



## ST. JOHN

The gospel according to John presents Jesus as the eternal Word of God who “became human and lived among us.” He says that he wrote his Gospel “in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in Him you may have life” (20:30-31).

John's audience was Jewish – Jewish Christians who had spent their lives worshiping in the synagogue. They believed in Jesus and Christianity but continued to belong to the synagogue, seeing Christianity as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Between persecutions and propaganda perpetuated by the synagogue leaders, these Jewish Christians were having a difficult time. John wrote his gospel to dispel their doubts and to strengthen their faith entirely in Jesus.

John's main themes deal with the divinity of Jesus and His purpose in becoming man. The reader notices immediately that John concentrates on who Jesus is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God*.” (1:1). The Word became flesh and dwelt among men in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In John, the subject of Jesus' preaching is his own person, his identity and his relationship with the Father who sent him.

The Gospel is ostensibly written by St. John the Apostle, “the beloved disciple” of Jesus. The Gospel of John is quite different from the other biblical gospel books. It is the one that most clearly shows that Jesus' earthly ministry was three years. It portrays Jesus having lengthy spiritual conversations on theological matters, i.e. Nicodemus (2:23-3:15), the Samaritan woman (4:4-42), and Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary (11:17-37). The major difference, however, lies in John's overall purpose. John concentrates much more on *who* Jesus is rather than on *what* Jesus does: “I and the Father are one” (10:29-33); “I am the bread of life” (6:35); “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “I am the resurrection” (11:25); “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man.

It is also interesting to note that only in the Gospel of John do we hear about the Good Shepherd (10: 1-21), the raising of Lazarus (11: 1–45), and the account of Jesus washing His disciples' feet (13: 1-14).

The Gospel of John is used prominently throughout Holy Week and the Easter season in the liturgy. In John's account of the Last Supper, Jesus talks about love and peace, joy and glory. He explains that his disciples would see him again, and he teaches about the “Paraclete” (14-16) who would continue his own presence in the world. Peter Edmonds, S.J., writes: “The Passion story is not so much the story of Jesus' crucifixion as an account of his enthronement, of his being ‘lifted up.’” (3:14; 8:28; 12:32). The whole Gospel of John is “a progressive revelation of the glory of God's only Son, who comes to reveal the Father, and then returns in glory to the Father.” It is appropriate that we read this gospel during Lent and Easter, so that we can grow deeper in our spirituality at the holiest time of the Church year.



John's place in the New Testament is that of "the theologian of the Trinity." He attempts to explain the deeper relationship of Jesus to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. In symbolic descriptions of the evangelists, John is represented by an eagle. He is the evangelist who "soars into the heart of the Trinity to discover and proclaim the depth of the love that unites Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" and overflows to all of us.

Resources: *The Gospel of St. John*, Peter Francis Ellis  
*Story, theology and drama in the Gospel of John*, Peter Edmonds, S.J.  
*The New Testament, St. Joseph Edition*