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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



The Gospel *of* John

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson except the first also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. In an address before the Pontifical Biblical Commission on April 12, 2013, Pope Francis stressed, "the Church's life and mission are founded on the word of God which is the soul of theology and at the same time inspires the whole of Christian life."

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 18 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.

3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the Gospel of John and realize how that Gospel offers spiritual nourishment. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When each author wrote his gospel, he didn't simply link random stories about Jesus—he placed them in a context that often stressed a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of the Gospel of John, the book is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 8 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from John 2:1 through 4:54. The study group reads and discusses only John 2:1 through 3:21 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on John 3:22 through 4:54 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the first format on page 16. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the second format on page 16, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The gospel passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into three to six shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

divina (see page 11) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study and *lectio divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✧ Gathering and opening prayer (3 to 5 minutes)
- ✧ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✧ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3 to 5 minutes)
- ✧ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✧ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✧ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10 to 20 minutes)
- ✧ Shared reflection (10 to 15 minutes)
- ✧ Closing prayer (3 to 5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 11.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✧ Gathering and opening prayer (3 to 5 minutes)
- ✧ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✧ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3 to 5 minutes)
- ✧ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflections (40 minutes)
- ✧ Closing prayer (3 to 5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✠ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✠ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✠ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✠ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✠ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✠ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✠ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✠ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✠ Use a clock or watch.
- ✠ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✠ Ask participants to read "Introduction: The Gospel of John" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✠ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✠ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with the prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✠ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✠ Read "Introduction: The Gospel of John" (page 19) before the first session.
- ✠ Read the Scripture passages and commentary before each session.
- ✠ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance,

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine, and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for that word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain always with us.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John

Read this overview before the first session.

One Sunday morning, a man drove up to the curb outside a church building to pick up his wife after a celebration of the eucharistic liturgy. He decided to test the pastor, who was standing outside talking to people as they left. The man stepped out of his car and approached the pastor. As his wife stood by, embarrassed by her husband's bold challenge, the man pointed out that the people leaving worship were good, holy people who believed in God and already knew about God's dealings with them. The pastor agreed.

The man asked, "Why do we have to keep reading the Scriptures week after week? These people already know Jesus. What more can they learn? I come to pray, not to listen to something I already know. Why should I come each week to hear something over and over?"

The pastor said that the Scriptures and his homily speak about God's love and care for all people. The Scriptures are read during the liturgy, and the Church allows him as an ordained priest to enjoy the privilege of preaching about the readings to strengthen the faith of those in the assembly. Through the readings and his homily, the hope is that those worshipping can continue to show their love for God through their manner of life.

Pointing to the man's wife, the pastor asked whether she knew the man loves her.

The man looked at his wife, smiled, and answered, "Of course she does. I tell her I love her every day when I leave for work, and many times I tell her what she means to me."

The pastor asked, "Why? She already knows it. Does she have to hear it again?"

The man paused, looked at his wife again, smiled, and said, “That was good, Father. I’ll be here every Sunday with my wife. I guess I needed to see it that way.”

When people tell a loved one how they feel, they may express the same idea about their love by repeating the same or similar words, but the one who receives the message may hear it in a way that triggers a deeper insight into the love of the person speaking. In a similar manner, as we read familiar Scripture passages, we may gain some new insight about God’s love. Whether hearing familiar Scripture passages read during the celebration of the Word at the eucharistic liturgy, reading the passages in a study group, or reading them privately, we can gain awareness and revelations that were previously unknown or misinterpreted.

John’s Audience

The author of the Gospel of John wrote for those who already knew about Jesus, wanting to deepen the message about Christ and encourage these believers to hold fast to their faith. At the end of his gospel he writes, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (20:30–31). The author loved Jesus and wanted to share that love with readers through the ages.

When we read the Scriptures, we may already know a great deal about Jesus and may strive to live life in a manner worthy of our faith in him, but we always have the need to learn more. Through the Scripture readings, we gain a deeper insight into God’s love for us each time we open the Bible. Let us continue to be nurtured by the Scriptures so that we may more fully “come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,” and that through this belief we “may have life in his name” (20:30–31).

The Johannine Community

Small communities arose within Christianity shortly after the resurrection of Jesus, and it is likely that most were under the leadership of those followers who were eyewitnesses to Christ’s ministry. The author of the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, wrote his gospel to a Jewish Christian

community in Antioch by combining the oral tradition that came from the community in which he lived with two written sources—the Gospel of Mark and another source called “Q.” The oral tradition found in Matthew is referred to as the “M” source.

Luke, who also used Mark and a written collection of the sayings of Jesus as a source (“Q”), also had an oral source proper to his community, known as the “L” source. Although these communities may have had different oral sources, they shared the same faith. When Paul the Apostle wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians, he addressed it “to the church of God that is in Corinth” (1:2), rather than “to the Corinthian church,” thus illustrating the unity of faith among early followers of Jesus. As both the writers of Matthew and Luke were heavily influenced by their communities, so a community known as the Johannine community heavily influenced the writing in the Gospel of John.

The Johannine community developed over several stages, with a history that is a bit complex. Scholars say that the composition of the Gospel underwent several periods of development before a final editor cohesively brought it together. For example, Chapter 21 was written in a different style than the rest of the gospel, suggesting that another author wrote it.

The Johannine community began as a community of Jewish followers of Jesus in or near Palestine, of which John the Apostle might have been a member. Also, some of the followers of John the Baptist belonged to this originating group. Many in this community learned about Christianity from the early disciples of Jesus, some of whom were companions of Jesus and eyewitnesses of his ministry. The Johannine community believed that Jesus came as the fulfillment of Judaism and that they could continue to live as faithful Jews who believed in Christ, so at the onset they continued to worship in the synagogue with Jews who did not believe in Jesus.

