb of God to Israel. The verb here is *phaneroo* or to manifest in the sense of to make public. While this is happening literally to a small number of people, such a manifestation is more than a passing sight. It's registered in the minds of those who've come to be baptized by John and spreads out from there. More importantly we can say that John the Evangelist had recorded the event from eye witnesses on whom it had a lasting impact. So in a way, the *phaneroo* of Jesus is continuing into the present and will do so into the future.

Vs. 32 spells out this *phaneroo* in terms of a reoccurring word in John's Gospel we've come across thus far despite the few number of verses. That word is *martureo* (*marturia* or the noun also inferred) which in the context at hand means that John sees Jesus coming toward him with no explicit mention of the two actually meeting. The same also applies in the next verse. So while we have the Baptist finally seeing Jesus-in-the-flesh, they don't make contact except at some distance. Even more intriguing, Jesus isn't recorded as being baptized. He drops by, if you will, approaches (*pros*) John but then moves on almost as though his *pros* were right through John.

As for John's witness in vs. 32, it consists of two verbs, *martureo* and *horao*. They are centered upon the Spirit or *Pneuma*, something which essentially cannot be seen, that which is breathed out or wind. The only way to present what cannot be presented is by comparison, and for this reason we have the small but important *hos* or "as." Without missing a beat, John comes up with the image of a dove to represent *Pneuma* coming down from heaven, *ouranos* here not necessarily from the divine dwelling place but heaven-as-sky. Once it had descended (*katabaino*), it remains upon Jesus, *meno* with the preposition *epi*. Obviously this doesn't mean that Jesus is walking

around with a dove perched on his head but is now endowed or recognized as endowed with another person or the Holy Spirit, to put it awkwardly.

In vs. 33 John claims not to know Jesus, *oida* or to perceive, behold. He just said this in vs. 31 which, if you will, is a partial truth because of that recognition implied by the verb *skirtao* when John and Jesus were in the wombs of their mothers. This clearly establishes that John knows Jesus essentially. However, John has to speak of Jesus now as Messiah for the benefit of others so that both men will retain their proper roles. And so John claims that someone had sent him to baptize but doesn't say explicitly that it's Jesus. John's role—again that emphasis upon *martureo*—is to point out Jesus as baptizing with the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma*. That's why again we have the two verbs *matureo* and *horao* that Jesus is Son of God. John doesn't spell out how Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. How does he immerse a person with something imperceptible as the wind? For now that question is left unanswered which is why there's no discussion between John and Jesus. Again, *martureo*, *horao* and *skirtao* suffice for any exchange of words.

Vs. 29 begins with mention of the “next day” or the day after John's confrontation with the priests and Levites from Jerusalem and moves on to his bearing witness to Jesus without the two speaking. Then we have another “next day” in vs. 35 when once again John sees Jesus walking along and exclaims as he does in vs. 29 behold (*horao*) with regard to the Lamb of God without mentioning that he takes away the sin of the world. John says this while with two of his disciples, one of whom turns out to be Andrew identified in vs. 30, brother of Simon Peter. As soon as they heard their master utter these words about Jesus, they left to follow him, *akoloutheo* connoting accompaniment. Something must have clicked to leave John whose reputation was above all reproach for a man of whom he had spoken of but in essence was unknown. Perhaps it was John's earlier words about Jesus as *Logos* that brought it about.

There's no record of Andrew and the other disciple taking leave of John nor did John expect it. This isn't because they were acting in a cold-hearted way but recognizing, even in a vague seminal fashion, that they were exchanging discipleship for a human being to someone who was divine. John, of course, was delighted that he was responsible for contributing to Jesus' first disciples. As soon as Andrew and the other man left Jesus didn't extend a welcome commonly understood but said in all fairness to John, “What do you seek” (*zeteo*)? They give no reply because they were incapable of it, but because this happened so suddenly, that wasn't of any special importance. The two men addressed Jesus as rabbi or teacher (*didaskalos*), something they'd never

call John. Instead of giving Jesus an answer to *zeteo* they asked where he was staying. Jesus complied and off they went though there's no indication of where that had been.

Since they were in the desert, most likely they stayed in tents. That, of course, was incidental to the story. We have no record of the conversation between the three, but Jesus must have asked about John's preaching. They were all too eager to fill in what John said about Jesus. Perhaps they were reluctant to ask if he really was the divine *Logos* but the fact that they abandoned John then and there showed they had some insight. They must have asked Jesus about that baptism of which John had spoken, namely, Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. That was only natural to ask by reason of their association with John who, in fact, stated that plainly.

In vs. 40 Andrew is identified as having heard John speak which must have been both of repentance and Jesus as *Logos*, so he and his companion were well prepared to make the switch. Andrew didn't waste time contacting his brother Simon which means that he too must have been with John though he's not identified as being the other man. He could have come on his own to the Jordan River both to hear John and to visit his brother, checking up on him. This means that Jesus was encamped nearby, not far from Simon, which is why Andrew told him that we (first person plural, possibly including his companion) have found the Messiah which vs. 41 equates as the Christ, *Christos*.

Upon bringing Simon to Jesus, Jesus takes a good look at him, *emblepo* connotes doing it intently, *em* also as *en* which means "in." Jesus addresses him in a way that makes him both confident and uncomfortable, *ei* translated as "so" which has a lot to do with it. Jesus doesn't expect a response; Simon isn't in a position to do so since was put on the spot. Jesus then says with a definite air of authority which at the time is totally beyond Simon's comprehension that he'll be called Cephas which means Peter. Both proper names mean rock. Nevertheless, Simon must have taken some delight in this and readily concurred with the change of names. At the same time he was puzzled as to what it meant. Surely he must have become the butt of jokes by his brother Andrew who similarly was puzzled.

Vs. 43 is the third instance of the "next day," the other two being in vss. 29 and 35. Surely a conversation must have lasted late at night between Jesus, Andrew, Simon now called Peter and the other man who possibly is with them but remains unidentified. Now Jesus decides to go to Galilee. As it will be revealed a few verses later, this is the place from which the two come. Most likely they suggested that Jesus go there to pick up two potential disciples. Without waiting any longer, Jesus takes

them up on their word. Upon arriving , Jesus finds Philip. Actually Philip is first of two who will become intimates of Jesus who simply commands that he follow him, *akoloutheo* . Philip along with Andrew and Peter decided to recommend Nathanael. Jesus, in fact, doesn't seek him out but allows Philip to do so knowing that he will make the proper choice despite any initial reluctance.

Easily we can picture Philip running up to Nathanael that we...the others with him...have found the one of whom Moses had spoken. Note that he quotes from Moses, not blurting out that he had found the Messiah, for that would be too dramatic. Surely reference to Moses would be enough, more than enough, to persuade Nathanael or any devout Jew. The reference Philip uses is Dt 18.18: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you (Moses) from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." Note that Dt 18.15 is cited with regard to vs. 25, it being in the same context. What's important is that this prophet will come from among the same people as Israel, not an import. *Qerev* prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from" suggests from the very midst or middle. From this center the Lord will put his words-as-expression or *davar* in the prophet's mouth who will them *davar* or speak them.

