

# The Gospel of John, Creation and Liturgy

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The books of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called synoptic Gospels because they present a similar content, order and synopsis of the life of Christ. In contrast most of the book of John (chapters 12-20) takes place during one week in the life of Christ. John concentrates on themes. One theme is that Christ will redeem all of Creation (not just souls) through Re-Creation. To highlight this John opens his Gospel using creation imagery found in Genesis. Second, John points out that Christ's work is Sacramental in nature. In the Church age it will be the liturgy with its Word and Sacrament that serve as the font of Christ's redemptive power<sup>1</sup>. This essay will examine these claims.

## A New Creation

John begins with the words "In the beginning". This immediately harkens us to the book of Genesis which opens with the same words. John then lays out a series of events in the life of Christ that mirror the Seven Days of Creation. We see this in the table below.

Genesis	John
1:1 In the beginning...	1:1 In the beginning...
1:1 ... <b>God created</b> the heavens and the earth.	1:3 All things <b>were made through him</b> [Jesus], and without him was not anything that was made.
Day 1: Light is created.	Day 1: Christ is declared to be the light of the world.
Day 2: The waters are separated.	Day 2: Christ is baptized with water.
Day 3: Fruit bearing plants come into being.	Day 3: Christ's ministry bears fruit as he acquires his first disciples.
Day 4: The Stars rule the heavens.	Day 4: Christ rules with his first command "follow me".
Day 5: Birds and fish are created.	Day 5: Silence
Day 6: Adam and Eve created in marriage.	Day 6: A marriage feast is celebrated in Cana.
Day 7: Sabbath rest is established.	Day 7: Christ rests in Capernaum.

John transitions events with "the next day". Stringing the "next days" together gives us seven days. However, in the middle of the week there is a hiccup. John moves from day four to the third day. In the Hebrew way of counting, he is moving from day four (inclusive) over day five (and thus the silence) into day six<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John does the same with the book of Revelation. Scott Hahn's book "The Lamb's Supper" depicts this.

<sup>2</sup> This way of counting is why we say Christ was raised on the third day. Friday and Sunday are inclusive while Saturday is passed over.

Why the silence? This is probably calling attention to Christ's death and Resurrection. While in the tomb there is Silence but on the Third Day Christ is raised. On John's Third Day we find Christ performing his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana. Here Christ initiates his Re-Creation by transforming water into wine. Re-Creation has begun. As Adam was tasked to tend the Garden on day six, so Christ begins to tend the World on day six. On day seven Christ goes to Capernaum "for a few days", presumably to rest.

### **Other New Creation Events**

Besides the seven day sequence found in chapter 1 there are other events in John that point to a New Creation theme. In chapter 20 Christ breathes on the disciples to institute the Sacrament of Confession. The only other time God breathed on Man in the Bible (other than a vision in Ezekiel) was in Genesis. There God breathed on Adam giving Adam a soul and life itself. Christ's breathing is a Re-Creation moment harkening us to the Creation story. In the Sacrament of Confession Christ breathes life into the soul with mortal sin. This story is unique to John.

John's treatment of Mary is unlike any other New Testament author. John never calls her by her name; he always refers to her as the Mother of Christ (and remember, he was the most familiar with her as she lived with him). This is because John's focus is on **her redemptive role**. Mary's role is that of **the New Eve**. John shows us this in at least two ways. First, John tells us Mary instigated Christ's first miracle. Remember, Eve was created to *help*<sup>3</sup> Adam in his rule over the Garden. The New Eve *helps* Christ by prompting him to act. And as a "helper" she has the servants to *assist him* saying, "Do whatever he tells you". This story is unique to John as he centers on Re-Creation.

In Genesis Eve is called "the mother of all the living"<sup>4</sup>. At the Cross Christ says to Mary, "Woman, behold your son". And to John (the author of the Gospel), "Behold your Mother". Notice Christ addressed Mary as "Woman". Many theologians see this as a reference to Genesis 3:15. There God says to Satan, "I will put enmity between you **and the Woman** and between your seed and **her seed**." "Her seed" is prophetic of the virgin birth (no other woman can be said to have seed). The Genesis Woman is therefore Mary. Addressing her as Woman (and giving her to John) Christ transcends the universal Motherhood of Eve (at the physical level) with the universal Motherhood of Mary (at the spiritual level). This was not a private conversation about some last minute housekeeping. These were redemptive words spoken from the Cross for the sake of all Mankind. This story is unique to John as he centers on Re-Creation.