Among this early community was the disciple referred to in the Gospel of John as the “beloved disciple.” The gospel writer records that John the Baptist declares to two of his disciples, “Behold the Lamb of God” (1:36), who then become followers of Jesus (see 1:36–39). It is possible that the “beloved disciple” was one of the two first followers of Jesus recorded in this gospel. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter was named, while the other disciple’s identity was not revealed.

At first, the disciples continued to live their Jewish faith after the resurrection of Jesus, believing that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. However, within a few decades after the resurrection of Jesus, the synagogue leaders began to realize that many of the Jews were converting to faith in Christ. At this astonishing development, they became indignant and angry with the Jewish Christians and expelled them from synagogue worship. It was becoming apparent that those who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were becoming noticeably different from those who did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. In 70, when the Temple was destroyed, the synagogue became the central place of worship for Judaism, and Christian Jews found themselves rejected by the strict Jewish culture. In many areas, they were ostracized and persecuted, leading the Jewish Christians to establish their own community.

In the midst of this persecution, an evangelist collected the traditions of the community and interpreted them for the Jewish Christians who were cut off from Judaism. Thus, the important messages found in the Gospel of John began to develop even further. The interpretations and development of the gospel traditions provided the foundation that the newly formed community needed for its existence outside the Jewish synagogue community. With the community's expulsion from synagogue worship, the members began to identify themselves as a Christian body independent from Judaism. Other followers of Jesus who were not affiliated with mainline Judaism became identified with the Johannine community as well, including gentiles from outside of Palestine. This led to some internal conflicts concerning the interpretation of the original Gospel of John, resulting in a series of changes that were brought together by a final editor.

Who Is John?

As it is with all the gospel writers, it is difficult to identify the author of the Gospel of John, especially when we examine the Johannine community. The composition of the gospel seems to have endured a number of transitions and changes. Tradition points to the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and the brother of James, as the author. This traditional belief, although largely unchallenged through the centuries, was not widely accepted, even in ancient times. Saint Irenaeus, an early Christian writer,

claimed at the end of the second century that John the Apostle was the author of this gospel, stating that he also penned the three letters of John and the Book of Revelation, an untrue statement, according to biblical scholars. After investigating the literary style and internal evidence in the texts, very few commentators agree that the same author wrote all these books. However, they do think it likely that the gospel writer also wrote some of the Letters of John in the New Testament.

The gospel speaks of “the beloved disciple” as the one who recorded these events (21:20–24). This disciple appears throughout the text, including chapter twenty-one, which is stylistically different from the rest of the gospel. According to scholars, this chapter was not written by the same author as the rest of John, posing a curious question about the identity of the “beloved disciple.” In chapter 21, we read that Peter asked Jesus what would happen to the disciple whom Jesus loved, and Jesus states that he wants him to remain until he comes (21:20–22). Two verses later, we read: “It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). Although chapter 21 has always been included in this gospel, it was clearly written by another author.

Some commentators believe the beloved disciple is often presented as one aligned in John’s Gospel with Peter, even when he is not identified as the beloved disciple. For example, at the Last Supper, the one whom Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus when Jesus announced that one of them would betray him. Peter signals the beloved disciple to discover the identity of that person (13:21–26). When Jesus is dying on the cross, he sees his mother and the disciple whom he loves, and he says, “Woman, behold your son,” and looking at his disciple, he says, “Behold, your mother,” but Jesus does not address the disciple as John. At the time of Jesus’ resurrection, Mary of Magdala ran to announce the news to Simon Peter and “the other disciple whom Jesus loved” (20:3).

In other parts of the gospel, Peter is with “another disciple,” whom commentators believe to be the beloved disciple. During the passion, when Peter comes into the courtyard with “another disciple,” they are able to enter since the “other disciple” is known to the high priest. This incident hints that the “other disciple” was a Jewish follower of Jesus who may have lived in Jerusalem.

The author of the Second and Third Letters of John, which bear a strong resemblance to the Gospel of John, calls himself “the presbyter.” Many attempts have been made to identify the author of the Gospel of John, but no conclusive evidence points to a specific author. The common opinion of scholars is that the author is an anonymous writer who gathered together and recorded the traditions developed within the Johannine community.

Date and Place

Most commentators place the writing of the gospel around the end of the first century, between the years 90 and 100. The author has some knowledge of the Gospel of Mark and, perhaps, of the Gospel of Luke. He shows familiarity with the destruction of Jerusalem, and his major issue is with the Jewish leaders who have cast all Christians out of the synagogues. The antagonism for the Jewish leaders is so great that the author no longer makes distinctions between the religious leaders of the Jews and the Jewish people. His gospel depicts an open conflict between Christians and Jews.

Fragments of the Gospel of John, dating from the early second century, have been found in Egypt. In order for the gospel to reach Egypt at this early date, it must have been written no later than the turn of the century; that is, no later than the year 100. Evidence points to the fact that it was written after the last of the synoptic Gospels, yet earlier than the first part of the second century. This leads to the speculation that the Gospel of John was written between 90 and 100.

The earliest tradition presumes that the Gospel of John was written at Ephesus, although some scholars claim it was written in Antioch or Alexandria. Most commentators find no reason to disagree with the earliest tradition, because the book could have reached Egypt (where the fragments were found) from Ephesus as easily as from any other main city of the Roman Empire.

The author writes with simple, common Greek terms, using words and images familiar to both his Hellenistic audience and those familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. And the gospel is largely made up of discourses, with only a small amount of narrative material.

The Image of Christ in John's Gospel

John presents an image of Jesus the Christ in what scholars refer to as “High Christology,” meaning that this gospel begins with the pre-existence of Jesus and stresses the divinity of Jesus throughout. In contrast, the Gospel of Mark, the earliest gospel written, begins with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, written about fifteen to twenty years after Mark, begin before the birth of Jesus. The Gospel of John, the last gospel written, however, opens with Jesus’ pre-existence: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1).