Philip expected Nathanael to come off with a response similar to his enthusiasm but instead is stopped dead in his tracks with a strong tinge of sarcasm and even disgust. Apparently Nazareth had a Podunk-like reputation or even worse. How dare Philip equate that place with the venerable Moses. This didn't dissuade Philip who invited Nathanael to check it out for himself, so off they went. You have to credit Nathanael for at least doing this, given his strong attitude. En route Philip must have done his best to paint a glowing picture of Jesus, of how John the Baptist had recognized him as being the Lamb of God, etc. Indeed that seemed pretty farfetched.

When Jesus caught sight of Nathanael approaching, he gave him the ultimate complement, that indeed (*alethos* or truly) that he was an Israelite with no guile or *dolos* which also means deceit or treachery. Nathanael's curiosity is perked at once, asking Jesus how does he know this. Indeed, there just might be something about this fellow from worthless Nazareth. Jesus said that he saw Nathanael under a fig tree well before Philip had called him. This evoked an immediate response, that indeed Jesus is the Son of God, the same words used by John the Baptist in vs. 34. Not only that, he blurts out that Jesus is the King of Israel, something that made Jesus uncomfortable by reason of its political overtones. Anyway, Nathanael lacked that *dolos*, so all this could be overlooked.

In vs. 51 which brings Chapter One to a close Jesus said that Nathanael will see greater things than Jesus having caught sight of him under a fig tree. He also poses a rhetorical question, one which Nathanael is powerless to answer about believing in Jesus by reason of having seen him. Jesus uses the words “truly truly” which consist of *horaō* or to see and the adverb *alethos* or truly. Compared with what had just happened, Nathanael will see the heavens opened and God’s angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man. In other words, what Jacob had seen in a dream will become a reality with Jesus.

The source of this *anabaino* and *katabaino* is Gn 28.12: “And he (Jacob) dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!” The Hebrew word for ladder is *sulam*, the only instance it’s found in the Bible. We can assume that Nathanael was familiar with this incident and at once held Jesus in awe as being that ladder or mediator between heaven and earth. Addition of angels made it all the more impressive. Nevertheless, all this is destined to be revealed in the future but Nathanael felt it present even now. This too must have impressed Andrew, Peter and Philip. Philip too could take credit for having introduced Nathanael to Jesus, that he was someone special and might be singled out later for some important role.

## Chapter Two

Verses one through twelve deal with the wedding at Cana, vs. 1 opening with the conjunctive *kai* usually translated as “and.” However, it goes untranslated in the **RSV** and shows the close connection between what occurred towards the end of Chapter One and what we have now. For some reason or other John speaks of the “third day” which could refer to the marriage taking place, for example, the third day after the Sabbath. That seems probable because the Sabbath was the central point of the week and essential for keeping account of the passage of time. Jesus was invited though only his mother Mary is mentioned as being present. Joseph is omitted which suggests that he had died relatively young; also no other relatives are noted which doesn’t mean they weren’t present. Just the fact that John speaks of Mary suggests that she will have a role to play. That, of course, will be revealed shortly.

Vs. 2 has Jesus as having accepted an invitation to a wedding along with his disciples, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael. Chances are all or some of them knew either the bride, bridegroom or both. It seems that this was the first time Mary, her son and his companions came together. Right away Mary as only a mother could do, quickly

assessed each one of them. That set the stage for what could have been a heated conversation between the two, Mary of course as mother having the upper hand. Obviously Jesus felt he was unfairly being put on the spot because he had to explain why he chose each of the four men with him and answer what seemed to him useless questions. All this must have taken place in private apart from the disciples. However, they could tell just by looking at the two that tension existed between them. Chances are Mary was worried, not unduly so, as to the character of each of the four men. Jesus had been with them a short time and hadn't had sufficient time to check them out. Also Mary wondered what they were going to do now. That, for sure, made her feel uncomfortable. Although she was concerned about whom her son was hanging around with, of greater interest was John the Baptist. After all, Elizabeth is his mother, hence the two being related to her. With this in mind, Mary must have pressed her son for updated information, knowing that he had been with John.

In vs. 3 the wine served during the wedding gave out, *hustereo* also as to fall short which may also imply that sufficient quantity wasn't provided, a severe miscalculation by those responsible for the celebration. Mary seems to be privy to this and brings it to the attention to her son, her motherly instinct to kick in to prevent any embarrassment. Quietly she informed her son most likely before the guests realized what was going on but discreet enough not to ask how he'd handle the situation if at all. Was he going to ask the disciples with him to rush out quietly and get more wine? That's one reasonable supposition behind her request. Then we have the famous response by Jesus when he addresses his mother as woman. A footnote in the **NIV** observes "The Greek does not have the adjective 'Dear,' but it is necessary to convey the correct sense since the potentially abrupt 'woman' could be understood as a harsh form of address."

Along with this Jesus says, literally "What to me and to you?" We have to keep in mind that he had just had a heated conversation with his mother about the four unknown men with him (one of whom Jesus had changed his name for some reason or another) plus her son giving what seemed to his mother scant information about John the Baptist. In other words, she has little or no information to convey about Elizabeth who just heard rumors about her son out in the desert who recently had been investigated by authorities from Jerusalem. Also Mary had to bring up something he'd rather not discuss during this joyous wedding celebration, namely, that his hour or *hora* has not come. *Hora* refers to a point in time for an occasion, that occasion if mentioned by itself would be designated as a *kairos* event. At this stage of the game Mary was really annoyed at the way her son was treating her. What on earth was this hour about? Thankfully the give and take between mother and son wasn't in front of

the wedding guests, especially the bride and bridegroom. That would have spoiled the whole affair. Nevertheless, tension between mother and son remained and was due to go unresolved for the rest of Jesus' ministry. Mary was left pretty much to the role of an onlooker.

The situation with regard to providing wine was getting more critical. Clearly what Jesus said about his hour or *hora* applies here. It was running out and something had to be done immediately to save the day. Mary knew that both she and her son were familiar to most people at the celebration. She decided to take the initiative before anyone else, even the hosts, knew what was going on. Perhaps part of this was that Mary wanted to smooth over relations with her son even though she continued to remain uncomfortable about the four men associated with him. Thus she told the servants waiting on the guests to do whatever her son asks of them, even rush out to the store but to keep a low profile. The noun for such a position is *diakanos* or one whose task is to act as an intermediary, this differing from *doulos*, essentially a slave.

It so happened that nearby were six large containers of water intended for purification, they being put in place earlier for the guests to cleanse themselves of any impurity incurred during the proceedings. Apparently some of water had been used already which prompted Jesus to ask the servants to fill them to the very top. Once they had done this, they are to bring some of the contents to the steward in charge of the feast, *architriklinos*. It was he who knew about the lack of wine and tried not to panic since so many eyes were upon him. After all, he was responsible for the miscalculation when it came to the wine. Those who brought the wine didn't inform him as to its source. They knew it was wine from the water jugs but naturally were filled with disbelief. One error on their part and they just might literally lose their heads.

