

Day 347. Psalm 32; 3 John; 2 John; 1 John 1 - 2

Walking in the Light

Psalm 32

The joy of knowing sins forgiven and God's promise to guide his servants.

3 John

As the apostles died and the time of the first missionary expansion of the church receded, the leadership of the local churches, which had originally derived its authority from the apostles (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), grew in importance while that of travelling Christian workers grew correspondingly less. In the church to which Gaius belonged a situation had arisen in which the local leader, Diotrephes, was actively trying to exclude travelling apostles (9-10). Calling himself simply "the elder", John writes to commend his friend Gaius for receiving travelling teachers and to encourage him to continue.

2 John

Although it appears to be another personal letter, both "the chosen lady" (1) and her "chosen sister" (13) are churches, their children being individual members. In this letter, the problem is the reverse of that of 3 John. Here it is the travelling teachers who are the problem, since they bring false teaching, and John writes to forbid the church to welcome them (7-11).

The opening paragraph gives some hints, which are expanded in 1 John, as to how to recognise those who bring error. It breathes the spirit of John's gospel, especially Jesus' address to his disciples in John 14 - 16. Christians are to walk in the truth, which is in us and will be with us for ever (1-2; John 14:16-17). They do this by obeying the command to love one another (4-6; John 13:34-35; 15:10-12).

1 John 1 - 2

The longest of the three letters also deals with the problem of how to discern false teaching and avoid it. John begins by asserting his apostolic authority. He is an eye-witness of Jesus' life (1:1), he has seen, heard and touched the Word made flesh (John 1:14), the Word which was with God from the beginning and in whom was eternal life (1:2; John 1:2,4). The

reason for the letter, that his "joy may be complete", suggests that he is writing from both obedience and love (1:4; John 15:10-11).

The life which is in Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:4-5). To live that life is to live in the light of its truth and to be able to discern between truth and error (1:5-7). So John gives a number of tests by which we can tell if both we and others are in fact living in the light:

1. Sin must be acknowledged and confessed (1:8 - 2:2). In fact, God's children should not make a habit of sinning (2:1; 3:6), but since no one can be completely without sin, we need the confidence that Jesus our sacrifice is also our advocate.
 2. We must obey his command to love (2:3-11; John 15:10-12). The commandment is old because the Christian faith is by now well into its third generation and has spread throughout the world, but it is new because the gospel is always new, bringing new life and light into the darkness.
 3. We must avoid the love of the world (2:15-17). Our desires must be moulded by the kingdom of God rather than by the things of this world or we will never be able to discern the truths of the kingdom (Matthew 6:31-33; Romans 12:1-2)
 4. We can rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is given to us to lead us into all truth, since the Spirit testifies to the things of both the Father and the Son (2:20; John 16:12-15).
 5. We are to stick to the basics (2:24). False teaching will make us forget the importance of the cross and resurrection and the lordship of Christ. If we find ourselves led astray in this way, we will know the teaching we have been following is wrong (Colossians 2:6-8).
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Day 348. Psalm 36; 1 John 3 - 5

Children of God

Psalm 36

The sinfulness of the world contrasted with the love of God; an invitation to drink from the well of life rather than the cracked cisterns of wickedness.

1 John 3 - 5

After its opening section, dealing with the tests for true and false teaching, John's letter continues with three meditations on living as children of God in a sinful world. Each meditation repeats the themes of the first two chapters in a slightly different way. Again, the words breathe the spirit of Jesus' address to his disciples in John 14 - 16, with its theme of the victory of Christ over a hostile world (John 16:33) enabling them to know the truth (John 16:12-15) and setting them apart from the world (John 14:22-24) which hates them just as it hated Jesus (John 15:18-21). The letter is written to encourage us to remain in Christ, living in obedience to him (1 John 2:28; John 15:1-4).

The first meditation (3:1 - 4:6) contrasts the experience of God's children with that of children of the devil:

1. Righteous v. sinful lives (3:4-10). A characteristic of God's people is that they do not continue to sin (3:9) because of the power of the new life of God (see also Romans 8:1-11), whereas those who are dominated by selfish desires live as children of Satan and continue to sin.
2. Love v. hate (3:11-18). God's children follow the example of Jesus and love others in practical ways, whereas the world's children live at enmity with one another.
3. Peace v. guilt (3:19-23). God's children know the experience of forgiveness and live with consciences open to God.
4. Holy Spirit v. worldly spirits (3:24 - 4:6). False teaching emanates from the unbelieving spirit of the world, which refuses to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, both human and divine (4:2). Where the Holy Spirit is at work, people recognise the truth (4:6).

The second meditation (4:7-end) develops the same themes but this time the starting point is the experience of God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) rather than our privilege as God's children. In true believing, the experience of God's love impels us to reach out to others in love (4:7-12), his Holy Spirit assures us of the truth of the gospel and the reality of God's love (4:12-16a) and the Spirit and our own lifestyle together give us confidence and peace in the face of guilt (4:16b-18). This love is not our achievement or our merit; it is simply obedience to the command of God who first loved us (4:19-21).

The final meditation (5:1-12) begins from the experience of faith. When John's readers became Christians, God planted the seed of faith in their hearts (3:9) enabling them to believe in Jesus as the Christ. This God-given faith enables us to overcome the world and obey his command to love (5:1-5). It is rooted in both historical testimony and personal experience. The water and the blood which poured from Jesus' side at his death on the cross prove that he is both fully human and the divine Son of God dying for our sins (John 19:33-35). The presence of the Holy Spirit and the experience of eternal life assures us that the historical testimony is true and God's forgiveness is real.

Finally, John urges us to continue in the faith, being faithful in prayer (5:14-15), watching over each other and praying for each other (5:16-17) and standing firm against evil (5:18-21).

John's Gospel

Even a casual reading is enough to show that John's Gospel is completely different from those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Instead of a series of incidents following hard upon each other there are only a few stories, most of them concerning an important miracle or "sign" which Jesus performed. Instead of the short parables and pithy sayings of the other gospels, Jesus' words come in the form of long sermons often interrupted by questions from his listeners. On the other hand, like the other gospels there is plenty of controversy and the disciples are slow to understand what Jesus is trying to teach them. Beyond all these differences in detail, however, there is an indefinable difference in "atmosphere" between John and the other gospels. In this introduction I will try to explain what I think are the main reasons for this and how they influence the approach I have taken in the readings which follow.

John's gospel was written later than the other gospels, perhaps around 100 B.C. It is based on the testimony of the "beloved disciple", John himself (21:24), but it is clear that the author or authors already knew and expected their readers to know most of the important stories of Jesus recorded in the other gospels. This accounts for the fact that the references to the events of Jesus' life in the gospel are very free. There is only passing reference to his baptism (1:32-34) and to Gethsemane (12:27-28) and these occur in long meditations on the themes of baptism and suffering. The Transfiguration is completely absent, but instead the theme of Jesus' glory recurs constantly (e.g. 2:11; 12:27-28; 17:1-5). John has also displaced the cleansing of the Temple from the end of the gospel to the beginning (2:13-22) and the miraculous catch of fish and the call of Peter (Luke 5:1-12) from the beginning to the end (21:1-8). He has also rewritten the healing of the centurion's servant (4:46-54; Luke 7:1-10).

It is clear, then, that John was not setting out to present Jesus by means of a historical narrative. He expected his readers to know the historical facts of Jesus' life already. The one place where real historical facts become important is at the crucifixion and resurrection (19:34-35; 20:3-8; 21:24). This is because John saw in the crucifixion and resurrection the key to the whole story. References to these events begin early in the gospel and continue throughout it (eg.1:11; 2:4,11,19-22; 5:25-27; etc.) In one sense, the Jesus who

appears in the pages of John is not the historical Jesus, but the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus. The stories are not intended as history so much as drama in which Jesus confronts both his enemies and his disciples and challenges them to believe. Stories and teaching are woven together as meditations on the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. More than any other gospel, John takes up the theme of Jesus' relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He does not give us a fully worked out doctrine of the Trinity, but especially in chapters 14 - 16 he points in that direction.

On the basis of 20:31, the book is often regarded as being primarily evangelistic. But if we assume that John expected his readers to know the stories of Jesus already it is better to understand it as addressed to people whose faith for various reasons fell short of full Christian belief. Some would have been disciples of John the Baptist who had been slow to recognise Jesus as the Messiah whom he proclaimed (1:20,35-39; 3:27-30). Some found it hard to accept Jesus as a real man (1:14, see 2 John 7-11). But probably most important were Jewish believers who thought of Jesus as the last of a long line of prophets rather than recognising him as the Son of God. This explains why the book is full of people who "believe" and then have their inadequate faith challenged (2:21-22; 6:60,66-69; 8:31-33; 20:29).

