

Introduction to the Gospels

The Gospels identify who Jesus is and, by doing so, identify that to which the Christian is called. To be a disciple of Jesus is to attempt to take on his identity, to adopt his concerns, to live by his values. In the Gospels, followers of Jesus discover who they are called to be.

What is a Gospel?

The Gospel was a new type of literature that emerged in the latter half of the first century CE. Paul's letters are often confined to specific pieces of advice on living the Christian life; they are not aimed directly at us in the same way that a Gospel is. A Gospel is meant to be a comprehensive treatment of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The Gospels are not “Scientific History”, but “Faith History”

History as we know it and as it is taught now has to pay attention to narrating exactly what has happened and how it happened. The Bible does not fall in this category.

- In biblical times throughout the then-known world, history was kept alive in oral tradition, being passed on from one generation to the next, century after century. Its purpose was to explain why things are as they are. Why is there so much beauty? It is because God created it. Why is there also so much evil? Because the humans God had created turned away from him and disobeyed him.
- Heroic deeds were attributed to ancestors in story form, often in exaggerated ways.

Only from around the year 1000 BCE were these “oral stories” gradually entrusted to paper. The process for the Gospels in the New Testament was the same: stories about Jesus first “lived on” for many decades in oral tradition and in early Christian communities, before eventually being written down and becoming “the four Gospels”.

Why Were Gospels Written?

64 CE, the Roman emperor Nero is said to have set fire to Rome and blamed it on the Christians. He used this as an opportunity to have them killed. It initiated a period of persecution against Christians. Many were killed by beasts in the Colosseum. Palestine had been conquered by Rome and added to the Roman Empire in 63 BCE. The Jewish War took place from 67-70 CE, a revolt by Jews against Roman occupation of Palestine. In the course of the war, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE. Prior to these events, there was no compelling need to write down the memories of the early church for two reasons:

- the presence of eyewitnesses still alive and
- the expectation that the Second Coming of Jesus would be soon.

But with the persecutions the witnesses were disappearing. Also new ideas and heresies were developing, e.g. the docetic heresy that Jesus Christ was not really human. Christian communities had to be enabled to deal with all this. Therefore, it became important to have a written Gospel.

The Formation of the Gospels

The importance of the various Christian communities deserves an explicit mention and explanation. *They* lived-out the extraordinary experience of Easter, of the Living Christ, and testified to that. *They* handed-on the newly acquired faith, not basing themselves on written documents (which did not yet exist, as mentioned above), but only on the oral (verbal) witness of the Apostles and their successors. Each community did so in its own way, stressing what it found important for every-day life. The later evangelists, who eventually put everything in writing, followed these concerns.

Indeed, we could say that the Living Word was proclaimed and lived-out, long before anything appeared in writing. The Church existed before the written word, living out the extraordinary experience of Easter without statutes, charters or constitution! Indeed, the Easter experience is the hub around which the whole New Testament is centred, in a very similar way as the Exodus experience formed the centre of the Old Testament. As Paul said:

“The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve” (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

The Gospels, therefore, are not the result of the work of a few individual evangelists; and, therefore, much more credit should be given to the living community in which the Gospel message took form, was expressed and handed on (i.e., oral tradition).

That explains why Matthew, living in a Christian-Jewish community, expresses the Gospel in a Jewish way, referring often to the Old Testament and giving importance to Jewish customs. Luke, on the contrary, was part of a non-Jewish-Christian community, and therefore is much less interested in Jewish feasts and traditions, but rather stresses universalism and, in his 2nd work, the Acts of the Apostles, on the expansion of the message to “the ends of the earth”.

These two evangelists made grateful use of Mark’s Gospel. Mark redacted his Gospel in Rome, where Christians suffered persecution and Mark wanted to offer encouragement to those suffering because of their faith. John’s Gospel is quite different from the others, in presenting the Good News in a more theological way.

The Three-Stage Formation of the Gospels

- The preaching of the Good News by Jesus, leading to his death and resurrection (around the years 28-30 CE).
- Various communities were formed around (belief in) the Risen Christ, which expressed their faith in liturgy and handed it on in catechesis, all orientated towards Mission, i.e. the spread of the Good News. They started to collect Jesus’ parables and stories of his miracles, and grouped together Jesus’ sayings, that people remembered, even if not literally. All this developed during a few decades through oral tradition, before the Gospels eventually acquired their final form.

- The final stage is the redacting stage, where the four evangelists, no doubt with the help of others, gave the Gospels their final written form. Note that there are many “Gospels” in circulation, but only those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were included in the New Testament.