The steward knew what he was tasting to be wine. When it was brought to him he assumed it would be as such and was relieved that there just may be enough to last for the rest of the wedding celebration. He too was fully aware that if there was no wine, that's the end of his career. Not knowing what to make of the situation and dissatisfied with a lack of response from his underlings, discreetly he decided to summon the man-in-charge, the bridegroom. Without bringing up the issue of a lack of wine—the steward wanted to avoid that issue at all costs—he asked about the source of the wine he had just tasted. The customary practice of serving the best wine first and the lesser quality later is reversed. It seems that no one knew how this came about except the servants who dealt directly with the wine from the jars of water set aside for purification. Even if they told the steward and bridegroom they wouldn't

believe it. And so all the guests continued on with the wedding celebration blissfully unaware that an embarrassing situation had been averted. The best part of all this which goes unrecorded is that the tension between Jesus and his mother was lessened. By no means did go away, but both could agree that the outcome of the wedding was to their common consent.

Vs. 11 states that this is the first sign Jesus had done, *arche* suggestive of the first in a sequence and *semeion* being that which signals something more significant or meaningful than the appearance. In and by itself this *semeion* is confined to a limited group of people. However, the fact that John records it and Jesus' disciples are present means it will have wider ramifications though not at the present. Jesus, of course, was fully aware of this. John rightly calls the *semeion* a manifestation of his glory, the verb *phaneroo* directly related to *doxa*. The disciples believed or *pisteuo* literally "into him." They are singled as out worthy of mention whereas the other participants at the wedding feast, bridegroom and bride included, are not. Everyone else was simply too taken up with the wedding and subsequent celebration, especially the unexpected treat of wine served later.

Vs. 12 has Jesus leaving Cana and going to Capernaum with quite a wide variety of people accompanying him, his mother, brothers and disciples. Despite the tension between mother and son, Mary tags along obviously wanting to know what he was up to. As for his brothers (*adelphos*), most likely this covers a relatively wide assortment of relatives not uncommon for the time and culture. During the walk as well as their stay in Capernaum those accompanying him were filled with questions as to what had happened in Cana. Like the wedding guests, they were just as ignorant of the change of water into wine and needed to be informed as to what really occurred. Here we can presume is where that first sign was duly recorded for posterity. Both Jesus' actions and his words had a far more lasting impact than if they came from any given historical figure. They had a unique way of inserting themselves into one's memory or faculty of *anamnesis* as noted earlier.

After a brief stay in Capernaum, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for celebration of the Passover. No one is mentioned accompanying him though most likely the same retinue joined in. After all, the Passover was the most solemn of all holy days. We can assume that they arrived several days in advance in order to obtain what was necessary for the celebration but still had to contend with the crowds. The population of Jerusalem surged as at no other time of the year which is why the temple courtyard will filled with all sorts of vendors. This upset Jesus so much that quickly he made a whip of cords to drive them out, overturning the tables of money changers as well. The

courtyard was fairly large meaning that Jesus didn't cover the entire area. Vs. 15 says that he drove them all out which may be an exaggeration. However, he impressed the other vendors so much that they beat it out there as quickly as they could. The same, of course, applied to the crowds. Jesus exclaims that these people were making the house of his Father a house of trade or *emporion*. Obviously he was overheard calling the temple his Father's house which must have astonished them.

Vs. 17 begins with how the disciples respond to Jesus' action, that is, they remember it or better, insert it into their collective memory, the verb being *mimneskomai* which ties in with the faculty of *anamnesis* noted earlier. Actually it's vital, for without it we would not have a record of what had happened. Perhaps without fully realizing what was going on, they associated this action with a quote from Ps 69.9. It runs in full as "For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." Zeal or *qin'ath* implies jealousy and '*akal* is the common verb for to eat. Such zeal for things divine has negative ramifications for the psalmist who suffers insults or *cheraph* (singular). Such a *cherpah* initially directed towards God indirectly falls upon the psalmist. As for the verse at hand, the verb *kataesthio* means to eat up ravenously, the preposition *kata* meaning down as with gulping down food. Although Jesus caused quite a commotion, chances are that the vendors quickly filtered back. This was the most profitable time of the year, so their very livelihood depended upon the Passover rush.

Naturally what Jesus had done upset those present but again, given the large area of the temple courtyard and throng of people for the Passover, it was limited to a small area. People in other parts of the courtyard were completely oblivious as to what was going on. Besides, the noise was something else. Nevertheless, some Jews asked him for a sign or *seimeion* to show them for what he had done. After all, clearly they heard him speak of the temple as his Father's house. If that's true, then the Father must have given him this *semeion*. It should be noted that this is towards the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and he was an unknown entity. No one at the time knew where he was from or what he was about. Perhaps some may have confused him with John the Baptist who, it seems, never set foot in Jerusalem.

The *semeion* Jesus gave was something the Jews didn't expect. In fact, it went above their heads and understandably so. He said in a provocative manner that if the temple is destroyed, he will raise it up in three days. *Luo* is the verb which more precisely means to loosen, as though the stones simply will give way at once. At once people thought of what their Roman occupiers might do and in fact did carry out a generation later. Raising the temple up or *egeiro* within such a short period of time is

utterly impossible. Then again, Jesus called the temple his Father's house, and the Father just might be capable of such a task. To this the Jews responded in a predictable, literal fashion. They speak of the long time it took to build the temple...forty-six years...and three days is nothing compared to that time span which is about one human generation.

Jesus didn't let on that he was speaking of his body, the new temple. That would be incomprehensible even if he said so openly. Again, Jesus is an unknown entity who had made his way to the capital during Passover when all sorts of people flooded the city. Vs. 22 puts this in context, namely, that Jesus' words became clear to his disciples only after the resurrection. The verb *mimneskomai* as in vs. 17 is the second mention of that making-present through the faculty of *anamnesis* which is at the very heart of the Gospel, not just John's but the other three when it's used. Vs. 22 puts it in proper context, the disciples believing (*pisteuo*) the scriptures along with the word or *logos* that Jesus as *Logos* had spoken. There doesn't seem to be a clear-cut reference to a particular verse or verses or to the Hebrew scriptures as a whole. Possibly the latter is more like it.

Vs. 23 continues the theme of *semeion* or sign put as what Jesus had done (*poieo*) which remains unspecified but most likely refers to physical healings. That is, people believe in Jesus, *pisteuo* being used here in a sense different from vs. 22 with regard to the disciples just noted. In a way, Passover was a good opportunity for this. At no other time would there be such a wide variety of people, many having come from abroad. These would be ideal candidates to spread Jesus' mission well beyond the borders of Israel. At the same time the commotion was a cover-up or protection against prying eyes from the religious and secular (Roman) authorities. Too much was going on to keep tabs on everyone. Even if word about Jesus healing people reached them, it was incidental. As long as order was being kept.

Chapter Two concludes on a wary note. Jesus willingly engaged in making signs as just noted but didn't trust himself to the people, *pisteuo* again. He wanted to refrain from gaining notoriety, especially now at Passover, which would have political overtones. He was fully aware of what could happen and required no one to bear witness to this, *martureo*. And so the chapter ends with Jesus knowing (*ginosko*) what was in a man. These words come as no surprise during the Passover, for in a few short years Jesus would be in Jerusalem during that feast when he would be betrayed and crucified.