To conclude, John's gospel is a concentrated meditation, written for Christians, on the significance of Jesus. The writer's technique is to take an incident, dramatize it and then weave a web of interpretation around it to help us see through the historical Jesus to the crucified, risen and ascended Lord who challenges us now to believe in him and follow him in the way of the cross (12:23-26).

We begin at 1:19 and leave the Prologue (1:1-18) until the last day of the readings as a summary of the gospel and the message of Scripture as a whole.

Day 349. Psalm 84; John 1:19 - 2:11

Jesus Shows His Glory

Psalm 84

Longing for the presence of the Lord.

John 1:19 - 2:11

Both Matthew and Luke use the stories of Jesus' birth to introduce him by his titles, the Messiah, Son of David (Matthew 1:1), King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2), Son of God (Matthew 2:15); the Son of God, king on David's throne (Luke 1:32-35), Messiah and Lord (Luke 2:11), the light to the nations (Luke 2:32). In this opening section, John does the same thing, but it is also important to notice who gives the various titles to Jesus.

As in Revelation, Jesus is the "Lamb of God", slain since the foundation of the world (1:29,36; Revelation 13:8). This is said by John, the one who introduced a baptism for repentance. For those who might still be followers of John, such as the men Paul discovered in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7), John makes it clear that John the Baptist is not the Christ (1:20), nor yet the promised Elijah, even though other gospels speak of him in this way (1:21; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:10-13), nor even the prophet promised by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). He is the one whose proclamation prepares the way for the return of the Lord to Jerusalem (1:23; Isaiah 40:3-5). In fact, John's baptism depends for its effectiveness on the one who takes away the sins of the world (1:29). Instead of telling the story of Jesus' own baptism, John gives us the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is the one on whom the Spirit rests, who baptises with the Spirit and who is the Son of God (1:32-34; see Mark 1:7-11) and then shows us two of John's disciples leaving him to follow Jesus (1:35-37).

The disciples call him "Rabbi" or "Teacher" (1:38), which is characteristic of would-be followers throughout the gospel (1:49; 3:2; 6:25; 20:16), but having stayed with him for a day, Andrew acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (1:40-41). In this gospel, Peter does not figure as an important character until the Passion stories. The story of his call becomes a story of his recommissioning in chapter 21. Here he is simply introduced. Just as Andrew draws in his brother, calling Jesus "Messiah", Philip draws in his

friend, calling Jesus the "one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote" (1:45) and then using the same words as Jesus has used in calling Andrew and his friends (1:39,46). Thus John indicates that the circle around Jesus is growing, and by 2:11 he has "disciples".

The last disciple of whom we hear is the sceptical Nathaniel, "a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false," (1:47). Just as it was important for the followers of John the Baptist to show John pointing to Jesus, so here a "true Israelite" who at first professes to see nothing special in Jesus (1:46) acknowledges him as Son of God and King of Israel (1:49) and becomes a disciple, showing the way for other sceptical and doubting Jews. Jesus' reply is meant to show that although these disciples believe in him and give him their allegiance, there is more that they do not yet understand. It is a reference to the story of Jacob, the father of the Jews, and his dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-12), but now it is the Son of Man who is the Way from earth to heaven and heaven to earth (1:51). The title "Son of Man" points to the cross (3:13-15; 12:23). Moreover, in the story of his dream Jacob himself says, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it," (Genesis 28:16). The disciples, though they believe in Jesus, do not yet know him fully (14:8-10).

The story of the miracle at Cana is full of verbal and symbolic clues to its meaning. The scene is a wedding banquet at which the wine has run out. The vessels Jesus uses are meant to hold water for a Jewish purification ceremony. The miracle foreshadows Jesus' "time" and shows his glory (2:4,11; see 17:1). It takes place "on the third day", the day of resurrection. In the other gospels, Jesus proclaims himself the bridegroom and the bringer of new wine which bursts the old wineskins of Judaism (Mark 2:18-22). Here at a wedding feast he turns the water of purification into the best wine and reveals his glory. The real bridegroom, sent from God to reclaim his bride, is not recognised, and the master of the feast does not know where the wine comes from, but the servants know and the disciples believe.

Day 350. Psalm 102; John 2:12 - 3:end

Born Again

Psalm 102

A prayer for God's help in trouble.

John 2:12 - 3:end

Like the words, "on the third day," in 2:1, the reference to the approaching Passover in 2:13 points to the underlying significance of the story. Passover is the time of the crucifixion and resurrection and, like the wedding at Cana, the story of the cleansing of the Temple is full of references to these events. The conflict with the Jewish leaders was a major element in Jesus' ministry and recurs throughout the gospel. By transferring the cleansing of the Temple from the end of the ministry to the beginning, John makes clear from the start the issues which divided them.

In driving the animals out of the Temple (2:15), Jesus signals the end of the sacrificial system. In the coming kingdom there is no need for the Temple at all. Our Temple is the Body of Jesus through which we have access right into the presence of God (2:21; Hebrews 10:19-20; Revelation 21:22-24). John knows that Jesus' demand for the holiness of the Temple would eventually lead to his death (2:17), but this very death was the means by which the new Temple would be consecrated (2:19). In the light of the resurrection the disciples came to understand the symbolic meaning of Jesus' attack on the centre of Jewish worship (2:22).

But what is the relationship between Jesus and Jewish worship for Jews who are sympathetic? Can they understand the message and way of life Jesus brings as simply part of Judaism or is it something radically new? John introduces a sympathetic Jew, Nicodemus, who calls Jesus Rabbi and acknowledges that he has come from God (3:2). But Jesus cuts right across these acknowledgements with the demand for a change as radical as a new birth (3:3). The words Jesus uses mean both "born again" and "born from above"; the ambiguity is deliberate. The fact that Jesus has come from above runs through the chapter (3:13,16,31,34). The new birth is by water and the Spirit, that is by baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit (3:5-8), through which one steps out of the old religion and into the new. Yet Israel's teacher

does not understand these things (3:10). The "we" of 3:11 is a deliberate anachronism: Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus stands for the ongoing dialogue between his followers and sympathetic Jews, in which the Christians will maintain that Judaism is not enough. Following Jesus means a radical break from the old religion.

Jesus is the one who came from heaven and has gone back to heaven, where he now reigns in glory (3:31; 13:1; 16:5). But the "lifted up" of 3:14 is another deliberate ambiguity. Here and at 12:32 it refers to both the ascension and the cross. Jesus' glory is seen in the crucifixion (12:23-24) and in a sense he reigns from the cross. To believe on him is to accept him as the crucified and reigning Son of God. This is the way to eternal life (3:16; see 1 John 5:11-12).

Baptism is one of the things which sets Christianity apart from Judaism, but what about John's baptism? Is that sufficient? John presents Jesus and his disciples as baptising alongside John, which is probably another deliberate anachronism, since the other gospels say that Jesus did not start his ministry until after John was put in prison (Mark 1:14). But the scenario, with Jesus gradually gaining more disciples than John, points the question: Which is the true baptism, Jesus' or John's? John's answer is that it is Jesus'. Jesus is the bridegroom, he (John) is the bridegroom's friend. Jesus must grow greater and he less. Jesus comes from above, he from the earth. And Jesus has the Spirit without measure and baptises with the Holy Spirit (1:33). Like the Jews, John's disciples need to believe in the Son whom God has sent (3:36).

Day 351. Psalm 100; John 4

The Spirit and the Bride

Psalm 100

A call to the whole earth to praise the Lord.

John 4

Chapter 4 continues the section which began at 2:13 in which Jesus travels from Jerusalem to Galilee. This journey parallels that of the gospel, which was preached first in Jerusalem, then Judaea, then Samaria and finally to all nations (Acts 1:8). The introduction to the chapter, in which Jesus' disciples baptize more people than John, suggests that its underlying theme is to be the mission of the Church, but it is characteristic of John that his stories weave together a number of themes:

- Jesus is greater than "our father Jacob" (4:12). Jacob's gift to Joseph (4:4) is referred to in Genesis 48:22. Sychar is Shechem, which means a "shoulder of land". Whereas Jacob gave the well, Jesus gives "living water". Whereas Jacob was "our father", Jesus puts people in touch with the real Father (4:23). Just as in the book of Hebrews, comparison between Jesus and the great figures of Israel's history is a recurring theme of the Gospel. In chapter 6 Jesus is shown to be greater than Moses and in chapter 8 than Abraham.
- The gift of God which Jesus brings is "living water" (4:10). In Acts 8:20, also in Samaria, the Holy Spirit is called "the gift of God". In John 7:37-39 the Spirit is compared to a stream of water welling up inside. The gift of the Spirit fulfils the hope of Israel for refreshing, life-giving water flowing from the throne of God (Psalm 46:4; Isaiah 43:19-21; 55:1; Ezekiel 47:1-12).
- Jesus' first miracle took place at a wedding where he provided wine for the banquet. In 3:27-30, John the Baptist names him as the bridegroom. The careful placing of this story at "Jacob's well" recalls the way Jacob met and won his bride at a well by providing water for her (Genesis 29:1-12). From Hosea onwards, the theme of bride and bridegroom had been an image for the relationship of God and Israel. Usually, God pours out his grace on the undeserving and unfaithful bride (Hosea 2;

Isaiah 54:1-8). Here though, the bride is not Israel at all but a Samaritan whose previous relationships have been a disaster (4:16-18). Although salvation is from the Jews (4:22), the Bride of Christ will include all nations.