### **Liturgy: Word and Sacrament**

There is a liturgical undertow to John. While Christ proclaims his message with the spoken word, John almost always puts those words in the context of the Sacraments. Specifically water (symbolizing baptism) and eating (symbolizing the Eucharist) are the context for most of the events in John. The table below depicts how sacramental

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:18 "It is not good for Man to be alone; I will make **a helper** fit for him." All quotes from RSV

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:20 "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living".

symbolism is wrapped around Christ's spoken word. The point here is the liturgy (the Word and Sacrament) is central to John's Gospel - and therefore to the life of the Church.

Chapter	Word	Symbol of Sacraments embedded in the story
2	Christ tells the servant to "fill the jars with water".  Christ later clears the Temple.	In Christ's first miracle he changes water into wine (when wine is turned into blood we have the <b>Eucharist</b> ). Baptismal jars were used to hold the water ( <b>baptism</b> ). The servants held the jars in their hands when the miracle occurs (the Sacrament of Holy Orders of the <b>priesthood</b> ). The Sacrament of <b>marriage</b> is sanctified. Later, Christ clears the Temple while "the <b>Passover</b> ... was at hand".
3	Christ proclaims the Gospel to Nicodemus.	Christ's message to Nicodemus is sacramental in nature as he says, "Unless one is born of <b>water</b> and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God". John then records, "after this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and <b>baptized</b> ".
4	Christ speaks to the woman at the well.	<b>Water</b> brought Jesus and the woman together (this is what baptism does, it bring a person and Christ together).
5	Jesus speaks and a cripple is healed at a pool near the Sheep Gate.	<b>Water</b> brought Jesus and the man together (as baptism does). This also took place during a <b>feast</b> of the Jews.
6	After addressing 5,000 Christ feeds them. He also walks on the water and tells Peter "come".	Christ comes to the disciples over <b>water</b> (as he comes to us in baptism). The feeding of 5,000 occurs while "the <b>Passover</b> was at hand". Christ tells the crowds to eat his flesh and drink his blood – a clear reference to the Eucharist.
7	Jesus preaches at the Temple.	The <b>feast</b> of the Tabernacles was at hand
9	Jesus speaks to a blind man.	Christ uses mud (spit and dirt) to place on the man's eyes. He then tells him to wash in the <b>pool</b> of Siloam.
10	Jesus tells the people he is their Shepherd.	"It was the <b>feast</b> of Dedication in Jerusalem".
11	Jesus commands Lazarus to be raised from the dead.	Christ comes to Lazarus as <b>water</b> drenches his face as "Jesus wept". This story is unique to John.
12 – 20	Christ preaches during his last week before the Crucifixion.	These events in these chapters all occur while "the <b>Passover</b> was at hand". Christ breathes on the disciples as God breathed on Adam.
21	Christ restores Peter.	Peter comes to Christ through the <b>water</b> (baptism) and then Christ <b>feeds</b> Peter with fish and bread.

Even the Great Commission (recorded in Matthew) is a call to use the Word and Sacrament to redeem the world.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** [Sacrament] them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** [Word] them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.<sup>5</sup>”

### **A New Creation**

As the New Adam<sup>6</sup>, Christ is ushering in a New Creation; a Re-Creation. The following texts speak to this truth.

“Therefore if any one is in Christ **he is a new creation**, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come<sup>7</sup>.”

“For the Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the Creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because **the Creation itself will be set free** from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies<sup>8</sup>.”

“Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.<sup>9</sup>”

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

1074 The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also **the font from which all her power flows**. It is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God. Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the **transformation** of men.

### **Summary**

In every Mass an act of Re-Creation occurs; the Holy Spirit transforms the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ (oh to have eyes to see what really happens at the altar!). Catholic worship is called the Mass (from the Latin missa) as the liturgy compels us to mission. In it, Christ calls us to draw all people to Him where, with Word and Sacrament, through the Holy Spirit, each person can become a new creation in Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:19, 20

<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:14

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:19-23

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 21:1