## Chapter Three

The second letter of this opening verse is the conjunctive *de* which the **RSV** translates as “now,” this being a way to prep the reader for something new and important about to be described. That happens to be the important figure of Nicodemus whose pedigree, if you will, John puts as “a man of the Pharisees” and “a ruler of the Jews.” Now the stage is set for Nicodemus to come to (*pros*) Jesus where night is mentioned specifically. The very fact that this meeting takes place at night says everything about Jesus’ relationship with the religious authorities right at the beginning of his ministry. The point of contention is, of course, Jesus having made quite a scene of upsetting the vendors in the temple courtyard. Other than we have no record of any tense relationship between him and official Judaism. As for where Jesus is staying during the Passover, most likely it’s a rented place along with those accompanying him as noted in vs. 12. Surely at least one of them had contacts in the city to make suitable arrangements. In fact, he may have done this well in advance to accommodate a relatively large party during the busiest time of the year, that is, Passover.

Nicodemus addresses Jesus as Rabbi or teacher (*didaskalos*) which shows great respect, he using the first person plural which could infer that others of his class felt the same but were reluctant to admit it. Adding the fact that Jesus comes from God is even more remarkable. The basis of this claim rests on the signs or *semeion* Jesus had performed, the ones mentioned in 1.23 but left unspecified. Nicodemus and his silent companions acknowledge that they could be done only by God or more accurately, that God is with (*meta*) Jesus. Wonderful as these signs might be, knowing the source or who was responsible for them is more important. As noted above, such signs must consist of healing though there’s nothing specific as to their nature.

Jesus doesn’t show the least bit of being flattered by Nicodemus. Instead, in vs. 3 he comes close to rebuffing him, using a double *amen* translated as “truly, truly.” He reinforces this, if you will, by adding “I say to you.” In other words, Jesus is addressing this respected religious leader as an equal, as a Rabbi which Nicodemus called him in vs. 2. At the same time he’s putting him in his place. Nicodemus accepted this as a proper response which set the stage, if you will, for a dialogue between the two men. Jesus challenges this man without mincing words, namely, the necessity to be born from above (the **RSV** has ‘anew’), *gennao* with the adverb *anōthen*, from above. Such a birth is necessary for seeing the kingdom of God, *horao*. And so if one is born without this above-ness being operative in one’s awareness, that person remains completely blind.

Vs. 4 has Nicodemus asking somewhat naively how someone who's an adult be born when old. Obviously a person can't enter the womb of his mother and come out once again. Jesus maintains his respect for this venerable member of the clergy yet doesn't hesitate to put him on guard. He does this by a double *amen* and "I say to you" which he had just used in vs. 3. Jesus refines what birth he's talking about. Instead of being born in the physical sense, water and the Spirit (*Pneuma*) are essential for the birth he has in mind. As for *Pneuma*, it's mentioned in 1.33 as recognized by John. Also the element of water associated with baptism and practiced by John at the Jordan River seemed to be something of a novelty, it not being found in the Hebrew scriptures.

It's quite possible that word of this had reached Nicodemus which wouldn't be surprising, for at that time word traveled more quickly than we imagine. Nicodemus was trying to put two and two together as best he could but apparently had no point of reference in the way he had been taught to comprehend what Jesus was communicating to him. As for water and *Pneuma*, both are requirements for entering the kingdom of God, *eiserchomai* with the preposition *eis*; in other words, two "intos" with regard to this kingdom. Now Jesus shifts Nicodemus' original question as to being born by saying yes, what is born of the flesh is flesh (*sarx*) whereas what is born of *Pneuma* is *pneuma*. Note the difference between the two, the latter being derived from the former. As for the verb, it's *gennaō* as Jesus uses it in vs. 3.

In vs. 7 Jesus tells Nicodemus not to marvel (*thaumazo*, also as to be impressed, to be caught off guard) at his words about being born literally from above (*anothen*), this apparently being something brand new for him. It seems Jesus is a bit surprised that someone so knowledgeable in his religion was unfamiliar with this. Then again, the religious tradition doesn't seem to have such references, but you'd think Nicodemus would have understood what was at issue.

Jesus still sees astonishment and confusion on the face of Nicodemus, so he decides to flesh out on what he had said earlier with regard to the Spirit. He uses an example of that which is most similar to it, wind, this also rendered as *pneuma*. Everyone is familiar with the wind in motion or as it makes various sounds but doesn't have a clue as to its source or destination. Also it can vary in intensity from a gentle breeze to a hurricane. In other words, *pneuma* more often than not is very fickle. As for its movement, it's rendered by the two verbs *erchomai* and *hupago*, the latter also as to go away or to depart. If *pneuma* is so unpredictable yet felt, it must be a very strange type of existence for a person to be born of the *Pneuma*, actually undesirable and even disturbing if one is unfamiliar with it. Although we don't have Nicodemus asking Jesus about this, surely he wondered to himself if such a person or persons do or can

exist. If so, how would they comport themselves? One thing is certain. Such a person would be pretty much alone not knowing his origin nor destination. Hearing would be an important factor in his life yet even this cannot be grasped, just listened to.

This talk about something so ungraspable must have confused Nicodemus even more instead of helping him out. No small wonder that in vs. 9 he exclaims “How can this be?” Jesus didn’t waste a moment responding or actually rebuking him. He puts the question in terms of another question. If Nicodemus is a teacher or *didaskalso* as he had called Jesus in vs. 2, why is he ignorant (i.e., lacks *ginosko*) of what Jesus had just explained with regard to the Spirit? Nicodemus must have felt that indeed he was put in his place. Although Jesus continues to speak with him, pretty much he fades away until he appears briefly in 7.50 and later to take away Jesus’ body. Unlike our perception of the Pharisees, Nicodemus must be credited with being open to what Jesus had taught, else he would have been among those who had condemned him. The same can be applied to other Pharisees sympathetic with him.

For the third time in a row in vs. 11 Jesus comes off with a double *amen* to Nicodemus followed by “I say to you.” He’s singled out for this treatment, if you will, by reason of his high status, so Jesus wants to make sure not just he but his associates grasp what he’s trying to communicate. Should Jesus succeed, he might...just might...have official Judaism on his side. This time, however, Jesus speaks in the first person plural which, in light of the threefold use of the double *amen* plus “I say to you,” is designed to give his words greater authority, one which Nicodemus seems disposed to accept. He tells Nicodemus straight out that he doesn’t receive “our” testimony, *lambano* and *marturia* or witness even though “we” are speaking of what “we” know, *eidon* also as to see, to perceive. Jesus knows he can really lay it on thick with Nicodemus, a way of testing his resolve and hopefully to win him over.

In vs. 12 Jesus continues speaking in rather harsh words to Nicodemus who remains silent throughout, reverting to the first person singular. He contrasts talk about things of the earth with those of heaven, *epigeios* and *epouranios*. Note the preposition *epi* or upon prefaced to each in the sense of with regard to, “upon earth” and “upon heaven.” It would be useless to speak of the former if they can’t be grasped. Apply this to the latter? Might as well forget about it.

Next in vs. 13 Jesus shifts to speaking about his origin and says out-rightly that he has come down from heaven and that no one except himself has ascended there. The two verbs are *katabaino* and *anabaino*, that is, the prepositions *kata* and *ana* prefaced to

the same verbal root *baino*. Jesus presents this as speaking of another person, that is, the Son of man which he mentioned last in 1.51 to Nathanael.

