

Contexts

John's Gospel

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 1:6-8; 19-28 – things to notice

- Those who arranged the Lectionary have deliberately joined two texts from chapter 1 of John's Gospel.
- The first passage consists of 3 verses from the 'profound, poetic meditation that opens the gospel (Jn 1:1-18 – the Prologue)...the second come from the narrative that follows'' [BOTW]
- In both passages it is clear that John is a witness but not the 'light' - that is, not the Messiah. It is possible that John is writing to dispel any lingering thoughts about the role and identity of John the Baptist. Perhaps there were remnants of that thinking in the various Johannine traditions/communities.
- Priests and Levites from Jerusalem: Levites – members of the priestly tribe of Israel, not permitted to be landowners, but were to be dedicated to Temple service and instruction in the Law, probably the same as 'scribes' used elsewhere. The presence of both priests and Levites coming from Jerusalem indicates a formal enquiry being made by the Sanhedrin into the preaching of John the Baptist. The style of questioning which follows also indicates this.
- 'Not the Christ' – Greek word 'Christos' means 'anointed one' who would bring salvation to the Jewish people – Greek translation of the Hebrew word, 'messiah'.
- Elijah – Jewish expectation that not only would a Messiah come, but Elijah would return as a messenger before him (cf Mal 3:1, 23 & 4:5: "I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.") Note that Elijah's ministry of reconciliation is the same as John's in last week's Gospel (repentance = reconciliation with God).
- The Prophet – not clear if this is a reference to the prophet predicated in the Book of Deuteronomy (18:18), possibly part of an expectation that one of the prophets might rise again from the dead. No one knows exactly what is meant here.

- 'A voice that cries....' – repetition of Isaiah quote (slightly adapted) emphasising John's role as messenger & witness – not quite 'preparer'.
- 'Pharisees' - question John's authority to baptise if he is not a messianic figure.
- '...there stands among you, unknown to you the one who is coming after me.' – notice that John does not quite answer the question, but points to (witnesses to) the presence of one who 'is unknown to you (the Pharisees). Throughout John's Gospel the Pharisees are the ones who do not know Jesus. Notice: no reference to Jesus baptising with the Holy Spirit.
- 'I am not fit to undo his sandal strap' – John's subservient role to Jesus, but here 'fit' might be 'able' as is 'I am not even able to...' – a sharper distinction between John and Jesus than Mark's account last week.
- Note: if John had claimed to be the Christ, the Prophet or Elijah it would have lent credibility and authority to what he was saying and doing. Instead, John is truthful and humble.
- 'Bethany on the far side of the Jordan' – no place called Bethany exists or perhaps ever existed in that region. A site identified by later Christian tradition as Bethany exists but there is great dispute among scholars about whether it is the place specified in John's Gospel. Not to be confused with the home of Mary, Martha & Lazarus.

The Liturgical Context

The first reading is from the third book of Isaiah which looks forward to the joyful restoration of Israel. The text actually speaks about the anointing of a prophet. This was probably one of the early post-exilic leaders, but in later Jewish tradition it was applied to a Messiah to come and in our Christian tradition it is applied to Jesus. Luke put these words on the lips of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. Once again, notice the gentle, 'shepherd/pastoral' imagery of this prophet anointed by the Lord: sent to bring good news, to bind up hearts that are broken, proclaim liberty of captives, freedom (light) to those in prison, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. The prophet exults in what God is doing for him and acknowledges God as the source of justice (integrity and praise) which will be seen (through Israel) in the sight of the nations.

Reflection

Today is Gaudete Sunday. The name comes from the first word of the Entrance Antiphon in Latin which means, 'Rejoice'. The full text of the antiphon is: *Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice! Indeed, the Lord is near.*

That is what we are rejoicing in: God's nearness to us. We recognise that nearness in the presence of Jesus, born so long ago, and in his continuing presence through the Holy Spirit in our lives now. We rejoice that God has always been with us, whether we realised it or not. God has never left us.

Advent is very much about a fresh discovery of God's presence and grace in our lives, in our own moment of history.

This is what we are celebrating on Christmas Day, too. Christ is God's great present to the human family. Christmas celebrates not only the birth of Jesus in one moment of human history, but his continual birth in us so that he may be present in every moment of human history.

As we wait for the final coming of Jesus we, like John the Baptist, are called to be witnesses to the Light. We do that best by taking up the mission of the prophet in the first reading, just as Jesus did. The Lord has anointed us to bring Good News to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison and a year of favour from the Lord. God trusts us to do that. We have been commissioned by the Church through our Baptism to do that.

Our faith in (that is, living relationship with) Christ is meant to be lived openly, generously and graciously, at the service of our brothers and sisters in the world by being the living presence of Jesus in our own day and age.

The Season of Advent

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| 1. Stay Awake! | 3. Rejoice! |
| 2. Prepare! | 4. Receive! |