There are four Gospels

- The *Gospel of Matthew*: Matthew’s focus in his Gospel demonstrates that Jesus fulfilled the promises that God had made to his people over years.
- The *Gospel of Mark*: Mark’s purpose was to communicate the power of who Jesus was in as vivid a style as possible so that Mark’s audience could understand the urgency and power of the call to “come and follow”. One of Mark’s messages seems to be to raise the question of what a good disciple of Jesus might be.
- The *Gospel of Luke*: is a story about the life of Jesus with the intended aim of persuading its readers of who he was. Luke’s focus in his Gospel is, as he makes clear in 1.1-4, to tell the story of Jesus in such a way as to persuade his audience of the truth of what has been said about him.
- The *Gospel of John*: John’s Gospel is the most reflective and theological of all the Gospels. It begins with a beautiful poem on the Word made flesh and continues throughout the book interweaving stories about Jesus with deep theological reflections on his importance. There are various themes that run through the Gospel of John, much more clearly than in the other Gospels’ themes, such as good vs evil, light vs darkness, Jesus coming to earth from heaven sent by God and, underpinning everything else – love.

Most of the quotations of Jesus in the Gospels are two stages removed from Jesus; but some of the quotations are probably from Jesus when the evangelist uses Aramaic words, such as *talitha koum* (“Little girl, I say to you, arise!”) and *eli, eli lama sabachtani* (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) and possibly the word *abba* (Father).

From the many things handed down to them, the evangelists selected some things, synthesized others and expanded others to suit the situation of their churches at the time they were writing. For example, Mark writing after the fire of Rome, draws attention to a suffering Messiah asking us to carry our cross. Not everything Jesus said and did is in the Gospels because the evangelists had to make selections. An example of a saying of Jesus which is not in any of the Gospels is “It is more blessed to give than to receive” which is recorded in Acts.

Because Matthew, Mark and Luke have many similarities they are called Synoptic Gospels, (“syn” in Greek = together/with and “optic” = seeing). Synoptic means “seeing together”.

Structure of the Synoptic Gospels

	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>
Jesus' infancy	1-2		1-2
Jesus' ministry in Galilee	3-	1-	3-9:50
Jesus' journey to Jerusalem	*	*	9:51-19:28
Jesus enters Jerusalem	21	11	19:28ff
Jesus' Passion	26-27	14-15	22-23
Jesus' Resurrection	28	16	24

*The journey to Jerusalem is not clear-cut in Matthew and Mark, but it is in Luke. Also, note that there is no infancy narrative (Christmas story) in Mark.

The Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes

These are groups found in the Gospel, who were opponents to Jesus.

The Pharisees viewed Judaism as a religion based on strict observance of the Law. They were a lay group, unlike the priestly Sadducees. They were closely allied with the scribes, the interpreters of the Law. The Pharisees survived the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. They were strongly opposed to Jesus in the Gospels. A fault with Pharisees is that they could not see Judaism developing any further. In other words, they had closed the door to God intervening in a new way. Quite a number of Pharisees converted and became Christians in the early Church (Acts 15:5). Even Paul had been a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5)

The Sadducees were a religious party within Judaism, a priestly party. They did not have the same beliefs as the Pharisees. For example, they did not believe in the resurrection or angels (see Acts 23:6-8). Only one of their encounters with Jesus is reported in the Gospels (Matthew 22:22-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). They disappeared with the destruction of the Temple and the priesthood in 70 CE.

The Scribes at the time of Jesus were the intellectual leaders of Judaism, its scholars. All their study had the Law as its subject matter which they regarded as the only worthwhile study and the summit of wisdom. They were addressed with the title 'Rabbi'. Most of the scribes were also Pharisees and there are frequent references in the Gospels to their hostility to Jesus.

Matthew

Matthew's focus in his Gospel demonstrates how Jesus fulfilled the promises that God had made to his people over years.

An important quote

"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7).

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel, like all of the Gospels, tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The quote above confirms the "Jewishness of Matthew" (in the giving of the Law to Moses, which was done on a mountain). He insists on every page that Jesus fulfils the promises of the Old Law and the expectations so long awaited by God's people. Although it begins with the birth of Jesus, including a visit from wise men from the East, the majority of the stories of Jesus' life focus on his adult life and ministry culminating in his death and resurrection. The Gospel ends with the command to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

St Augustine seems to have been responsible for putting the Gospel of Matthew first in the order of the four Gospels; and it is always the one that comes first in our Bibles. In the early Church, it seems to have been the most popular and wide-spread of the Gospels; and, until the recent reforms of the Lectionary, it was the Gospel read most frequently in the liturgy. However, it was almost certainly the second Gospel to be written, for it uses and expands on Mark, expressing Matthew's own particular angle on the Good News of Jesus.

Suggested Reading

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7.

Who wrote this book?

This Gospel is associated with the apostle Matthew, one of the Twelve, since the second century. Many modern scholars would argue that, when writing the Gospel, the author had Mark's Gospel in front of him as well as a store of his own stories.

What do we know about him?