In vs. 14 compares the Son of man to when Moses had lifted up the serpent in the desert. The occasion? When the Israelites had complained about the manna as “worthless food” and were punished by the Lord with fiery serpents which bit them, causing quite a few casualties. As for the cure, the Lord himself told Moses “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” [Num 21.9]. “Fiery serpent” consists of two nouns, *nachash* and *saraph*, the former being the one which had tempted the woman and described as “more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made” [Gn 3.1]. As for the pole or *nes*, it also means a banner with military connotations. The solution was simple for anyone wishing to be cured of his bite. All one had to do was to look at this *nes*, *ra’ah* being the verb. Note the similar sound of *nachash* and *nashak*, serpent and to bite.

To replace the seeing of the bronze serpent, the verse at hand has Jesus offering life which is eternal, *aionios* essentially that which has no beginning nor end. However, such life is dependent upon believing (*pisteuo*) in him.

Jesus continues speaking with Nicodemus, having moderated his tone because he could see that despite having rebuked him, he remained eager to learn. Jesus would have stopped then and there should Nicodemus show any hesitation. Actually what Nicodemus hears are the first detailed words as to Jesus’ identity, perhaps more than the four disciples whom Jesus had chosen. In back of Jesus’ mind was this man going to share what he had learned with his fellow Pharisees? Judging from the wider picture, even if he did so later on, it didn’t seem to have had much effect.

In vs. 16 Jesus reveals to Nicodemus his mission which consists of perhaps the best know verse from the New Testament. It’s one of those things that has become so familiar that we breeze right over it with little consideration. It can be examined in terms of three parts. The first is about God giving his own Son because he loved the world. The common verb *didomi* or to give connotes granting permission, appointing or even establishing. What springs directly from such *didomi* is the verb *agapao* (verbal root of *agape*) with regard to *kosmos*. This verb which is so essential to Christianity can be rendered as to having affection and once taken as such, makes all the difference.

The second part is connected with the first by *hoste* or “so that” which suggests a given result being followed by what had just come before it. Next is the giving of

God's Son who is *monogenes* or only-begotten, his only one. The third and final part of vs. 16 begins with *hina* or "in order that" which shows something else which follows, that is, from *hoste*. This consists in any person (*pas* being all inclusive) who believes (*pisteuo*) not so much the Son but conditionally, if you will, that is, literally into (*eis*) the Son. This into-ness spills over into the following. Such a person will not perish but have life which is eternal or *aionios*, the verb being *apollumai* which is more forceful and suggestive of something coming from without, that is, to experience destruction.

Vs. 17 follows directly upon *agapao*→*didomi* or loving and giving with regard to the Son and world respectively. That is to say, God sent the Son (here not as *monogenes*) into the world or *kosmos*. The verb is *apostello*, to dispatch in order to accomplish a mission. Compare with *didomi* above or God giving his Son who is *monogenes*. *Didomi* conveys the sense of permanence, that the world now possesses the only-begotten Son whereas *apostello* suggests giving but with the certainty of a return. I.e., the former is one-way whereas the latter is reciprocal.

As for the reciprocal *apostello* with regard to the Son, he is not to condemn the world but that it be saved through him. In other words, we have a contrast between what would be expected as *krino* or judging and therefore having a sentence delivered, most likely as harsh as possible, and *sozo* or saving the world. Both are prefaced with *hina*, "in order that" which implies a result that will follow quickly. In other words, this saving comes about through the Son instead of *krino* coming through him. *Sozo* connotes both preserving as well as rescuing. At this early stage Jesus doesn't go into details as to how this saving will take place. If he were to jump ahead and speak of his death and resurrection, clearly that would be too much for Nicodemus to comprehend. Not even the disciples grasped this despite having been with Jesus for three years. As for the Son, Nicodemus was able to associate the fact that Jesus was speaking of himself and not of someone else. That was more than enough to make him follow Jesus in the coming years closely but to do so in a discreet manner. Thus in a way Nicodemus is an ambivalent character.

Vs. 18 has the Son already present in the world engaged in his mission of saving people though someone like Nicodemus is unaware of what this consists of. A precondition for it—and *sozo* is later seen as preeminently tied in with the passion and death of Jesus—is believing in the Son, *pisteuo* which leads to being "into (*eis*) the Son." In other words, such active belief consists of an almost physical transfer from one place into another or better, from one condition into another. Right away such *pisteuo* results in the person doing it not to be condemned or *krino*, that is, judged

and having a sentence handed down to him. The exact opposite holds true for a person who does not believe, this being modified by into (*eis*) the name of the Son of God who is only-begotten. *Onoma* or name in this context is Jesus Christ which, of course, refers to the double nature of his person and hence mission, the one who both saves and is anointed.

While such talk indeed is not only refreshing but revolutionary, in vs. 19 Jesus speaks of judgment or *krisis*. Like the verbal root from which it's derived (*krino*), *krisis* implies the giving of a sentence. Such *krisis* is not like anything one would expect. Rather, it consists of a presence-in, light or *phos* which has come into the world and in 1.4 is identified with life. In other words, the light doesn't have to do anything, just be itself. Even before this has taken place, men loved darkness (*skotos* more precisely as gloom), the verb *agapao* being used, the same one with regard to God loving the world. Thus *agapao* can work in two opposite directions. At the root of this *agapao* with regard to gloom is that already the deeds of men were evil, *poneros* implying that which is worthless both socially and morally.

And so this precondition to what is *poneros* makes a person hate the light, *miseo* also as to have a strong aversion, keeping him away from it and not desiring to approach (*pros*, direction towards-which) it, the verb being *erchomai*. Instinctively such a person knows that this aversion to *pros* will expose his deeds or *ergon*, also as occupation. The verb is *elegcho*, also as to scrutinize, to examine carefully.

In contrast to what vs. 20 describes, vs. 21 brings to conclusion what turns out to be a kind of monologue by Jesus to Nicodemus. As for Nicodemus, he hasn't uttered a word since vs. 4, his question as to how a person can be born a second time. As noted above, hopefully this Pharisee's position will influence his peers which unfortunately hasn't come true. This last verse before Jesus departs concerns a person who does what is true or more accurately, what is truth or *aletheia*. Such true has a unique way of bringing him to (*pros*, again direction towards-which) the light. In this way his deeds that have been done in God will be clear to all, *ergazomai* being the verbal root of *ergon* or deeds. The verb is *phaneroo* also as to become visible with regard to that which previously had not been seen.

Vs. 22 shifts gears with the opening words "after this" or after the extended talk with Nicodemus which to him must have been both inspiring and confusing. Throughout it all he didn't ask Jesus a single question, having been effectively silenced when he asked about being born a second time. Nothing is said about Jesus' experience in Jerusalem for the Passover nor how long he stayed there. We can assume it was relatively short,

he and his disciples (his mother and brothers not mentioned) having made their way to Judea. It is there that Jesus engages in baptizing, the details of which aren't given. However, keep in mind that Jesus' baptizing must have been different, John the Baptist having acknowledged this back in 1.33, "he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" [1.33]. How that fits in is better left unsaid but simply put out there.

Apparently nearby John was continuing his practice at a place described as having much water. So we have two men...cousins...engaged in essentially the same practice which must have been confusing to people, Jesus' disciples included. Vs. 24 expressly says that John had not yet been put into prison implying that he was being monitored closely whereas such was not the case with Jesus. Many must have wondered who was a disciple of whom?