- In 2:13-22 Jesus abolished the sacrificial system of Jewish worship and proclaimed his body as the true Temple (and thus also the source of living water). The Samaritans had an alternative Temple on Mount Gerizim outside Shechem, which they claimed to be the proper site for worship (4:20). But Jesus abolishes all such distinctions. Henceforth, true worship will be made to the Father in spirit and in truth (4:21-24). Jesus is the giver of the Spirit (4:10), the truth, and the way to the Father (14:6). In God's kingdom, he is the place of all true worship.
 - The call to mission becomes explicit in 4:34-38. Although salvation is from the Jews, Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world (4:42). The others who have done the hard work are probably the Old Testaments patriarchs and prophets, whose words and actions Jesus is constantly fulfilling. Their work means that a crop is ready for the disciples to reap, which will become the Christian Church.
 - The call to mission issues in the conversion of the Gentiles. Jesus is not recognised among his own people (4:44; see 1:11) but the Gentiles believe. The story of the official's son is based on that of the centurion's servant in Luke 7:1-10. There too the point is the faith shown by the Roman in contrast to the Jews, who demand signs (4:48; Luke 7:9; 1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Challenged to believe without seeing the evidence, the official does so and his son is healed. As he responds in faith the "official" is transformed to become first "the man" (4:50) and then "the father" (4:53). The conversion of the father's whole household is another of John's deliberate anachronisms. Household conversion was characteristic of the Gentile mission (Acts 16:29-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16).
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Day 352. Psalm 116; John 5

The Work of the Sabbath

Psalm 116

The writer thanks God for delivering him from sickness. The Lord has raised him from death and now his soul can have rest.

John 5

Chapter 5 begins a new section of the book, which ends with chapter 12. It is made up of a series of incidents, mainly miracles or "signs" of Jesus, which reveal who he really is to those with faith but result in condemnation for those who refuse to accept them. Each sign is followed by a dispute with the Jewish leaders and most are set in or near Jerusalem. In this section John shows Jewish Christians how completely wrong their leaders were and are about Jesus and how he fulfils entirely the hopes and worship of Judaism.

He begins with the Sabbath controversy, one of the most important elements in the dispute. In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus rejects the accusation of the Pharisees that he is breaking the Sabbath with the words, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath," (Mark 2:28). The story of the man at the Pool of Bethesda recalls some elements of the story of the paralytic whose bed was let down from the roof (Mark 2:1-12). Both were healed on the Sabbath, both were told to pick up their mat and walk and both were sinners who needed to repent (5:8,10,14). John does not refer to the issue of Jesus' supposed blasphemy in forgiving the man's sin. Instead he introduces a new element. The man has been lame for 38 years, the time Israel was wandering in the wilderness before beginning their final journey to the Promised Land, which would be their resting place (Deuteronomy 2:14; 12:9). The man seems reluctant to be cured. In theory he is waiting to be healed, but in practice he seems to have given up hope, rather like the Israel of Jesus' day, waiting for a rest which never came.

But Jesus is the Giver of rest (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:1-11). Instead of the Promised Land for which Israel had to wait long years in the wilderness, the rest he gives consists of freedom from sin in this life (5:14) and eternal life in the next (5:21). Not only does he heal the lame man but

when challenged by the Jews he promises to raise the dead (5:21,25). They accuse him of breaking the Sabbath, but Jesus claims to be doing the work of the Father. The reason he works on the Sabbath is that God the Father is working, bringing life to all who honour him (5:16-19). He compares himself to a son in his father's workshop learning his father's trade, something he himself must have done in his early years (5:19). Because the Father brings life, so does Jesus; because he raises the dead so does Jesus; because he judges, so will Jesus (5:24-27). The Son of Man of Daniel 7:14 is not only the Lord of the Sabbath but the Lord of the living and the dead (Romans 14:9). His death and resurrection leads to the judgement after death spoken of in Daniel 12:2 (5:28-29).

The remainder of the chapter is taken up with the issue of Jesus' credentials. He has the testimony of John the Baptist (5:33-35), of the work the Father gives him to do (5:36) and of the Scriptures themselves (5:37-41). Yet the Jews refuse to believe because they are more concerned with preserving their status in the eyes of one another (5:44; 12:42-43). In the end, Moses, the author of the Law, will be their judge (5:45-47) because the Law points to Jesus. The institution of the Sabbath points beyond itself to the need for eternal rest and Jesus is the Giver of that rest.

Day 353. Psalm 16; John 6

The Bread of Life

Psalm 16

The writer rejoices in the life God gives.

John 6

As usual, the way John sets the scene is crucial for our understanding of the chapter. For this story, Jesus is back in Galilee with his disciples and the crowds. The feeding of the five thousand takes place on the "far side" of the lake, while the dispute which follows it happens in the synagogue in Capernaum (6:59). Both of these are symbolic places: over the lake towards Gentile country the people are fed; back home in the synagogue and where Jesus is known (6:41-42) his words are rejected. In the introduction John also tells us that a great crowd was following Jesus because of his signs: this is to be another sign which though seeing they do not believe. 6:3 is reminiscent of the setting of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1, which tells us that the underlying theme of this chapter is to be Jesus' teaching, and finally the reference to Passover in 6:4 tells us that it has to do with his coming death and resurrection.

On the day of the miracle nobody recognises the true significance of the sign. Philip does not know what Jesus is about to do and Andrew does not expect him to do much with five loaves and two fish (6:5-9). The people see only a great prophet and try to make him king by force (6:14-15). Later, when the disciples see Jesus walking on the sea they are terrified (6:19).

The crossing of the sea in the night, which Jesus accomplishes easily, his disciples and the crowd with so much difficulty, may point to the crossing of the Red Sea which brought Israel into the wilderness where they received the manna. Symbolically we are now in the desert where God gave Israel all they needed to eat (6:11; Exodus 16:18). Jesus offers himself to eat but like the Israelites in the desert both Jews and disciples grumble at him (6:41,61; Numbers 11:4-6).

Only in the dispute at Capernaum is the true meaning of the sign revealed and then only to those who believe in Jesus. The crowds come looking for more earthly food; instead Jesus offers himself as the Bread of Life. Earthly

bread sustains earthly life but Jesus is food for eternal life; whoever eats him needs no other food. This is food which the Son of Man will give (6:27). The title points to the centrality of the cross and resurrection. The response which God requires is to believe on Jesus (6:29), to come to him (6:35) or to look to him (6:40); these are not different but are given as parallels.

The Jews look to their past, when God had fed them through Moses with manna in the wilderness. Despite the feeding of the five thousand, they cannot see past this to the significance of Jesus (6:29-31). But Jesus is talking about a feeding which starts now and continues to eternal life (6:32,34,39-40). This feeding, as he is about to make clear, is his Word. By listening to the Father and learning from him one comes to Jesus and receives life (6:45-50).

At 6:51 a new theme is introduced with a change of terminology from "bread of life" (6:35,48) to "living bread" (6:51). The living bread, which is Jesus' flesh for the life of the world, is coupled with his blood and so obviously refers to the bread and wine of communion (6:51-57), one reason why the image of loaves and fish quickly became a symbol for Holy Communion in the early Church. This is the bread which sustains Christians now, as the manna in the desert sustained Israel in their desert wanderings (6:58). Those who eat it remain in Jesus (6:56; 15:1-4) and receive eternal life. The Jews, who do not eat this bread, do not have eternal life.

But Jesus' insistence on listening to his words and partaking in the Eucharist as the sources of eternal life is a hard saying for his disciples. The mention of Judas in particular signals the problem of unfaithful Christians, likely to defect to the Jews (6:64,70-71). For John's contemporaries, the issue was whether it was really necessary to make a complete break from Judaism. Did the Christian community, gathered around the Eucharist, really have something which the Jews did not have? And John shows them that indeed they have. They have Jesus, who came from the Father and ascended to him again (6:33,41-42,51,62). They have his words, which are spirit and life. And they have the Holy Spirit, who gives life through both Word and sacrament. It is not the bread of the Eucharist which brings life; it is the words of eternal life which Jesus speaks (6:67-69) and the Spirit who gives life to the bread (6:63; see 3:6).

Day 354. Psalm 92; John 7:1-52

The Source of Living Water

Psalm 92

A psalm for the Temple.