John presents Jesus as the divine Son of God who comes from God in heaven, enters our creation, and ascends to God again when his mission is complete. Throughout the gospel, John reveals a strong image of a divine Jesus who is thoroughly in control. John calls him the “Word” who existed with the Father from all eternity and through whom and with whom the Father created the world. In his very person, Jesus reveals God to those who see and understand him. In John’s Gospel, although the Word becomes flesh, he retains all the powers of his divinity as the Son of God and speaks of himself as one with the Father.

The Gospel of Signs

In the synoptic Gospels, we read that faith must be present for Jesus to perform miracles. But John believes that the signs and wonders performed by Jesus lead to faith, and that Jesus’ miracles point beyond themselves, bringing clarity to the message that Christ preaches. The Book of Signs consists of seven miracles or signs that lead people to faith in Jesus; though they might encounter a miracle or sign, they are invited to see more deeply—beyond the miracle. Some witnesses do not respond to these signs with faith, while others are able to encounter them with the eyes and ears of faith. John praises those who do not need signs in order to become believers.

Opposites and Double Meanings

In this gospel, the author uses contrasting ideas, or opposites. We read about light and darkness, life and death, heaven and earth, God and Satan, spirit and flesh, and so on. He contrasts this world and its ways with those of heaven. John does not speak about life hereafter as much as he speaks about the contrast between the life of glory and the life of this world, which both exist, according to John, simultaneously. Some commentators view the use of these contrasts as a result of the influence of John the Baptist, who may have taught his disciples in this manner. John belonged to a monastic type of community known as the Essenes. They lived in the desert with the expectation that the Messiah would come and find them as the faithful, Chosen People. The Essene community made use of contrasts in their documents, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The writings of this community likely had a great influence on John the Baptist.

The Gospel of John also uses images with double meaning. Jesus' teaching would intend one thing, but the hearers who were the people of Jesus' day understood it differently. For instance, in 2:19, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The people thought he was speaking of the Jewish Temple, but the author of the gospel tells us that "he was speaking of the temple of his body" (2:21). In this passage and others, the author explains what Jesus meant by his statements.

The author also uses inclusions, where what is said at the beginning of a passage is repeated at the end, thus including the whole within a framework. An example of this occurs at the wedding feast of Cana. First we hear that "the mother of Jesus was there" (2:1). This phrase is then restated again at the conclusion of the story within a larger framework with "after this, he and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days" (2:12).

The Second Coming

Shortly after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ became a dominant theme. The Gospel of Mark reflects the expectations of an imminent Second Coming, while the Gospels of Matthew and Luke look to the distant future for the coming of

Christ. John does not place as much emphasis on the Second Coming as do the authors of the synoptic Gospels. John believes the end has already begun with the death and resurrection of Christ and that the “future gifts” have already been fulfilled in the present. The believer shares in the Second Coming, the glory of the resurrection, and eternal life, even now, while sojourning on this earth. The apocalyptic expectations found in the earlier gospels nearly disappear in the Gospel of John, another indication that this gospel was developed quite a bit later than the synoptic Gospels.

The Holy Spirit

The Gospel of John emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit. We learn that the Holy Spirit is another Advocate, sent by God after the death and resurrection of Jesus. This implies that Jesus sees himself as the first Advocate, that is, the one who comes from God. Like Christ, the Advocate offers wisdom, understanding, guidance, and comfort. Just as the world did not accept or believe in Jesus, likewise it would reject the Holy Spirit. For believers, whom the author views as those who do not accept the false values of this world, the Advocate comes as a special gift from the Father and the Son.

An Outline of John's Gospel

The Gospel of John is basically divided into two sections: the Book of Signs (1:19—12:50) and the Book of Glory (13:1—20:31). Prior to the Book of Signs is a Prologue (1:1—1:18), a hymn adapted to serve as a preface to the gospel. After the Book of Glory, a chapter is added where the Greek style is drastically different from that of the rest of the gospel, thus appearing to be a separate addition (see 21:1–25).

In the Prologue and first chapter, the author opens with a highly involved hymn about Christ, introducing us to John the Baptist and his witness of Christ.

Beginning with the second chapter, John recounts the first of the signs of Jesus at the wedding in Cana and follows with incidents that continue to show the role of Jesus as the Word become flesh. Jesus cleanses the Temple, teaches Nicodemus about baptism, speaks of his power to bring new life, speaks with the woman at the well concerning the water of eternal

life and the place of true worship, and, from a distance, heals the son of an official of the synagogue.

In Chapters 5 through 10, John portrays Jesus in conflict with those who misunderstand the meaning of the Sabbath. Jesus teaches about the Sabbath and performs healing actions on this special day of rest. He asserts his relationship to God, feeds the crowd in the desert, walks on water, and gives a discourse on the bread of life. Jesus uses the occasion of the feast of Tabernacles to present significant teachings about himself and the need for faith in him. Jesus ends his public ministry, and the passion story begins.

In Chapters 11 and 12, the cross begins to become a dominant theme. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the leaders of the people react by deciding to have Jesus put to death, and Jesus is anointed in symbolic preparation for his burial. Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of praise, and he teaches the Greeks (the foreigners) who come to question him. The Book of Signs ends with a discourse on the message of the cross.

In Chapters 13 through 17, Jesus celebrates the Last Supper with his disciples, telling them that he will leave them for a time but will return. Jesus gives a long discourse concerning those who keep faith in him. The passage ends as Jesus prays for the Church.