Vs. 25 recounts a discussion (*zetesis*, fundamentally as search, investigation) between the disciples of John and an unidentified Jew with regard to purifying or *katharizmos*, perhaps confusing this and the act of baptizing. At once the discussion shifts to the disciples bothered over Jesus and his disciples engaged in their baptizing. When addressing John they referred to Jesus as the one to whom he had borne witness, *martureo*. However, what really concerned them was not that Jesus was competing with John but that they, the disciples or ones complaining, were in danger of losing their reputation by being associated with the Baptist. Although we have no word from Jesus' disciples, we can assume they felt the same.

This prompted John to offer a teaching moment, one that will for good settle the difference between John's mission and that of Jesus. This will go on for the remainder of the chapter. John's disciples address him as Rabbi, this the first time in the Gospel such a title is used with regard to John. Right away John saw through their self-centered concern and responded by saying that a person receives only what's given to him from heaven, *lambano* and *didomi*. Then he gets right to the point, namely, he reminds his own disciples that they are bearing witness (*martureo*) that he isn't the Christ or the anointed one. Instead, John is one sent (*apostello*) before him.

John now puts all this in the context of participants at a wedding. While the bridegroom has his bride, the friend (*philos*) of the bridegroom is standing near and listening to him, *histemi* and *akouo*. This friend is something like a best man, one who has a special role to play during the wedding ceremony itself. His readiness to be of service is indicated by a disposition to rejoice (*chairo*) at the bridegroom's voice which sums up *histemi* and *akouo*, making them one and the same. That is to say, his joy is now full or *pleroo*, brought to fulfillment. Implied is that the friend is ready to be of

service to the bride should she request it. Such joy is mirrored in a spontaneous willingness to decrease while the bridegroom (and let's include the bride) is increasing, *auxano* and *elattoo*. We could say that while each is going his or her own separate ways, there's a violation of space and time, if you will. The further apart they get, the closer they become.

In vs. 31 John elaborates upon this *auxano-elattoo* as it pertains to Jesus Christ but without mentioning his name. There are two words for the English "above," *anothen* and *epano* (from above and above), both containing the preposition *ana* or above, up to. The latter has the preposition *epi* prefaced to it, upon or literally "upon above." Using both with regard to Jesus is intended to show his divinity. In contrast to both aboves we have in the same verbs mention of earth or *ge* also as land with two uses of the preposition *ek* and reading literally "from the earth" in both instances. Compared with heaven and the two uses of "above," the person associated with (*ek*) the earth speaks of it, *laleo* in the sense of having the same language as the earth. Then John throws in that the one coming from heaven (*erchomai* with *ek*) is above everything, *epano*. After all, *epano* = *ouranos* or heaven.

In vs. 32 John speaks of himself without mentioning himself. That is to say, he puts himself as bearing witness or *martureo* which is equivalent to having seen and having heard (*horao* and *akouo*). While that is fine in and by itself, the tragedy is that no one has received this testimony, *lambano* and *marturia*. Yet at the same time while John is baptizing, Jesus is doing the same thing nearby. Keep in mind the fact that John said Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit as noted above.

Vs. 33 continues as part of an extended sentence from the previous verse, namely, that despite the tragedy of not receiving John's testimony, there are some who do so. By reason of this, receiving John's testimony is equivalent to setting a seal, that is to say, that God is true (*alethes*). The verb is *sphragizo* which is a kind of security measure to prevent tampering with a document. In sum, *sphragizo* and *marturia* are pretty much equivalent.

In vs. 34 John continues speaking about Jesus without mentioning his name, that is, to his own disciples. Chances are his words are going way above their heads just as it was between Jesus and Nicodemus. The one whom God has sent utters God's words, *apostello* and *laleo* with regard to *rhema* (plural). This noun refers to a thing or object compared with *logos*, word-as-expression. Such *apostello/laleo* ties into the way God gives the Spirit or *Pneuma* which is not by measure, *metros* with the preposition *ek*,

literally as “from measure.” In other words, human measurement does not apply here simply because *Pneuma* refers to something which can’t be seen as one’s breath.

Vs. 35 continues from the previous one as an extended sentence. Note the connection between the Father loving the Son and his giving everything into his hand. In other words, *agapao* = *didomi*. This should make it easier for a person to believe literally “into (*eis*) the Son,” *pisteuo*, it being equated with life which is *aionios*. The opposite of this *pisteuo*? The person who does not obey the Son won’t see life which means that *peitho* (*apeitho* being the alpha privative) or obeying is on the same plane as seeing life, *horaō* and *zoe*. Unfortunately for a person who neither believes nor obeys will have God’s wrath coming to rest upon him. The noun is *orge*, also anger with the verb *meno* which is more along the lines of remaining, of abiding made all the more burdensome by the preposition *epi*, “upon him.”

## Chapter Four

The two opening words of this chapter serve to indicate a shift, *hos oun* or “now when.” That is to say, it’s from the interaction between the disciples of Jesus and those of John the Baptist to Jesus entering Samaria. As for the word “gaining,” it’s the comparative of *polus*, much, many. Although the text says that Jesus was responsible for baptizing, right away John inserts that he wasn’t doing it himself but his disciples. Compare with 3.22: “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.” However, Jesus leaves Judea and returned to Galilee. As for this comparison with John the Baptist, the overall point is to show both the similarity and difference between what the two men represent. In sum, Jesus fulfills what John had been doing in his ministry of baptizing. This had been clear right from the beginning.

Once Jesus left Judea vs. 4 says that by necessity to get to Galilee he had to pass through Samaria, the verb *deo* also as to compel. This is putting it somewhat oddly, indicating that Jesus felt that by going this way...essentially a detour...he was about to accomplish an important part of his mission. He may have not known the details, but had sense enough to go that way. The text sheds more light on this by saying more specifically that Jesus came to a town called Sychar. This place is significant for two reasons. The first insofar it symbolizes reconciliation between the two brothers Jacob and Esau or more specifically, a village near Shechem where Jacob celebrated this reconciliation by having “erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel” [Gn 33.20] or God, the God of Israel. Perhaps in Jesus’ day part of this altar remained or in its place

a monument to mark the spot. The second significance is with respect to land Jacob apparently gave to his son Joseph prior to his death, a kind of will and last testament: “Moreover I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope (*shekem* in Hebrew or shoulder) which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow” [Gn 48.22].

In addition to this, vs. 6 speaks of the well of Jacob being at Sychar, a place where Jesus decides to stop at the sixth hour or around noon just when the heat of the day was starting to take hold. He was tired due to his journey, *kopiao* more as to be weary due to work and *hodoiporia*. The latter can be rendered more specifically as a journey on the road. Most likely he and his disciples planned to rest in some shade nearby before moving on. The prospect of spending the night in what could be hostile territory was less than desirable. As for the location of this well, the NIV has a footnote saying that it’s “mentioned nowhere else in Scripture.”

In vs. 7 a woman comes to the well at the same time Jesus was there or just before it becomes too hot in order to draw water. She’s specifically mentioned as being from Samaria to emphasize Jesus’ current location, territory essentially at odds with Israel. In other words, Jesus was in a place whose inhabitants were hostile to Jews and even worse, had come into contact with a woman from this alien territory. This sets off a lengthy discussion which continues through vs. 42. Being alone, Jesus figures it’s safe to ask the woman for a drink. Obviously he could have gotten it himself but used the situation for a specific teaching moment. The text adds deliberately that the disciples had gone into the nearby town to procure supplies. If they hung around, they would have caused unnecessary and unwelcome criticism, something Jesus wasn’t inclined to deal with.