John 7:1-52

The middle chapters of the gospel are a continuous theological argument between Jesus and the Jewish leaders which, like any argument, does not move smoothly forward but continually backtracks and moves to new issues while keeping to one central theme - who is Jesus? (7:28-29,40-43; 8:19,25). John's answer is that Jesus fulfils the whole of the Old Testament. In chapter 5, he is the giver of a better rest than the Sabbath, in chapter 6 he gives better bread than the manna in the wilderness or the bread of Passover. His teaching, the bread of heaven, is better and more satisfying than the Law (see 1:17). Here, in chapters 7 and 8, he fulfils the promises associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Jews celebrated the hope that the Temple would become a source of light and life for all nations (7:2).

The readings for this feast included Zechariah 12 - 14. On the last day water was poured out in the Temple and the whole court was illuminated to symbolise the hope expressed in Zechariah 14:7-8. In his teaching in the Temple courts (7:14; 8:2) Jesus shows how he fulfils these hopes (7:37-39; 8:12). Moreover, Zechariah 14:16-21 also speaks of the Gentiles coming to the Temple to worship the Lord. Already in chapter 4 the Samaritans have recognised Jesus as the Saviour of the world and a Gentile family has been baptised. 7:35 begins a series of passages looking forward to the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (10:16; 11:51-52; 12:20-23,31-33). They will worship God through Jesus, the new Temple (2:19-21; 4:19-26).

7:1-13 sets the scene and also puts the whole debate in the context of John's contemporaries. His brothers recognise him as a "public figure" and urge him to draw attention to himself. Their support is not the faith which Jesus looks for. He is far more than a public figure and they don't recognise it. This kind of faith avoids the hatred of the world, but Jesus is hated and so will be those who really follow him (7:7; 15:18). The "crowds" are unsure about Jesus and debate amongst themselves who he is, but not openly for

fear of their leaders (7:12-13). The "Jews" throughout the gospel stand for the Jewish authorities who were trying to suppress Christianity; John shows them continually blinded by their unbelief and missing the point while the crowds struggle towards faith in Jesus against their opposition. Finally, Jesus' "time" has not yet arrived (7:6,8). All points forward to the final fulfilment at the cross and resurrection.

7:14-24 picks up the theme of the previous Jerusalem dispute about Sabbath healing. Jesus is acting according to the spirit of the Law by healing on the Sabbath, while the Jews, who break the Sabbath by authorising circumcision on that day, are also breaking it by trying to kill him. They do not recognise Jesus because they do not really want to do God's will. Those who really want to know and do the truth will recognise that Jesus comes from God since his words are the words of God and his works the works of God (7:16-18; see 5:19).

In 7:25-36 the dispute moves on a little. Only those who love God know Jesus because he has come from God. But he will only be with them, that is preaching in Israel, for a short time. Soon comes the time when he will return to God (7:33-34; see 13:33,36; 14:5-6,28). At that time the gospel will not be preached to the Jews alone; it will be preached to the whole world (7:35-36). When Jesus goes away, the Holy Spirit will come (16:17-22) and when he comes the promise of Tabernacles will be fulfilled. Rivers of living water will stream out of Jesus, the new Temple, and become springs of living water in each of his disciples (7:37-39; see 4:10).

This proclamation leads some to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, but they immediately get bogged down in a new argument, as to whether the Christ comes from Bethlehem rather than Galilee. Both Matthew and Luke answer this argument by showing that Jesus was, in fact, born in Bethlehem. Clearly, John wants to encourage those who, like the crowd, were ready to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Is he simply relying on the fact that Jesus was known from the other two gospels to have been born in Bethlehem? Or is he actually saying that it doesn't matter where Jesus was born? Those who believe in him see past his earthly origin and recognise that he has come from God.

Day 355. Psalm 64; John 7:53 - 8:end

The Son of God

Psalm 64

The writer prays for protection from the conspiracy of his enemies.

John 7:53 - 8:11

As noted in the text of most versions of the Bible, this passage is not in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts. It also appears in some manuscripts of Luke's gospel after Luke 21 as part of Jesus' dispute with the authorities in Jerusalem. But although it is not present in the most reliable gospel manuscripts it seems to be an authentic story of Jesus, contrasting the law given through Moses with the grace and truth which came through Jesus (1:17).

In its present position, the story continues the dispute with the Pharisees over the Law. Whereas the Jews will die in their sins unless they believe in him (8:21), Jesus forgives the sins of those who seem to stand condemned but warns them not to sin again (8:11; 5:14). At the beginning of the chapter the Jews are ready to stone the sinful woman (8:5), at the end of it, they are ready to stone Jesus (8:59).

John 8:12-end

The dispute at the Feast of Tabernacles continues with Jesus asking the Jews to recognise who he is and them refusing. In the illuminated Temple courts, Jesus claims to embody the hope expressed in the Feast. He is the light of the world and whoever follows him will have the light of life (1:4-5,9; 8:12). Whoever refuses the light will bring judgement on themselves, and this is the main theme of the next chapter (9:4-5,40-41).

The Jews ask Jesus for his witnesses. In a court of law, he would be expected to produce two witnesses to validate his claims (8:17). In fact, the Jews have already rejected the witness of John the Baptist (5:32-35), Moses (5:45-47) and the ordinary people (7:45-49). But here the argument centres on whether they will accept the testimony of the Father that Jesus is the Son of God. Since Jesus has come from above, he knows the Father and the Father knows him. He will be with the Jews only a short time and this is

their chance to believe in him, but they will not take it because they do not really know God the Father (3:31-36; 7:33-34; 8:14-19). In fact, not even the disciples recognise who Jesus is until much later (14:8-11).

Those who refuse to accept that Jesus has come from the Father bring judgement on themselves (3:19-21). He has come to save the world from sin (3:14-17; 4:42) so those who refuse his testimony will die in their sin (8:21). Only when the Son of Man is "lifted up" will they know who he is (8:28; see 3:14; 12:32-36). It is in the cross and resurrection that he is glorified (17:1) and in the light of them that people begin to recognise that he is the Son of God (2:11,22; 12:16; 20:8-9,27-28). Meanwhile, the dispute in chapter 8 centres on fathers and sons without the Jews ever recognising what or who Jesus is talking about.

Some of the hearers, however, do believe in Jesus (8:30), but their faith is immediately tested. Jesus claims to bring them the teaching (in Hebrew, "torah", the word for the Law) whose truth will set them free (8:31-32). Immediately, they refuse to recognise this claim. Their real confidence is not in Jesus but in their status as members of God's chosen people and descendants of Abraham (8:32). So now the father-son argument gets into full stride. Jesus is the Son who can set them free from slavery to sin (8:34-36; see Galatians 4:1-7) but they prefer their sonship of Abraham to becoming sons of God. In fact their real father is the devil, the enemy of God and father of lies and this is why they are trying to kill Jesus who brings the truth (8:36-44).

Accused of being children of the devil, the Jews retort that it is Jesus who has the demon (8:48). Jesus moves the argument on another step by claiming to give eternal life (8:51; see 5:21; 6:40; 11:25-26). This prepares the way for his great statement at 8:58. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus has been hinting at the divine name, I Am (8:24,28; Exodus 3:14). Faced with the claim to give life, the Jews ask Jesus who he is. Is he greater than Abraham or the prophets (8:52-53)? Jesus has already claimed to be greater than Jacob (4:12-14) and greater than Moses (6:32-33). Now he claims not only to be greater than Abraham but to be the God of Abraham (Exodus 3:13-15). The Jews refuse to believe him; instead they prepare to stone him for blasphemy.

Day 356. Psalm 23; John 9 - 10

The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23

The Lord as Israel's true shepherd.

John 9

This chapter and the next continue the dispute with the Jews or Pharisees over who Jesus really is and illustrate further the division between those who believe in him and those who reject him. In the background is Jesus' claim to be the light of the world, which he is now about to demonstrate by the healing of a man born blind. The disciples ask Jesus why he is blind, because of his own sin or that of his parents. Jesus' answer points them to the sequel rather than the cause, that the work of God may be displayed as the man comes to believe in him (9:3; 6:28-29). Everyone is born spiritually blind and everyone is offered healing by Jesus, the light of the world, but only those who believe in him, as this blind man does, receive it.

The story of the blind man also strengthens those who had to endure persecution from the Jews. Expulsion from the synagogue (9:22) is another of John's deliberate anachronisms. It did not happen in the time of Jesus but was introduced after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Although his parents hold back for fear of the Jews, the man himself fearlessly acknowledges Jesus to be a prophet and is thrown out as a result of it (9:30-34). The Jews accuse him of having been steeped in sin at birth, but we know that this is untrue (9:2-3,34). Finally he sees Jesus and believes in him (9:35-38). The Jews, on the other hand, refuse to believe in Jesus despite the signs he performs (9:16,24,28-29). They claim to see, but are in fact blind. The division between Jesus' disciples and his enemies is complete.