In Chapters 18 through 20, John tells us about Judas' betrayal, Jesus' trial, Peter's denial, and the events surrounding the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Chapter 21, the text that most commentators believe did not originally belong to the first twenty chapters, pulls together some loose ends. In this chapter, we find Jesus appearing to his disciples in Galilee by the Sea of Tiberias, where he prepared fish and ate with the disciples. Also, here Christ forgave Peter and called him to a special mission within the Church.

Note About Terms Used in John's Gospel

When reading the Gospel of John, we must realize that John is speaking from the viewpoint of his own era, and he uses the expressions of his own time. Consider the following:

“Jews” in place of religious leaders: John will often speak of the Jews challenging Jesus instead of referring to the religious leaders, such as the Pharisees, the scribes, or the Sadducees, who are actually the ones who challenge Jesus. The use of the term “Jews” in place of the Jewish leadership has its roots in a deep struggle that existed between the Johannine community and the Jewish leadership. The community began to identify all the Jewish people with its leadership when some of the Jewish people joined the leaders in casting the converts to Christ out of the synagogues. In conclusion, we must recognize that although the author of the gospel uses the term “Jews” as being in conflict with Jesus, we should not read these accusations as referring to all the Jewish people of Jesus’ day. Jesus himself was a devout Jew who “went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day” (Luke 4:16).

“Father” for the first person of the Trinity: Although John realizes that God is spirit, which means that he is neither male nor female, he uses the expression of the patriarchal era to identify God as “Father.” In a commentary, it becomes difficult to avoid the use of the term “Father.” When we read Jesus’ words that state, “The Father and I are one,” the message of the distinction of persons would be lost if we were to have Jesus say, “God and I are one.”



LESSON 2

Jesus Gives Living Water

JOHN 2:1—4:54

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life (4:13–14).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Context

Part 1: John 2:1—3:21 Mary, the Mother of Jesus, initiates Jesus' public ministry by requesting that Jesus change water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus seems to object, but Mary ignores this and directs the servants to do what Jesus tells them. Following this event, Jesus casts the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple. When challenged by the religious leaders, Jesus speaks of his body as a temple, saying that it will be raised up in three days. Jesus then teaches a lesson about baptism to Nicodemus and predicts his own death.

Part 2: John 3:22—4:54 John the Baptist supports Jesus' disciples who were baptizing a large number of people and teaching that power must come from God. After John the Baptist proclaims that he must decrease as Christ increases, Jesus declares that he is the one who comes from above. In this study, Christ promises living water to the woman at the well and returns to Cana where he heals a royal official's son.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (JOHN 2:1—3:21)

Read aloud John 2:1—3:21.

2:1-12 The wedding at Cana

The wedding at Cana takes place “on the third day” (2:1). Nathanael came to Jesus on the fifth day, and the third day after Nathanael came to Jesus would be the seventh day. The reader should note that John does not say *three days later*, but *on the third day*, meaning that we would count the fifth day as the first day, the sixth as the second, and the seventh as the third. Just as there were seven days in the creation story, so these seven days mark the inauguration of the new messianic era. The *third day* is also reminiscent of the day when Jesus was raised from the dead. The third day in this passage shows that Jesus has moved into a new situation. His mission is about to begin.

Although no parables are found in John’s Gospel, each episode and event in the gospel is filled with countless allegories. The first of these stories is the well-known narrative of the wedding feast at Cana. The theme of a wedding feast fits perfectly with the message the story wishes to convey. The coming of the messianic kingdom is often portrayed as a banquet or celebration. The wedding celebration is occasionally used to show that the Messiah is the true bridegroom at the banquet.

Jesus, his disciples, and his Mother are attending a wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother has an important role in this story. When the wine runs out, Jesus’ Mother speaks on behalf of the family and tells Jesus they have no wine. At the end of John’s Gospel, Jesus will symbolically declare that Mary is the mother of all people when he says to Mary, “Woman, behold, your son,” and to the beloved disciple, “Behold, your mother” (19:26–27). The motherly instinct and concern shows itself at this point when the Mother of Jesus acts as though she is a mother concerned for all people.

During Jesus’ era, a Jewish wedding feast could last for several days. It would be a terrible tragedy for the bride and groom to run out of wine before the celebration ended. When the wine runs out, the Mother of Jesus intervenes for the sake of the hosts. Nowhere in the gospel is she

called Mary. When she tells Jesus that the hosts have no more wine, Jesus responds by addressing her as “Woman” (1:4), which was a title of honor and respect for a woman during Jesus’ era, but hardly a title one used for one’s own mother.

John makes it clear that Jesus hears his mother asking for a miracle, and Jesus’ answer sounds harsh. He tells her that this cannot concern him, because his hour has not yet come. The “hour” ordinarily refers to Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Therefore, his first sign (miracle) would be the launching of his hour that would eventually lead to his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Unperturbed by his apparent rejection of her request, the Mother of Jesus directs the waiters to do whatever he tells them. Not only does the author of the gospel show that Jesus has full knowledge of his divinity, but he also shows that the Mother of Jesus is aware of Jesus’ divine powers.

According to Jewish Law, those coming to a wedding feast had to perform certain ritual washings before taking part in the meal. The hosts at the wedding provided stone jars ordinarily filled with water for this ritual washing. Jesus orders the waiters to fill the jars with water. Each jar held about twenty to thirty gallons. When the jars were filled, Jesus orders the waiters to draw out some of the water that had become wine and to take it to the chief steward. The steward comments on the quality of the wine, which is better than that served at the beginning of the banquet.

This little episode has many messages hidden within it. The water in the stone jars used in Judaism for ritual washing signifies the old covenant, and thus changing water into wine marks the beginning of a new covenant. Jesus, the true bridegroom at the messianic banquet, brings the new and finer covenant (the good wine). The old creation has run out, and the new creation begins with Jesus. God has saved the good wine until last, that is, until the coming of Jesus.