This woman whose identity remains unknown is surprised that Jesus is asking her for a drink of water. How she recognizes him as most likely from Israel isn’t given. Perhaps it was his accent or he told her outrightly that he was passing through. She puts the awkward situation succinctly, namely, that Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans, *sugchoreo* consisting of the verbal root *choreo*, to make room or to give way prefaced with the preposition *sug* or with. Instead of putting her at ease, Jesus surprises her with something she finds hard if not impossible to accept. She simply hasn’t a clue as to the gift (*dorea*) of God being extended to her through the person who’s asking for a drink of water. If she was aware of this, she would have been disposed to receive water which is living. Implied is that because she doesn’t know, she might not get such water and regret it for the rest of her life.

The woman persists and confuses this living water with Jacob's well which is very deep. We may take this as missing a golden opportunity because it's so obvious, but it represents a literal way of looking at things just as people did back then. She asks if Jesus is greater than Jacob, a revered patriarch, supposedly responsible for having dug the well and having provided water for his family and livestock. We can detect clear pride on her part, for after all, Jesus is not a Samaritan but an alien.

The dialogue continues, again thankfully with interference from the disciples. Jesus states the obvious, namely, that anyone who takes water from the well at hand will thirst again. This obviously has special meaning in a desert environment where water is scarce. It differs radically from the water Jesus is willing to give to anyone which will quench thirst forever. Not only that, it will come from a spring welling up to life which is eternal, literally "into (*eis*) that which is eternal or *aiōnios*." Without missing a beat the woman...the Samaritan...asks Jesus for this water but understandably hasn't a clue as to what's involved. Who wouldn't make such a request? Having water which is eternal is one thing but to have a well springing up and never failing is quite another. That's like comparing money from the bank with having the bank which contains the money.

In vs. 16 Jesus decides to put this woman to the test, asking her to bring her husband to the well. Right from the get-go she had a strong hunch that Jesus would put this to her and uttered the half-truth that she has no husband. We might tend to think rather crudely that Jesus could read her mind when she failed to acknowledge having had five husbands. After all, both were by this well dug by Jacob during the heat of the day. Such a holy spot, despite not being mentioned in scripture, had a role to play insofar that it disposed the woman to be "read" quite easily. In fact, without being conscious of the fact, she was waiting for someone to come along so she could resolve her irregular marital situation. All Jesus had to do was put the question to her, nothing more.

The woman said in a rather matter-of-fact way that Jesus was a prophet, using the verb *theoreo* or to observe in a sustained manner. She was correct, but it took someone especially disposed to recognize this because Jews and Samaritans didn't get along for centuries. She continues saying that her fathers or ancestors had worshiped on this mountain or Mount Gerizim. The verb is *proskuneo*, the root *kuneo* meaning to kiss or give reverence prefaced with the preposition *pros*, indicative of direction towards-which. "And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebel" [Dt 11.29]. As a Samaritan, the woman subscribes to this

whereas she recognizes that Jesus, being a Jew, Jerusalem is the place (*topos*) for such *proskuneo*. One such reference for this is Ps 122.34: “Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord.”

Jesus couldn't contest that which is clearly stated in scripture, yet in vs. 21 he takes the initiative to break this centuries old impasse. While both have legitimate claims, Jesus sees in this woman an opportunity to acknowledge their age-old disagreement and to resolve it. He states bluntly that she, a Samaritan, worships what she doesn't know whereas we (the Jews) worship what we know. Use of the first person plural betrays not arrogance but speaking from a position of authority. In other words, he posits a juxtaposition between *proskuneo* and *eidon*, the latter implying to see in the sense of perceive. Not only that, salvation or *soteria* comes from the Jews, this word suggestive of security and safety. A footnote in the RSV has a quote from Is 2.3 worth mentioning in this regard: “And many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

Without a doubt, the woman was first attracted to what Jesus said as well as having personal knowledge of her situation. However, quickly she was taken aback when he spoke so authoritatively with regard to that perennial bone of contention, Samaritans vs. Jews. Any tension dissolves with the first word of vs. 23, “but” or *alla*. This changes everything. Jesus recognizes the two fundamental ways of worshiping God and says that it is about to change. He speaks of an hour coming, *hora* being a more specific event, a kind of honing in implied in *kairos* or special occasion. Jesus addresses her as “woman” which here is not unlike that double *amen* when he's about to speak in a formal manner. She, by the way, could not help but pick up on this, having no other choice but to listen.

As for the coming (*erchomai*) of this hour, Jesus says that already it is present, literally “and now is.” Indeed, as it stands at the moment, the woman—again, keeping in mind this is Samaria—is the only person alive who is witness to this hour. However, there's an element of the future involved. Jesus continues by saying that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The noun for such persons is *proskunetes*, obviously derived from *proskuneo*. God is the Father who belongs to both Samaritans and Jews. As for the *proskuneo* at hand, it is twofold: *pneuma* and *aletheia* or spirit and truth which transcends the two verses cited above with regard to Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem even though Jesus does not mention both places. While this is going on,

the Father is active as well. He doesn't sit idly but is actively seeking for persons to worship him, *zeteo* with regard to *proskuneo*.

Although Jesus says that true worshipers worship the Father in spirit along with the truth, vs. 24 aligns this with the nature of the Father himself, that is, he is spirit or *pneuma*, this demanding that *proskuneo* be in accord with such a nature. While Jesus is aware that he's speaking with one person, he knows that quickly word of this conversation will spread. As to how John knew this (he wasn't privy to the conversation), he as a true worshiper would recognize it when dealing with Jesus even though the subject may not have been brought up directly.

In vs. 25 the woman acknowledges that the Messiah is coming, this term = *Christos* or Anointed One. Once he has come, he will show all things to us, first person plural possibly referring to his desire to include the Samaritans or even more radically, the Samaritans minus the Jews. The verb is *anaggello* or more precisely, to carry back (*ana*) information. Because of her confidence in this, Jesus figures it she's ripe for revealing himself to her, that he is the Messiah or *Christos*.

Such a dramatic statement, one that can't be overestimated, is broken off immediately by the appearance of the disciples which is well put by the first words of vs. 27, "just then" or literally "upon this" *epi touto*. Even from afar they could see Jesus was speaking with a woman—Samaritan isn't mentioned, that being presumed—and picked up their pace to find out what was going on. Curiosity, of course, go the better of them. As they drew closer, they didn't bother asking. As vs. 28 puts it succinctly, the woman left her water jar just to get out of the way. After all, she learned quite a lot in such a short time.

Now the scene shifts to the woman running off to the townsfolk about her recent encounter with Jesus. Even though it was still around high noon, she couldn't run fast enough, going from house to house, rousing people preferring to be indoors to avoid the heat. Everyone was familiar with her situation, something not uncommon in village life, that she had been married five times. Nevertheless, they were so taken by her enthusiasm that they figured it was worth going out to the well and see if what she had claimed was true. Obviously they didn't want to miss out on something so momentous. Soon they'd find out the real story. And so everyone went to Jesus at the well despite it now being later and even hotter. As for the disciples, there's no record of their conversation with Jesus. We can assume they were surprised, even shocked and put in their place. Jesus told them to calm down and wait for the woman to

return with most of the townsfolk. Now the stage was set for that which would change everything.