John 10

The Jewish leaders should have been acting as shepherds of the flock; instead the Israel of Jesus' day were like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). The refusal of the Jews to accept Jesus and their rejection of the sheep who follow him leads to an extended meditation on the shepherd theme.

It is vital for understanding this passage to realise that Jesus is not just calling on an evocative pastoral image. In Israel's tradition her shepherds were her kings, the successors of David who was called from watching the sheep to shepherd God's people (2 Samuel 7:8; Psalm 78:70-72). After the exile, when her kings had failed her, God promised Israel a new and righteous shepherd from among David's descendants (Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25). In addition, God promised that he himself would be Israel's shepherd (Isaiah 40:10-11; Ezekiel 34:11-16). Now Jesus proclaims himself that good shepherd of whom the prophets had spoken. The image of the gate also refers to the shepherd, since at night the shepherd himself lay down in the entrance of the sheepfold to prevent the sheep wandering off.

As shepherd, Jesus calls his sheep by name (10:3; see 1:42,47; 20:16) and leads them out of the sheepfold (10:4). He saves them and provides them with pasture (10:9), gives them life to the full (10:10), lays down his life for the sheep and takes it up again (10:11,15,18) and brings other sheep into the flock (10:16). There is thus more than a hint of Jesus leading his followers out of Judaism and including the Gentiles in the new community, the Church.

The Feast of Dedication (10:22) completes the cycle of feasts leading to the final Passover (12:1). It comes some two and a half months after the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) but in fact the argument does not seem to have moved on very much. The Jews still refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ, rejecting the evidence of his miracles (10:24-25) while the sheep follow him and are kept safe (10:27-28). In fact, since no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him, the sheep are the Father's sheep (6:44; 17:6-8) and it is he who keeps them safe (10:29). Coming from heaven to do the will of the one who set him apart and set his seal on him (10:36), Jesus the Son of God is one with his Father (10:30; 1:18). It was this claim of the Church that Jesus was divine which set them apart from the Jews and so aroused Jewish hostility, but John presses it home as being the only way to understand Jesus' signs and his words (10:38-39; 12:37-end).

Day 357. Psalm 107; John 11

The Resurrection and the Life

Psalm 107

The Lord gives respite to the needy and life to all who are in trouble.

John 11

In the Prologue, John has already introduced Jesus with the words, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (1:4). He is the one who gives life to all to whom he wishes (5:21), who raises the dead on the last day (5:25; 6:40), is the bread of life (6:35) and came to give people life to the full (10:10). Now he is about to demonstrate his power over death by raising his friend Lazarus to life.

But in doing so, he also goes toward his own death. The Jews are trying to kill him (11:8), but Jesus knows that his death will come only at the right time. Until then, his ministry will continue (11:9-10; 9:4-5; 10:17-18; 19:10-11). So Thomas, later to demand evidence of the resurrection, leads the disciples to die with him, which will certainly be the calling of some of them (11:16; 13:36-38; 21:18-19).

The chapter is full of references to the approach of the crucifixion, beginning with the mention of Mary, who anointed his feet (11:2). This anointing takes place at 12:1-3 and is to prepare Jesus for his burial (12:7-8). As with the blind man (9:1-3), Jesus looks at the purpose of the sickness rather than its cause. This time it is so that the glory of God might be displayed (11:4) as it was displayed when he turned water into wine (2:11), and will finally be displayed in his death on the cross (12:27-28; 17:1).

The translations "yet" (N.I.V. 11:6) and "though" (N.R.S.V. 11:5) obscure the fact that Jesus deliberately allows Lazarus to die before he makes a move. A closer fit would be "so" or "accordingly". 11:12-15 make it quite clear that Lazarus is dead when Jesus begins his journey. But to Jesus, the dead are only asleep and he has the power to wake them up (see Mark 5:39). Martha and Lazarus are among the followers whom Jesus loves (11:5; 13:1) to whom he gives life from the dead. All are alive to him (Romans 14:7-9; 1 Corinthians 15:22-26).

In the face of the friends who had come to mourn Lazarus' death, Jesus leads Martha to faith in him as the giver of life. She believes that God will grant Jesus anything he asks (11:22); she believes that Lazarus will rise at the final resurrection (11:24). Now Jesus tells her that he fulfils the last resurrection; the life God gives does not wait until the last day, but is found in him (11:25-26). Martha's response is the full Christian confession: not only is Jesus Messiah and Son of God, but his coming was purposed and predicted (11:27). This is the faith which is the key to life in his name (20:31).

After leading Martha to faith, Jesus consoles her sister Mary and is moved by her grief (11:32-36). His grief for Mary and the death of Lazarus anticipates the next time he is troubled in spirit, when the hour for his glory draws near (12:27-28). Deeply moved again, he comes to the grave where the glory of God is to be revealed (11:40). Just as Jesus will later be, Lazarus has been wrapped in strips of linen with a cloth around his face and buried in a tomb with a stone across the entrance (20:1,5-7). The removal of the stone and the unwrapping of the gravecloths anticipates his own resurrection, but in the case of Lazarus they have to be done by the bystanders. Lazarus is the first of the dead who will hear the voice of the Son of God and live (5:25). The life they will share is the resurrection life of Jesus himself.

Even as the Jews who had been with Mary put their faith in Jesus, the movement to kill him intensifies. The raising of Lazarus really has precipitated the plot which will end his life. The Sanhedrin meets to decide officially that Jesus must die and Caiaphas utters the prophecy that Jesus will die for the people (11:49-50). But what Caiaphas means is not what God means. Jesus will die according to the purpose of God, not just for the Jewish nation but for the whole scattered people of God (11:51-52). The next time Jesus goes to Jerusalem for a Feast, it will be for his death.

Day 358. Psalm 4; John 12

The Judgement of This World

Psalm 4

An appeal to all to trust in the Lord.

John 12

This chapter forms the conclusion to Jesus' public ministry and looks forward to the Passion narrative and his approaching death. But, as with the whole of John's gospel, the focus is not just on the incarnate Jesus, his disciples, his enemies and the crowds. It is on the risen, glorified Jesus and the challenge to John's own contemporaries. Four groups of people are highlighted: the Church, the Jewish crowd, the Gentiles and the Jewish leaders.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus represent the Church in its various aspects. Martha is the one who serves; the story in Luke 10:38-42 is clearly in the background here, but service is not disparaged. In 2:9 it is the servants who know the secret of where the best wine comes from. In 12:26, the Father honours those who serve Jesus. In 13:12-17 he teaches his disciples that they must all be servants to one another.

Lazarus is the witness. He has been raised from dead and now has a place in the (heavenly) banquet with Jesus (12:1-2). His new life attracts others to see him and believe in Jesus (12:9,17-18). Finally, Mary is the worshipper. Kneeling at Jesus' feet, she pours a jar of perfume worth almost a year's wages over them and wipes them with her hair. It is a costly sacrifice, but its value as an act of worship to Jesus is much greater than that of its money value (12:5-8). The whole house is filled with the fragrance of it (12:3).

In anointing Jesus for his burial, Mary's sacrifice points to that of Jesus which is soon to come. In this the whole Church must follow him, Lazarus who died and was raised, Martha the servant and Mary the worshipper (12:23-26). Christians are called to pour out their lives as Mary's ointment was poured out and in exchange they will receive eternal life. The life Jesus calls us to lose in 12:25 is in Greek *psyche*, the life of the soul. The life we are to receive is *zoe* - eternal life, the knowledge of God himself (17:3).

The crowds believe because of Jesus' miraculous signs, especially the raising of Lazarus (12:9-10,17-18). At his entry to Jerusalem they eagerly proclaim him king (12:13-15). However, the real meaning of their welcome and Jesus' kingship is only revealed in the light of his death and resurrection (12:16) and forms the main theme of John's account of the trial and crucifixion. The crowds have been eager to have Jesus as king (6:15) but they cannot believe in the "Son of Man", the one who is to suffer for them (12:34). Faced with a suffering king, they later reject him (19:14-15). Jesus urges them to believe while there is still time and finally hides himself from them (12:35-36). Really to believe, the Jews have to overcome the spiritual blindness which has been a feature of their national life, the blindness that prevents them from seeing the glory which the prophets saw (12:37-41).

Isaiah 6:10 is quoted both in 12:40 and at Acts 28:26-27. This may be a deliberate echo on John's part of Paul's words there and a reminder that the blindness of the Jews opens the way for the gospel to come to the Gentiles. When the Greeks come to Andrew and Philip, the ones who have previously brought their friends to Jesus (1:40-45), Jesus begins to speak about his approaching death, by which he will glorify God and draw all people to himself (12:23,32). He is about to fulfil the vocation of the unrecognised suffering servant of Isaiah (12:38), who fulfils the purpose of God (Isaiah 53:10) and through whom all mankind will see the glory of God (1:23; see Isaiah 40:3-5).