The prophet Amos spoke about the coming of the messianic kingdom as a time when the juices of the grapes will run down the mountains. It is a time when the true Israel will be rebuilt (Amos 9:13–14). In both the old and new creations, wine symbolizes blood. When Jesus tells his mother that his hour had not come, he is linking the new wine with the eucharistic sacrifice. The celebration of the Eucharist is properly a celebration in which

Christ offers his blood for us, but it also celebrates the total mystery of his Passover into glory. Through the first of his signs, Jesus shows that the messianic era has dawned, revealing his glory. Thus the disciples begin to believe in Jesus.

In a transitional verse to the next episode, John tells us that Jesus, his Mother, his relatives, and his disciples go to Capernaum, where they remain only a few days. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus spends the first part of his public ministry in Capernaum, his home during his ministry.

2:13–25 Cleansing the Temple

Following the miracle at Cana, John presents the episode of Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. In the synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the Temple, which occurs toward the end of Jesus' life, becomes one of the reasons the leaders of the Jewish people seek to put Jesus to death. The author of John's Gospel places the cleansing of the Temple right after the first sign performed by Jesus at Cana to show that Jesus continues to replace the old Law with the new. The Temple, the very center of Jewish worship, must also give way to Christ, who is the temple of the new covenant.

John the evangelist tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover. The synoptic Gospels tell of only one visit to Jerusalem by Jesus, while John reports that Jesus celebrated three Passover feasts there. In this instance, the Gospel of John is most likely correct. Jesus, being a devout Jew, would naturally wish to celebrate the Passover in the Holy City when possible. As Jesus enters the Temple area, he becomes enraged at what he encounters and, making a whip of cords, he drives out those who were selling the oxen, sheep, and doves used for worship, knocking over their tables, spilling their coins, and driving the animals out of the Temple area.

In Jerusalem, it was customary for the people to exchange their Roman coins for Temple coins, since the Temple could not be contaminated with a foreign coin. Jesus rejects making the Temple into a marketplace. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus gives as a reason for cleansing the Temple of the cheating taking place on the merchants' part, and he quotes from the prophet Jeremiah who declared that the house of the Lord had become a den of thieves (Jeremiah 7:11). Though the author makes no mention

of the den of thieves, he portrays Jesus as enraged because the Temple of God has become a marketplace.

During Jesus' era, the leaders of the Jews often confronted him and tried to turn the people against him. Approximately seventy years after Jesus' resurrection, when John writes his gospel, he does not make a distinction between the Jewish leadership and the Jewish people. He views the rejection of Jesus as coming from all the Jews and not the Jewish leaders alone. When the Jews challenge Jesus, he responds to their challenge with a confusing answer. He tells them to "destroy this temple" (2:19), and he will raise it up in three days. The Jews are amazed at his answer, reminding him that the temple has been under construction for forty-six years. According to ancient records, the construction of the Temple began about 20 BC, placing Jesus in Jerusalem somewhere near the year AD 27, a fairly accurate date for Jesus' public ministry.

The author of the Gospel of John clarifies Jesus' statement for us by explaining that Jesus was talking about the temple of his body. When John writes his gospel, he is already aware that the Jewish Temple had been destroyed around the year 70. After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples (and the author of this gospel) would realize that Jesus was speaking about his own resurrection from the dead as the temple to be raised up in three days. The old Temple has been destroyed, but the new temple, Jesus, continues to exist. Because the Jews used Jesus' words about the destruction of the Temple at his trial during the passion, many commentators believe that Jesus actually spoke these words.

Many people come to believe in Jesus because of the signs he is performing, but Jesus remains cautious, not trusting them because he knows that their faith is weak. John tells us that Jesus knew human nature well and knew how the human heart worked. He knew that these same people would turn against him during his passion. Although Jesus does not perform any miracles in this passage, the author of the gospel considers it to be another of Jesus' signs. It shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who has great zeal for his Father's house, and the one who acts with authority in the Temple. He casts out the old Law for the new. The Temple of the old Law will give way to the temple of his body, the temple of the New Covenant.

3:1–21 Nicodemus

John introduces Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. As a member of the leading Jewish body, he is a powerful leader who comes to Jesus at night, a sign that he wanted to keep his visit a secret. Nicodemus will appear twice more in the Gospel of John, first to defend Jesus against his accusers (7:50–52) and later to take part in the burial of Jesus (19:39). He shows respect for Jesus by addressing him as “Rabbi.” Nicodemus has seen the signs that Jesus performed, and the signs bring him to his first steps of faith. He cannot yet be called a believer, but he acts as one who is pondering what he has seen.

Nicodemus remarks that he knows Jesus comes from God, since no one can perform the signs Jesus is performing unless God is with him. Jesus ignores Nicodemus’ words of praise and tells him that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born from above. Jesus stresses his statement with the usual words of emphasis: “Amen, Amen, I say to you” (3:5). The author of John’s Gospel uses a common literary device in this debate between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus makes a statement, and Nicodemus asks a question, which is followed by another statement by Jesus and another question by Nicodemus.

Viewing birth from a purely physical viewpoint, Nicodemus asks how a person can be born again. He asks sarcastically if a person can enter a mother’s womb to be reborn. Jesus makes it clear that he is not talking about physical birth. He tells Nicodemus that the baptism by water, given by John the Baptist, does not lead one into the kingdom of God; but a new birth in water and in the Spirit does. He makes his statement strongly emphatic by again using the words, “Amen, Amen I say to you” (3:11).