Vs. 31 has the disciples asking Jesus to take some nourishment, perhaps a way to shift the direction of the tense conversation they were having or to take the heat off them for having criticized the woman who was a Samaritan, a double-barreled condemnation in itself. Calling Jesus Rabbi was simply an added prop in this regard, if you will. Jesus didn't pay the slightest attention and came off with a statement not unlike one he had just given the woman. With her he spoke of water and with the disciples, of food. In the meantime the woman is going from house to house summoning the inhabitants of the village to come to the well.

As for the food (*broxis* also the act of eating) Jesus has to give, it's followed by a predictable question the disciples asked each other, that is, who had brought it without telling anyone. Jesus knew this would happen and took it in stride, not surprised that such a discussion was taking place among his followers. Now he puts this talk about food (*broma*, usually food which is solid) as being twofold: the will of him who sent him, *thelema* and to accomplish his word, *teleioo* in the sense of bringing to completion *ergon*. By now the disciples knew that that when Jesus spoke like that he was referring to the Father. At least they made that much progress.

In vs. 35 Jesus continues the theme of food, reminding the disciples of a common saying which he puts in terms of a rhetorical question, that is, the harvest follows after four months. In other words, the harvest cannot be rushed, but in the case at hand, it's too late. The harvest has arrived: "see how the fields are already white" as this verse continues. In vs. 36 Jesus amplifies his remarks on the theme at hand, namely, that the person who reaps will obtain the following two: he receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life or literally "into (*eis*) eternal life," the adjective being *aiionios*. In this occasion it's a win-win situation. Both sower and reaper rejoice (*chairo*) at having received the same reward. Jesus again brings up a common saying or *logos* in vs. 37, namely, that one sows and another reaps.

The disciples figured that they had been both educated as well as chastised, something they didn't expect. Jesus now applies this talk about sowing and reaping to themselves, that already he has sent (*apostello*) them on an unusual mission. That consists of being sent to reap what they hadn't labored or more specifically, will take over what other persons have labored. Obviously it seems completely unjust but attractive to the disciples. They wondered why this is so and that some day the tables might be turned. How would they react then? The disciples—again no mention of all

twelve but by now assuming they numbered as such—can't help but think of the woman who soon will return with the entire village to meet Jesus. Might these people...outcast Samaritans...welcome Jesus or simply drive him and his disciples out of town? At this point things are left up in the air, deliberately so.

As for the Samaritans, in vs. 39 they aren't mentioned specifically as having come to meet Jesus though it's implied. John is more interested in whether or not they believe in him which they do, the verb being *pisteuo*. So in a very real way this unidentified woman is a kind of apostle. The verse at hand puts this literally as "word of witness" where *logos* and *martureo* are as one. The selling point was that Jesus had told the woman everything she had done in her life. If not her, then why not they? Those belonging to Jesus thus move in and take over the initial work she had done for them, thereby reconciling the age-old division between Jew and Samaritan. If that can be overcome, why not the rest of mankind? It was way too early for that, but the stage had been set for it to become a real possibility. All in all it begins in vs. 40 where Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days. We can just imagine the conversations that took place which had dumbfounded the disciples who, like all Jews, were raised to consider Samaritans as virtual heretics.

As a result of the important, indeed vital, two day stay with the Samaritans, vs. 41 says that many more came to believe in Jesus compared with those in vs. 39 who believed the woman's testimony. The locals tell the woman-apostle as will be the case with future apostles that their belief in Jesus Christ rests in personal testimony as with the woman. Such belief is tied in with knowing (*eidon*) that Jesus is Savior of the world. Note that they call him *Soter* instead of Messiah or *Christos*, the only use of this noun in the Gospel.

Vs. 43 has Jesus departing from the well of Jacob in Samaria to Galilee after being with the local inhabitants for two full days. The discussions must have been amazing, something today we'd designate as ecumenical. As for the woman-as-apostle got this underway, we can assume that some if not all five of her former husbands were present. All in all, there must have been an amazing reconciliation. Even though Jesus left and isn't recorded as having returned to Samaria, we can assume that his visit left a deep impression on the apostles accompanying him. Later on or after the resurrection and Pentecost, they made Samaria a high priority, already having sown the seeds of faith there.

In contrast to the unexpected hero-like welcome in Samaria, upon arriving in Galilee with joyous memories still echoing in his ears, Jesus testifies that a prophet has no

honor in his own country, *time* also as value or price. The verb *martureo* is used which seems rather formal and reflects the fact that Jesus was quite miffed at his reception. Nevertheless, the inhabitants did extend a welcome to him, *dechomai* fundamentally as to receive. This cool reception seems to be based upon the possibility that he would perform miracles, not that he was the Messiah as the Samaritans had come to recognize. Indeed, word must have reached those in Galilee ahead of Jesus' arrival that such was the case. Their response? Don't believe it but milk Jesus for what he's worth. Their point of reference? Many of them had been in Jerusalem during the Passover and saw what he had done there. On top of their minds was that he had caused quite a commotion in the temple courtyard. Some of the Galileans may have been manning the money changers' tables, etc., and were the subject of Jesus' wrath.

In light of this cool reception, Jesus decided to remain in Galilee and return to Cana where memory of him having provided wine was still fresh. That's all the text says, but we can assume he and his disciples had received a warm welcome after his cool reception elsewhere. Then at Capernaum the son of a local official was ill, *basilikos* being an adjective connoting that which is royal and presumably a local politician, not one directly affiliated with the Roman occupiers. This official also heard about Jesus being in the vicinity so out of desperation he begged him to heal his son, *erotao* also as to put a question along with the preposition *pros* or direction towards-which, indicative of his desperation.

Jesus comes off with a rebuke which must have taken the official by surprise. Behind this was still feeling of having been miffed by the local inhabitants. Hence he exclaims that you—not so much the official proper but essentially all Galileans—have a need to see signs and wonders, *semeion* and *teras*, the latter more as an omen or prodigy and thus more awe-inspiring compared with the former. Without them you won't believe. So instead of actually going to see the boy, Jesus tells the official not to worry, that his son will live which turned out to be true. As with the Samaritans, this official believed the *pisteuo* and *logos* that Jesus had spoken, he by reason of his position of authority being a kind of outsider even if a native of Galilee.

While the official did believe Jesus, the remaining verses of this chapter intimate some lingering doubt or hesitation. That is to say, some of his servants told him of the good news which prompted him to ask more precisely the time his son had been healed. Note that the text doesn't say explicitly that he ran home as quickly as possible, just that "he was going down" [vs. 52] which indicates a normal pace; i.e., no rush to see his son. It's almost as though he didn't want to see what had happened and therefore

have his hopes dashed prematurely. Only once the servants confirmed that the boy was healed at the seventh hour, the same time the official was with Jesus, did he believe along with his household. Actually vs. 50 has the man believing, more specifically the *logos* of Jesus. Now he had firsthand knowledge to back up the *logos* or report, a fact which if Jesus knew about, would have miffed him all the more. Such was his ambivalent experience in his home territory of Galilee. The first verse of the next chapter has him headed for Jerusalem.