Finally, the Jewish leaders become hardened in their enmity of Jesus because they care more about one another than about God (12:43). By rejecting the light, they condemn themselves to judgment (12:44-50; 1:9-12; 3:16-21).

Day 359. Psalm 133; John 13:1 - 14:11

A New Commandment

Psalm 133

The call to live in unity.

John 13:1 - 14:11

Chapters 5 - 12 were a dramatic interpretation of the significance of Jesus for the world, in which each of his signs showed a different facet of who he is: the light of the world, the shepherd, the resurrection and so on. Chapters 13 - 17 are an extended meditation on the relationship between Jesus and his followers and hence the meaning of discipleship, in which John especially highlights and interprets the meaning of Jesus' words about being a servant recorded in Mark 10:45, Luke 22:25-27 and Matthew 20:28.

The scene setting in 13:1-3 is especially detailed and applies to the whole of the next five chapters. The Passover is near, which signals Jesus' approaching death and resurrection just as in 2:13 and 6:4. But John does not present the last supper as a Passover meal as the other gospels do. Instead, he carefully adjusts the time of the meal so that Jesus dies just at the time when the Passover lambs would have been killed in the Temple (18:28; 19:14,42). John's readers would know that the evening meal being served was the last supper. Although there is nothing directly about the institution of Holy Communion, the teaching Jesus is about to give, centring on the cross and the command to love one another, interprets the meaning of communion. The washing of his disciples' feet shows us how we are to follow him in the way of the cross (13:1,34).

Jesus knows that his life's work is about to be accomplished (13:3; see 19:30) and in that knowledge he takes the role of a servant. Again, we are told that the disciples will only understand later what he is doing (13:7,12; see 2:22; 12:16) because the meaning of his actions is only revealed in the light of the cross and resurrection. By washing his disciples' feet Jesus is acting out the meaning of the cross. In the life of every Christian there is to be one great cleansing followed by many small ones (13:10). Only those who accept his death for them belong to him (13:8; 15:3-4). And the cross is also a demonstration of the meaning of love (1 John 4:7-12). Those who follow

Jesus are to do as he has done, in serving each other and giving their lives for each other (13:12-17; 15:12-14).

In 13:23 the "disciple whom Jesus loved" makes his first appearance. In the rest of the book he is the picture of loyalty, always to be found close to Jesus (18:15; 19:26; 21:20). Here and in 18:15-16 and 20:2-9 he is found in association with Simon Peter. Reclining Roman style, leaning on their left arms and with their feet away from the table, the beloved disciple would have been just in front of Jesus. He would only have had to lean back and turn his head to speak quietly to him without anyone else hearing. In contrast to the beloved disciple, Judas is the disloyal disciple, of whom there were many in the New Testament Church. We have already been shown that he cares more for money than for worshipping Jesus (12:4-6). Now it is he through whom Jesus is betrayed. As Judas goes out, the night which Jesus had spoken of has finally arrived (13:30; see 9:4; 11:9-10).

Like the approach of the Greeks in 12:20-23, Judas' departure is a signal of Jesus' approaching glory (13:31-32). The time has come for his departure (13:33), when he will no longer be with his disciples. Without Jesus physically present they will need a new defining characteristic, and that is to be love, the kind of love he has shown towards them (13:34-35). The words of Simon Peter which follow make it clear that this love is not the same as heroic sacrifice (13:36-38). In fact, Peter will deny Jesus and be restored with a new challenge to love him (21:15-17). Rather, love is the outcome of abiding in Jesus, living the life he gives through the Holy Spirit (15:5,8,12,16-17).

If love is to be the mark of the Christian life, faith and hope are to be its foundation. The disciples are to trust Jesus and the Father and to know that their place with Jesus is secure. He is the way to the Father in the here and now (14:6), just as he is the fulfilment of the hope of resurrection (11:25-26). To know Jesus is to know the Father (14:7-11), to love him is to receive the Father's love (14:23).

Day 360. Psalm 20; John 14:12 - 16:15

The Life of the Trinity in the Disciples

Psalm 20

A prayer for the king: Christians too are to be like kings, with authority to rule in God's Kingdom, filled with his strength and doing his will.

John 14:12 - 16:15

In this central section of the farewell discourse, Jesus presents a number of short pictures, each one building and expanding on the ones before, to explain the dynamic of the Christian life. In Matthew Jesus assures the disciples of his presence with them always (Matthew 28:20). In Luke, he tells them that they are to receive the gift of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5,8). Here in John he unfolds the Christian life as the life of the Father and the Son lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to be Trinitarian not only in theory but in experience.

The time has come for Jesus to return to the Father (13:1,36; 14:2,5,12,28; 16:5), but in his place the disciples are to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (14:15-17; 16:7). Yet the Spirit is not someone different; he is to be the presence of Jesus himself. The disciples already know him because he is with them now (14:17). His coming is Jesus' own coming (14:18) and with him comes the life Jesus has been speaking of throughout the gospel, the life of Jesus himself (14:19; 1:4; 4:13-14; 5:26; 6:35; 7:37-39; 10:10; 11:25-26). Not only is the Spirit's coming Jesus' own coming, but it is also the Father's coming. First Jesus explains that the presence of the Spirit sets up a mutual indwelling: Jesus in the Father and the disciples, they in him (14:20). Then he speaks of the Spirit's coming as the coming of both the Father and himself (14:23).

The result of the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the believer is the fruit of the Spirit. Their presence brings peace (14:27) and joy (15:11) and flows from love (14:15,21,23; 15:9,12,17). In fact, only those who love Jesus and obey his commands can receive the Spirit (14:21). The purpose of the Spirit is to enable the disciples to bear fruit and so glorify the Father (15:8). The fact that it is by such fruit that they show they are Jesus' disciples suggests that the fruit Jesus is speaking of is not so much

effective evangelism or service as the love which reflects his nature and shows that his disciples belong to him (13:34-35). In fact, throughout this passage, effectiveness in ministry flows not so much from powerful actions as from believing prayer in the power of the Spirit (14:13-14; 15:7-8,16). This is how the disciples will do even greater things than those which Jesus has done (14:12).

To describe the mutual indwelling of him and his disciples, Jesus uses the picture of a vine and its branches. He supplies the life, we the fruit (15:4-5). In this picture, the Father is the gardener. It is he who decides when to prune (15:2), and which branches will be cut off (15:2,6). His is the glory when the fruit appears (15:8). Jesus is about to glorify the Father by going to the cross (14:28-31) and the disciples, called to love as he has loved, are also to lay down their lives for one another (15:12-14; 13:12-17).

To dwell in Jesus in the power of the Spirit will mean facing persecution. The world has hated Jesus because it hates the Father and because it has hated them it will hate the disciples (15:18-25). In fact, the witness which Jesus envisages takes place in the face of persecution and is the work of the Holy Spirit, testifying with the disciples (15:26-27) and convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-11).

Nowhere in the whole passage does Jesus call for any specific action or any particular ministry. Instead, he promises a life. He himself lived in obedience to the Father, doing what he saw the Father doing (5:19-20). In his ministry he made known to the disciples everything he has learned from the Father (15:15) and the Holy Spirit will continue to do this (16:12-15). The disciples are to continue working in the same way as Jesus has done (14:12; 15:5-6). The secret of this is first to live the life which Jesus gives through the Spirit (14:19), bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Next, comes prayer, through which the Father will give all they ask (14:13-14; 15:7-8,16). Christian ministry is not a question of programmes and activity. It is primarily a life - the life of the Trinity lived out in the believer. Secondly, Christian ministry flows from prayer, and only then issues in specific actions, the works the Father himself is doing.

Day 361. Psalm 121; John 16:16 - 17:end

The Father's Glory

Psalm 121

The Lord is the protector of his people.

John 16:16 - 17:end

From his final words to his disciples, Jesus turns in prayer to the Father, for the heavenly guarantee of all he has entrusted to them. He is "leaving" the disciples for "a little while" and then returning to them. This leaving and returning refers to three things:

- first to the crucifixion and resurrection, which will be a time of pain as great as that of a woman in labour (16:20-22);
- next to the ascension, followed by the return of the Holy Spirit and the mutual indwelling of Jesus and his disciples giving them life and joy through him (14:15-19; 16:5-7);
- and finally to his departure to be with the Father followed by his eventual return, when he will take his disciples to be with him in the place he has prepared for them (14:1-3). This time of Jesus' absence will also be a time of trouble during which the disciples will suffer the consequences of the world's hatred, but Jesus' parting gift to them is his own peace, which the world cannot give (14:1,27; 16:33; 17:15).