Jesus states that a person of flesh can only give birth to another in the flesh, but the Spirit can give birth to a new spirit in a person. Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth from above, and he tells Nicodemus that this message should not surprise him. Just as the wind blows according to its own whim and a person is able to hear it without knowing its origin, so the Spirit touches everyone in the same way. Those begotten of the Spirit cannot tell us any more about the action of the Spirit. Knowing the origin of the Spirit and how the Spirit works cannot be fully understood.

The author plays on words here, since the word for Spirit and the word for wind is the same in the Greek language.

Jesus' answer leads Nicodemus to ask another question for further clarification. He asks Jesus how this can happen, and Jesus, accepting Nicodemus' role as a teacher, chides him for not understanding what Jesus is saying. In this passage, the author of the gospel is speaking about baptism as a sacrament, and such a message would be far beyond anyone's comprehension during the life of Jesus. Much of this explanation comes from knowledge gained by the author and other followers of Jesus after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

After Nicodemus asks this question, he disappears from the scene in John's Gospel, and the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus now becomes a discourse given by Jesus to a larger audience, most likely the readers of the gospel. The author of the gospel frequently uses this literary technique of having someone ask a question which becomes the foundation for a longer discourse meant for a larger audience. Jesus, again speaking with the emphatic expression *Amen, Amen*, speaks as one who knows what he is preaching because he has seen God, whereas the people—that is, the Jewish people who do not have faith in Jesus—do not accept his testimony.

Note that Jesus was originally speaking to Nicodemus when he addressed him as “you,” but John now presents Jesus as moving from addressing Nicodemus alone to addressing “you people.” If people do not believe Jesus when he speaks about things of the earth (perhaps a reference to the wind), then how will they believe him when he speaks about heavenly things? Jesus declares that he can speak of heavenly things because he, the Son of Man, has come down from heaven. The expression *Son of Man* is used here to refer to Jesus in glory. In John's Gospel, Jesus is totally conscious of his coming from the Father.

John next refers to an event in the Exodus experience of the people of Moses' time. When the people of the Exodus sinned in the desert, God punished them by sending a multitude of poisonous snakes. After many people died from serpent bites, God directed Moses to set a brass symbol of the serpent on a pole so that all who looked at it would be saved from death (Numbers 21:4–9). Jesus alludes to this as a sign pointing to himself (the Son of Man) as he is lifted up on the cross to bring eternal life

to those who believe in him. Jesus' teaching shows that he is aware of his crucifixion when he is speaking.

God's love is so great that God sent his only Son in order that those who believe in the Son may have eternal life. The Son of God did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. Jesus does not condemn those who do not accept his presence in the world; they condemn themselves. This condemnation comes because the light came into the world, but some chose the darkness of sin and their evil ways instead of the light. Lest they be exposed, those who practice evil avoid the light, while those who live in truth come into the light so that their works may be plainly perceived as done in God. The contrast of light and darkness found in the gospel harkens back to the first chapter of John's Gospel when he writes that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5).

Review Questions

1. What is the significance of Jesus' actions during the wedding at Cana?
2. Why does Jesus cleanse the Temple? Explain the significance of it in this gospel.
3. What is the central message of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? What role does Nicodemus play in John's Gospel?
4. What authority does the Son of God have to witness God's activity in the world?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 18)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 11)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. See page 11 for further instruction.

The wedding at Cana (2:1–12)

At the bidding of his mother, Jesus enters his hour, that is, his path toward his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. When we pray in honor of Mary, we are praying through a loving mother who has an overwhelming concern for our welfare as she had for the hosts of the wedding feast of Cana. We pray that Mary will help us on our mission in life. She is Our Mother of Perpetual Help, always ready to intercede on our behalf. Mary speaks to us as she did to the servants: Do whatever he tells you. At Mary's bidding, we abide by Christ's will.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Cleansing the Temple (2:13–25)

The worship area where the action of Christ in the Eucharist takes place is a type of temple. Although the merchants in the gospel were on the outer rim of the temple, Jesus considered the whole temple to be a place for reverence. It is his "Father's house" (2:16). Jesus had a sense of the sacred and challenges us to test our own sense of the sacred during the eucharistic celebration and our reverence for the place where the community joins together to worship in the name of Jesus.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Nicodemus (3:1–21)

Jesus tells us of heavenly things. His heavenly message for us is that we must be born of water and the Holy Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Christians are born again through water and the Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism, bringing us into union with Jesus, the Light of the World. Those who choose the light perform good deeds so that their "works may be clearly seen as done in God" (3:21).

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (JOHN 3:22—4:54)

Day 1: The Final Witness of John the Baptist (3:22-30)

The author interrupts Jesus' discourse to speak about the witness of John the Baptist. Although we will find in chapter four that Jesus did not baptize (only his disciples did), it seems from this present passage that Jesus was baptizing with his disciples. Since chapter four specifically notes that Jesus did not baptize, we can presume that this is true. However, perhaps this reference is intended to emphasize the importance of baptism for Christians and the role disciples played in baptizing members of Christ's body.

The disciples of John the Baptist complain to him about the baptism given by Jesus and his disciples. At the time, John was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because of the abundance of water there, a sight that most commentators are not able to identify. The author of the Gospel of John tells us that the Baptist had not yet been imprisoned. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus begins his public mission when Herod imprisons John, but the Gospel of John makes no mention of the Baptist being in prison. The Baptist's disciples seem to be jealous of Jesus' success as they report to John that Jesus, about whom the Baptist was testifying, is now drawing crowds to himself and baptizing them. This jealousy reflects the controversy in the early Church between the followers of John who believed he was the Messiah and the followers of Jesus.

The Baptist tells his disciples that no one possesses this gift unless it comes from above. He reminds his followers that he himself declared that he was not the Messiah but that he was sent before him to witness to Jesus. The author of the gospel may have added this statement from the Baptist to emphasize again that John the Baptist is not the Messiah. The Baptist calls Jesus the bridegroom and himself the best man, the one who exults at the voice of the bridegroom. Now that Jesus has arrived and his mission has begun, the Baptist's joy has reached its fulfillment. The Baptist proclaims that Jesus "must increase; I must decrease" (3:30). The time has come for the Baptist to step aside, and it is noteworthy that these words are the last words uttered by John the Baptist in the Gospel of John.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The disciples of the Baptist are apparently jealous of the success of Jesus' disciples. Jealousy can exist among holy people who sincerely strive to fulfill God's will. John has the perfect antidote to jealousy, a mental attitude that recognizes the importance of Christ increasing within us as we decrease. No one should use their devotion or religious knowledge to lord over others, rather it should serve to humbly help and inspire them. The ability to touch the heart of another with a spiritual blessing comes from God, not from human ingenuity.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: The One Sent From Heaven (3:31–36)

Some Scripture scholars believe this passage should immediately follow verse 21 of this chapter, before the passage about John the Baptizer, since its current placement seems to indicate that John the Baptist is speaking. The lesson found in this passage, however, clearly comes from Jesus. The scholars believe the author of the gospel slipped the episode about John the Baptist into the middle of Jesus' discourse, perhaps to remind the readers that the Baptist previously spoke of Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33).

The author of the gospel continues to make use of contrasts. In this passage, he begins by contrasting what is above (heaven) with what is below (earth). The one who comes from heaven, namely Jesus, is above all, while the one who adheres to the world can speak only in a worldly way. Christ testifies to those things he has seen and heard, but no one "of earth" accepts his testimony. Even if some do not accept the testimony of Jesus, those who do accept it witness to the truth of Jesus' words and experience the abundance of the gifts that come from the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has turned everything over to him. Those who disobey the Son will not have life, meaning eternal life with God. Faith in the Son leads to eternal life, while rejection of the Son leads to the destruction that comes

from God's wrath. The image of the wrath of God appears often in the Old Testament, punishing for the sake of atonement, not for condemnation. Jesus did not come to bring condemnation, but he warns about God's wrath for the sake of saving those who are obstinate and refuse to follow the light of Christ.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Jesus is God become human, and so he has the words of eternal life. Believing in Jesus means that we believe with words and deeds, a faith that affects our whole life in all we do. True belief is living what we say we believe. We believe Jesus came from heaven with true knowledge of God and shares this knowledge with us. We illustrate our trust in Jesus' message by making it visible in our lives.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: The Samaritan Woman (4:1–42)

To avoid the Pharisees, Jesus must withdraw from Judea and journey back to Galilee with his disciples. The Pharisees are the religious leaders of the people who led a persecution against the followers of Jesus within Palestine after the destruction of the Temple in 70. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees who did not believe in Jesus would have resented his action of casting the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple. Jesus would naturally attempt to avoid the Pharisees who were likely upset with Jesus' disciples baptizing more people than the disciples of John. His journey to avoid the Pharisees takes him through Samaria and leads to his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well.

During Jesus' lifetime, the Jews and the Samaritans were open enemies. In the late eighth century before the coming of Christ, the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel, marching off some of its inhabitants into exile and bringing other conquered people of other nations into Samaria to intermarry with the Israelites. The Jews of Jesus' day looked down on the Samaritans who practiced a form of faith that mixed many

Jewish traditions with other traditions brought in by the pagan inhabitants. In Jesus' era, the animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans was so great that they were openly hostile to each other to the point that some Jews felt that they were unclean if they even spoke to a Samaritan.

On his journey through Samaria, Jesus stops to rest by a well, known as Jacob's Well, in a town called Sychar. The Book of Genesis does not specifically mention Jacob's Well, but it does speak about Jacob buying a piece of land on which he pitched his tent (Genesis 33:18–20). It was in this place that Jacob set up an altar and invoked the God of Israel. Biblical scholars contend that it was on this plot of land where Jacob's Well was constructed. It was apparently widely used by the people of Samaria for their water supply.

Exhausted, Jesus rested at the well around noon, while his disciples journeying with him went into town for some food. A woman comes to draw water from the well. When Jesus asks her for water, she expresses surprise that he, a Jew, would ask her, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink. The Jews at the time considered Samaritan women as unclean, so the Jews were naturally forbidden to drink from any vessel handled by a Samaritan woman. Jesus, as was his custom, followed the Mosaic Law, but he rejected laws developed over time by Jewish authorities, laws that he considered to be contrary to the laws prescribed by Moses. The attitude about contact with the Samaritans as being unclean came from a later interpretation of the Law by religious leaders. The author of the gospel notes the animosity existing between the Samaritans and the Jews.

The woman's surprised response provides Jesus an opportunity to teach his message. He tells her that she would have asked him for living water if she realized the gift of God and who was asking for a drink. As in the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus, the author of the gospel uses the same literary form: Jesus makes a statement and the Samaritan woman follows with a question. The woman at first misunderstands Jesus, believing that he is speaking about the fresh, living water from the well. Jesus actually is speaking about spiritual water, the life-giving and eternal gift of the Spirit.

The woman addresses Jesus as Sir, which is a greeting akin to addressing a man with great respect. She asks Jesus how he expected to get water from such a deep well without a bucket, and she immediately follows this

question with another, asking where Jesus expects to draw this water. John shows us that she is beginning to understand the implications of Jesus' use of "living water" when she chides Jesus and questions whether he claims to be greater than Jacob who gave the people this well and used it for himself and his family. Although there is no mention of Jacob's Well in the Old Testament, oral tradition held that Jacob used the well for his family and flocks while he lived in the area.