Originally, the word "glory" meant simply honour and respect, given by others, but later in Old Testament times it came to mean the inherent quality for which glory is given. The "glory" of God is his essential being, and his glory is revealed where he is present and worshipped. God's people Israel were meant to be the people through whom God revealed his glory in the world, a "light" to the nations (Isaiah 40:5; 49:6; 60:1-3). But because of their blindness and disobedience, Israel failed to demonstrate God's glory. Instead, Jesus came from the Father, appearing as a man to fulfil the role for which Israel was chosen. While on earth, the Father gave him a small group of disciples, to whom he revealed the Father (17:6-8). With the cross and resurrection comes the time for those who believe in him to see the Father's

glory, his true nature, revealed in his Son (17:1,4-5). The outcome for the disciples will be the knowledge of God, which brings eternal life (17:3).

When he has revealed God's glory, Jesus will return to the Father, leaving his disciples to continue his work in the world (17:11,18). By receiving his word, which is the word of the Father, and believing in him, they have been "sanctified" or set apart for the work Jesus has entrusted to them, that of making the glory of the Father known (17:17-19,22-23). Jesus prays for three things in particular which will ensure their effective witness:

- Protection from the power of the evil one (17:12-15). Earlier he had promised that he would lose none of those whom the Father gave him (6:37-39). Now he prays for the assurance of that promise. There will be trouble in the world (16:33) and the ever-present danger of disciples going the way of Judas (17:12), but this need not be the case because the Father's power is sufficient to protect all those who belong to him.
 - Unity (17:11,23). The source of this unity is the mutual indwelling of Jesus and his disciples, by which they are filled with the character of God. Jesus has already commanded them to love one another as he has loved them. Unity is the outcome of that love. Without love, efforts for organisational unity are doomed to failure.
 - A foretaste of heaven (17:24-26). Jesus had already promised that he would eventually return and take the disciples to the place he had prepared so that they would be with him (14:1-3). Now he prays that they will be with him and see his glory. The Spirit is the downpayment on eternal life, a foretaste of the glory which is to come (Ephesians 1:13-14). The gift of the Spirit brings Jesus' peace in the face of persecution (16:33) and joy in the midst of bereavement (16:22). To know the "best wine" of eternal life is to see Jesus' glory (2:11) and to live in this world with the assurance of heaven.
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Day 362. Psalm 143; John 18 - 19

The Scripture Fulfilled

Psalm 143

A prayer for rescue from enemies. In contrast, Jesus went willingly to death at the hands of those who hated him.

John 18 - 19

John's account of the arrest, trial and crucifixion is a series of dramatic confrontations in which the themes of the gospel are brought to fulfilment. Here we see how Scripture is fulfilled (19:24,28,36-37) and Jesus' work on earth completed (13:1-3; 17:4; 19:30). The themes around which the story centres are the Son of God, the King of Israel and the Lamb of God.

John is very exact about the details of what exactly happened. Some of his knowledge apparently comes from a disciple who was known to the high priest (18:15), some from the beloved disciple (19:26,35; 21:24), who may be the same person. We hear of the name of the slave whose ear Peter cut off (18:10), a hearing before Annas as well as a full trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (18:13), the exact questions put to Peter in reply to which he denied Jesus (18:17,25-27), the fact that the Romans did not permit the Jews to exact the death sentence (18:31), the place at which Pilate made his final judgment (19:13), the exact time of the trial (19:14), the names of the women at the cross (19:25), the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side (19:34-35) and the names of the people who arranged for Jesus' burial (19:38-42).

One of the puzzling features of this exactness is that John insists that Jesus was crucified not on the day following the Passover but on the Day of Preparation (19:42). This means that the last supper could not have been a Passover meal as in the other three gospels. Instead, Jesus is killed at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed in the Temple.

There is no mention of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane, although in 18:11 he does speak about the cup his father has given him. Instead we see him voluntarily giving himself up to the Jews, who have no power to hold him (18:1-9; 10:17-18). At his arrest he once more takes the divine name on his lips, "I am he," (18:5,8) and the soldiers fall to the ground before him. At the trial, Pilate, having already rejected Jesus' claim to speak

the truth (18:37-38), proclaims him as "the man" (19:5). In reply the Jews remember his claim to be the Son of God and reject it (19:7).

Whereas the crowds once attempted to make Jesus king by force, the Jewish leaders now reject him as their king. Jesus is a king (18:36-37), but not the kind some Jews are looking for and others fear will disrupt their cosy arrangement with the Romans (19:12,15). They would rather have a rebel released than a king who threatens their own authority over God's people (18:38-40). To Pilate, whether Jesus is or is not the so-called King of the Jews is immaterial; his aim is to reassert the authority of Rome (19:19-22). Yet through all this jealousy and political manoeuvring, the real meaning of Jesus' death is symbolised (18:14; 19:19).

As well as Son of God and King of Israel, the titles given him by the "true Israelite" Nathaniel (1:49), Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29,34). The Scripture fulfilled by his death in 19:36 refers specifically to the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12) as well as to the righteous man whom God protects (Psalm 34:20). The quotation in 19:37 is taken from Zechariah 12:10 which speaks of Israel turning in repentance to the Lord like the mourning for a firstborn son. Later, in Zechariah 13:1, the Lord opens a cleansing fountain to cleanse Jerusalem from all impurity. This fountain is just one of the several interconnected meanings of the flow of blood and water from Jesus' side. It is the stream of living water from the new Temple, Jesus' own body (2:21), which brings life and healing (Psalm 46:4; Ezekiel 47:1-12). It is the river of the Spirit, which flows from the cross to everyone who believes in Jesus (7:37-39) and becomes a spring of living water welling up within them (4:13-14). At the moment of crucifixion it comes from one who is himself thirsty (19:28). His thirst brings the living water to all who believe in him, his death brings life to the world.

Day 363. Psalm 145; John 20

The Risen Lord

Psalm 145

The goodness and greatness of the Lord proclaimed throughout the world.

John 20

Throughout his gospel, John is assuming that his readers are already familiar with the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This is why he can skip over some of them, rearrange and rewrite others. The purpose of this gospel is to take us deeper into faith and to convince those who doubt that Jesus is Lord and God. So John carefully shapes his account of the resurrection in a way which points to its significance.

- First he shows us that as a matter of historical fact, the tomb was empty: the stone was rolled away and the grave-cloths discarded. On the basis of this evidence, not having understood from Scripture that Jesus was to rise again, the beloved disciple believes. Later, in 20:17 and 27, John shows us an actual bodily resurrection. Thus his account discredits those who claim that the historical facts of the resurrection are unimportant. In fact, for the evangelists, they were all-important.
- But intellectual belief in the fact of the empty tomb is not enough. Jesus also meets us personally. Mary is one of his sheep, whom he calls by name, who recognise his voice and follow him (10:27). Her response to his call is to call him "Teacher", the title given to Jesus by his followers (1:49; 3:2; 4:31). Moreover, because of his resurrection, the disciples are all brothers, children of God the Father and heirs with Christ of eternal life (20:17).
- The risen Christ is present in worship. The story in 20:19-23 takes place on the evening of the first day of the week, the time the early Christians would usually have met for worship. Jesus is present, bearing the marks of his crucifixion (20:20; John does not tell us at this stage what the disciples would have seen on his hands and his side - he would have expected his readers to know already; see also Luke 24:39). Jesus greets the disciples with his peace, a part of the earliest communion

services (20:19) and sends them out empowered by the Holy Spirit (20:21).

- This appearance in the upper room also fulfils the promises made to the disciples in the last discourse in chapters 14 - 16 and Jesus' final prayer in chapter 17. As he told them, he has gone away and returned, but this return after the resurrection is a foretaste of his return in the person of the Holy Spirit. He fulfils the promise of peace (20:19; 14:27; 16:33) and of joy (20:20; 15:11; 16:24), gives them the Holy Spirit (20:22; 14:15-17) and sends them out into the world (20:21; 17:18).

The ministry he gives them in the power of the Holy Spirit is a ministry of forgiveness. Right at the beginning of the gospel, Jesus was announced by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (1:29) and in many ways the gospel shows those who receive Jesus being forgiven while those who reject him are judged (3:16-21; 5:14; 8:11 if it belongs to John; 8:24,34; 9:39; 12:31; 13:8; 15:3; 19:34-37). Now the Church is to take that ministry out into the world.

But the message of the resurrection must also be taken to those who have not seen. "Doubting" Thomas stands for all those who must believe on the word of the disciples, those whom John has in mind throughout the gospel. Thus, Thomas' confession of Jesus as Lord and God, and Jesus' blessing on those who believe without seeing is really the climax of the gospel. Its purpose is that those who doubt or waver may believe and make the full Christian confession (20:30-31).

Day 364. Psalm 149; John 21

Restoration and Mission

Psalm 149

God's people rejoice in him and he gives them victory over their enemies.