Jesus answers the woman's question, not by answering that he is greater, but by stating that his gift is far more lasting than what Jacob provided. Jacob gave them water, but anyone who drinks it will eventually become thirsty again. Jesus, however, promises spiritual water that will never leave anyone thirsty. It will be as a spring of life within a person, "welling up to eternal life" (4:14). The woman again shows that she misunderstands Jesus' message when she asks him for this water that will keep her from having to come and draw from the well again. Any water that would quench one's thirst once and for all would be a great gift.

After the woman asks Jesus for this living water that will quench her thirst once and for all, Jesus ignores her statement and tells her to go and bring her husband to him. When she answers that she has no husband, Jesus agrees with her, stating that she has had five husbands and that the man she is living with now is not her husband. His answer causes the woman to regard Jesus in a new light. She now considers him a prophet of Israel and questions him about a major dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews, namely, the proper place for worshiping God.

The Samaritans believed their ancestors worshiped God on the mountain where the meeting between Jesus and the woman was taking place, while the Jews believed that true worship took place in Jerusalem. The mountain was at Gerisim, a place on which the Samaritans erected a temple in the fourth century before Christ. In answer to the woman's question, Jesus presents a theme that is central to the Gospel of John, namely, that true worship will no longer depend on a place but on one's faith and spirit. True worship according to Jesus will be done in "Spirit and truth" (4:23) rather than in either Jerusalem or at Gerisim, the mountain. Jesus tells her that the hour is coming when this change will occur. By using the word "hour," Jesus again links his message with his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Because of his hour, people will worship in Spirit and in Truth. Since God is Spirit, this will be the true worship desired by the Father.

The woman responds to Jesus' words by stating that she believes the Messiah is coming. Jesus tells her that he is the Messiah, saying, "I am he." This recalls the words spoken by God when addressing Moses in the Old Testament, when God called himself "I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Although Jesus does not seem to be speaking directly of his divinity here, he does seem to be preparing the way for a later statement in which he will refer to himself as I AM.

When the disciples return, they wonder about Jesus speaking with the woman, but none of them dares to question him about it. The woman, leaving her water jar behind as a sign she will return, calls the townspeople to come and meet Jesus. She wonders whether he could really be the Messiah. The townspeople set out to meet him.

Meanwhile, when the disciples urge Jesus to eat, he tells them that he has food of which they know nothing. The disciples are speaking of the ordinary food, while Jesus is speaking of spiritual food that consists in doing the will of the one who sent him and in carrying out his mission. The disciples ask each other whether someone else has brought Jesus food, a question that enables Jesus to launch into another discourse.

Jesus tells them that his food is the fulfillment of his Father's will. He quotes from a well-known proverb of the day, stating that the harvest would come in four more months. This may be a reference to the time between the planting and the harvesting. Jesus invites the disciples to look to the Samaritans to find a harvest ready for reaping. The disciples did not plant, but people such as Jesus, the Samaritan woman, and others planted, and the disciples of Jesus share in the harvesting. This may be a reference to the many Samaritans who became believers after the ascension of Jesus. At the harvest time, those who sow and those who reap share joyfully in the harvest.

When the Samaritans finally come to Jesus, they beg him to stay with them, believing in him because of what the woman told them. Jesus stays with them two days. At the end of that time, they are able to profess their faith in Christ, not because of the woman's testimony but because they themselves have heard Jesus' words. Unlike the Jews, who reject Jesus, the Samaritans profess that he is the Savior of the world.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well obviously points to the living waters of the sacrament of baptism. Just as Jesus breaks the ritual rules of his day concerning speaking to a woman and a Samaritan, he also breaks the limitations of worldly thinking. He is the living water who brings about a great change in our lives. Those who drink will never thirst again. Once we celebrate the sacrament of baptism, we have no need to be baptized again. We celebrate the gift of baptism, the gift of being called sons and daughters of God and rejoice in the blessings and graces that God pours forth upon us—living water welling up to eternal life.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: Second Sign at Cana (4:43–54)

After two days, Jesus leaves Samaria for Galilee. John the Evangelist recalls that Jesus testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. We find these words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel (Mark 6:4) where the people of Nazareth reject Jesus. But it is difficult to know why the author of John's Gospel placed the reference at this point in his gospel. A possible explanation is that the Samaritans believed in Jesus because of his words, whereas the Galileans believed in him only because of his signs. The Galileans' faith was not as solid as that of the Samaritans. The people of Galilee welcome Jesus because they had seen all that he had done while in Jerusalem at the Passover feast.

Jesus goes to Cana, where he had performed his first miracle. A royal official, hearing in Capernaum that Jesus has returned, goes to him and begs him to come and heal his ill son. The story is similar to that of the centurion and his sick servant in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10). Jesus responds with a rebuke for all the people who must see signs in order to believe. The royal official persists in his request, and Jesus sends him home with the assurance that his son will live.

The author of the gospel tells us that the man believes Jesus and starts

his journey home. Unlike the people of Galilee, the royal official believes without seeing. The passage teaches that Jesus' word is powerful, even from a distance. The official's servants meet him with the news that his son is well, telling him the time of the cure: the exact hour Jesus pronounced that the boy would live. The author states that this was the second sign Jesus performed on his return to Galilee from Judea.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Jesus answers our prayers, often in unseen ways. We do not have to see the answer to our prayer to believe that God is answering it in some manner. Faith tells us that God loves us, and God answers our prayers in a way that we may not see, but the Lord sees. Faith is trust in a loving God who heals as God sees fit.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. Why does John the Baptist show joy at the success of the baptism performed by Jesus' disciples?
2. What is the meaning of the living water that Jesus offers the Samaritan woman by the well?
3. What is the message of the Samaritans who came to believe in Jesus? Why is it significant?
4. How did Jesus heal the royal officials' son and what does it teach us?