John 21

Thomas's confession of Jesus as Lord and God followed by the words in 20:30-31 clearly form the climax and conclusion of the book, so chapter 21 is a kind of epilogue. The reason why it was added was probably the death or imminent death of the beloved disciple, the last of the apostles. From 21:20-23, it seems as if his death might have shaken the faith of some of his immediate circle of followers. But the wider question was how the Church was to continue once the historical link to Jesus in the form of the apostles was removed.

Already in chapters 14 - 16 Jesus had prepared the disciples for his absence and the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom they were to continue and extend his ministry. In 17:20-23 he prayed for those who would believe in him as a result of their testimony. In this chapter, using Peter as the representative disciple, John's circle of followers show how mission and pastoral ministry are to continue without the apostles.

The story of the miraculous catch of fish is based on the call of Peter in Luke 5:1-11, but this time the call is a recommissioning and in 21:15-19 there is a clear reference to Peter's three-fold denial. Peter is going back to his old occupation, from which Jesus calls him to pastor the Church. But "fishing" is also a metaphor for the Church's mission. In the story there are seven disciples in the boat. Seven, the number signifying completion, stands for the whole Church. According to the Greeks, 153 was traditionally the total number of species of fish. So symbolically the whole Church is engaged in a mission to every nation and "even with so many the net was not torn" (21:11). The key to success is trust and obedience. They catch nothing until Jesus appears on the shore, calling them friends (15:15) and their work comes under his direction (21:5-6).

When Peter comes to land, he finds a charcoal fire burning there, just like the charcoal fire which had been burning in the courtyard of the high

priest's house (21:9; 18:18; the translation in N.I.V. is not specific enough). On that first evening, Peter had claimed he was ready to give up his life for Jesus (13:37) but then denied him three times. Now Jesus calls him to step into his own shoes as the good shepherd, ready to give up his own life for the sheep (21:15-17; 10:14-18). In the end, Peter would die for Jesus (21:18-19) but not before becoming the pastor of the Church. His qualification for this is not perfection or heroism, since he has already failed, but love. It was love Jesus demonstrated at the last supper when he washed the disciples' feet and told them to do the same for each other (13:1-3,12-17,34-35).

Even here, Peter is not confident. The love Jesus asks of him is *agape*, the passionate, selfless love of God, which puts him before everything else (21:15). In his reply, Peter uses a different word, which means affection. In his third question, Jesus reverts to using Peter's word, *phileo*, and Peter is distressed (21:17). But in 16:20-22 Jesus has used the same word (pain, distress) to speak of the disciples' grief turning into joy when he returns to them in the form of the Holy Spirit. In response to Peter's distress he tells him that he will in fact die for Jesus just as he had previously said he wanted to. Again, it is the power of the Holy Spirit, through whom Jesus returns to the disciples, which will accomplish this.

Day 365. Psalm 150; John 1:1-18

The Word Made Flesh

Psalm 150

All creation praises the Lord.

John 1:1-18

John's gospel as a whole is a presentation of the significance of Jesus. It begins with a meditation on his significance in even more concentrated form. The prologue brings together most of the themes whose relation to each other and to Jesus is explored throughout the gospel: light, life, witness, belief, new birth, truth, the Father and the Son, glory, and the relation between Jesus and Moses and Jesus and John the Baptist. It also introduces two themes which are not developed in the rest of the gospel, but which sum up John's message. They are the Word and grace.

Throughout the gospel John uses images with a wealth of meaning for his readers, such as the Sabbath, Passover, Temple, the Shepherd and the Vine, and shows how these are fulfilled in Jesus. The "content" of the gospel is thus far wider than what is written in the twenty-one chapters. The way John constantly refers back to the great themes and figures of Israel's history suggests that the content of the Gospel includes the whole of the Old Testament; as well as several contemporary Jewish beliefs arising from it (1:21; 7:27; 9:30-31). In addition, there is the meaning in Greek culture of the images he uses such as light and life. In the world of his time Greek, Jewish and oriental cultures had already cross-fertilised to produce a kaleidoscopic variety of world-views, religions and speculation. It is against this background that John sets out to present the significance of Jesus.

The Word (Greek: *logos*) is the governing image of the whole gospel. For the Greek philosopher, *logos* was the principle of understanding by which people come to know both the world (*cosmos*) and God (*theos*) in whatever way God is conceived. For the strict Jew *logos* refers to "Torah" both in its restrictive sense of the Law and its wider sense of "teaching", the way in which God makes himself known to us. Thus, in Jesus the *logos* John presents someone who is both God's revelation to us and our ability to

receive it, combined in one Person who is fully God, and therefore the ultimate revelation of God, and fully man, totally obedient to the Father's will.

In the Prologue, John tells us what he is going to say about the Word. Some of this is shared with parts of Greek philosophy or with Judaism; some is entirely new and contradicts both of these. Boldly, he draws strands from the various traditions and revolutionises their meaning by applying them concretely to Jesus. Thus, for the Jew, whether Hellenistic or Rabbinic, Jesus is is Torah, the revelation of the Father (1:17-18).

1. He is "in the beginning" (1:1), a conscious reference to Genesis 1:1. This common starting point signals that the scope of the gospel is the same as that of Scripture. The Word is to be fully revealed.
2. He is divine but distinct from God. The language of 1:1-2 is very elusive. The relationship of Jesus with God is difficult to express even after nineteen centuries of Christianity. In a world of strict Jewish monotheism and of Greek philosophical distinctions it may have been even harder (see 10:29-38). But the doctrine of the Trinity was already on the way to formation (see also Matthew 28:19).
3. He is Creator, and thus distinct from the *cosmos*. In Jewish terms, he is not simply a prophet but "sent from above" (3:31; 8:23). Nor is the *logos* the same as the *cosmos* as in Stoicism or Hindu pantheism.
4. He is the source of life (4:14; 5:26; 6:35; 10:10; 11:25; 12:49-50; 14:6; 17:3). It is God who is the life-giver (Genesis 2:7) but through sin mankind is cut off from the source of life and dies (Genesis 3:3,22-24). Through the Law God's offers Israel the gift of life (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). In the priestly code, he is the Lord of life (Leviticus 17:10-14). Ezekiel sees God bringing Israel to life by his breath or spirit (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Jesus comes as the one who brings eternal life (3:16; 20:31). The resurrection is the victory of life over death and the whole of the New Testament vibrates with this message (5:21,24,28-29; 6:38-40,44,47-50; 11:23-26; Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 3:1-4).

But God's life is a different kind of life. In 12:25, the life we must lay down is *psyche*, the life of this world, of the soul, which has its source outside God. This is the natural life which leads to death and must be replaced by *zoe*, "eternal life" or the life of the Spirit (6:63; Romans 8:1-

8). Hence the need to abide in Jesus (15:4-8) by being continually filled with the Spirit in order to live God's life rather than the natural life of the world.

5. The Word became flesh (1:14). To Hellenistic philosophy, this was unthinkable. Between God (spirit) and human beings (flesh) was a radical separation and salvation could only come by denying the flesh. These ideas were a frequent source of heresy in the early Church from people who believed that if Jesus was God he could not really be a man as well (see 2 John 7). John explicitly denies these heretical views. This is a real incarnation of the Word and it is our "flesh", that is our human nature, which is redeemed by being taken up into the life of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-50; 1 John 1:1-4).

For the Jew, it was equally unthinkable for a man to be God. This is why Jesus' claim amounted to blasphemy (5:18; 10:33). But John means to tell the Jews also that this is a genuine incarnation. Rabbinic Judaism used three terms to speak of God in order to avoid mentioning his name: these were "word", "glory" and "presence". In 1:14 John uses all three to spell out the claim that Jesus is God. Then, in 1:18, he writes of the Word as "only-begotten God" who has made God known.

The idea of presence comes in the word "dwelt". The Greek form of this word, *skene*, both means "tabernacled" or "made his home" and sounds like the Hebrew *shekinah*, which means the presence and glory of God. It thus recalls the whole tradition of God dwelling among his people, including the tabernacle (Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46; 1 Kings 6:11-13; Isaiah 8:18; Joel 3:17; Zechariah 2:10-12, see Matthew 28:20; Revelation 21:3).

"Grace" signifies both the fulfilment of the Law and the fact that the Law is now obsolete. The Christian receives not the Law given through Moses but grace and truth through Jesus Christ (1:18). The idea of the Word sums up all that Jesus is, grace sums up all that he gives, eternal life (4:10; 6:32-33; 14:27; 15:11; 17:26). Grace and the Word are linked because it is only when we receive God's grace in Jesus that we come to know him (17:3). It is impossible to know God in a detached way without loving him. Those who truly love God recognise in Jesus the one he has sent. Truly to know God we have to come to him through Jesus, the only-begotten, who has made him known (1:15-18; 3:16; 14:6-11).