Matthew writes excellent Greek but has a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, in both Hebrew and Greek. Many think it was written in Antioch to tell the story of Jesus there to a largely Jewish community, a significant number of whom became Christians. It is the only Gospel quoted by St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in his letters about 108 CE.

Liturgical notes

In the readings, the Gospels are given pre-eminence by the Gospel procession with a cross and lights and by always being proclaimed – sometimes in song – by a priest or deacon. The Gospel of Matthew is read at Sunday Mass throughout Year A. For some centuries before the reform of the lectionary consequent on Vatican II, it had liturgical priority among the Gospels, because of the fullness and poetic quality of its teaching, due to the Augustinian view that it was the earliest Gospel. To some extent, this priority still persists. On weekdays, Matthew 5-25 is read semi-continuously during Weeks 10-21.

How is it structured?

Matthew's Gospel strikingly has five "discourses" or major pieces of teaching in it. These are preceded by an introduction and concluded with an epilogue, as follows:

- 1:1-2:23** title and birth narratives
- 3:1-7:29** the baptism of Jesus and first discourse (Sermon on the Mount)
- 8:1-10:42** miracles, calling of disciples and the second discourse (on mission and suffering)
- 11:1-13:52** conflict with opponents and third discourse (a series of parables)
- 13:53-18:35** increasing conflict and opposition and fourth discourse (preparation of the disciples for Jesus' absence)
- 19:1-20:34** Jesus travels to Jerusalem and fifth discourse (the coming end)
- 21:1-28:20** epilogue or culmination: the last week of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and great commission

How Matthew is symbolised

Matthew the Evangelist is symbolized by a winged man, or angel. This represents Jesus' Incarnation and so Christ's human nature and implies that we should use our power to reason to achieve salvation.

God speaks to us

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of time" (Matthew 28.19-20).

Mark

Mark communicates the power of who Jesus was in as vivid a style as possible so that Mark's audience could understand the urgency and power of the call to "come and follow".

A significant quote

One of the scribes asked Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Mark 12:29–31).

The Gospel of Mark

From his first words, Mark lets his readers into the secret of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God. Two titles appear beside his name: Jesus, which identifies him as a man and Christ (which means Messiah) and Son of God. John the Baptist claims to be the forerunner of the Messiah, and the Father proclaims to Jesus that he is his Son (Mark 1:1-13). So, we know what is going on. From now on, he will share with the disciples their slow discovery of the mystery of Jesus in two stages.

In the first stage (Mark 1:14-8:26), Jesus proclaims the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, and gives signs of its coming, and miracles. He does not say who he is and forbids others to divulge it. The only title which Jesus applies to himself is the mysterious title Son of man. The second part (Mark 8:27-16:8) begins with Peter's proclamation, "You are the Messiah". We have the impression that Jesus breathes a sigh of relief; his disciples have seen one part of his mystery. At the same time, he is disturbed: there is a risk that they, too, will get the wrong idea about the Messiah – that he would be a military or political liberator who will establish the kingdom of Israel by force of arms. Jesus forbids Peter to share his discovery; but, at the same time, he leads his disciples to the second stage: the Son of man will suffer and be put to death.

Most important, Mark's Gospel tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Mark's Gospel places a particular emphasis both on discipleship and on walking the way of the cross in the footsteps of Jesus. Mark's Gospel has a few alternative endings. The original manuscripts end at 16:8 but later manuscripts provide both an extra shorter and an extra longer ending. Their style is so different, however, that it seems unlikely that they are original.

Suggested Reading

Mark was a member of the Roman persecuted community, a fact that marks his Gospel. Read Mark 8:26-10:52, the Way of the Cross and the cost of Discipleship.

Who wrote this book?

The overwhelming majority of scholars agree that the Gospel according to Mark is the earliest of the three "synoptic" Gospels. Mark was chosen to put together a record of the stories which formed the Good News of Jesus Christ. He did not write a biography of Jesus in the modern sense, for he leaves out many details which would

be fascinating to a modern reader – Jesus’ appearance, his childhood, his development.

Mark chooses and presents the incidents in order to convey the message of Jesus. We don’t really know who Mark was; the name Mark was very common in the Roman world. There is no suggestion that he was ever a companion of Jesus. Rather he assembled the stories that he received from tradition. He may well have been a catechist who used the stories about Jesus in his instruction; his style betrays many of the features of oral story-telling.

Liturgical notes

The Gospel of Mark is read at Sunday Masses during year B. It is the shortest of the Gospels and is supplemented by readings from John not only in Lent and Paschaltide, but on Sundays 17-21. On weekdays, Mark 1-12 is read semi-continuously during Weeks 1-9. As it is the simplest, most narrative of the Gospels, it makes sense to read it first. This is also the reason why it is the Gospel given to enquirers in the RCIA who want to know about Christianity.

How is it structured?

- 1.1 the beginning
- 1.2-4.34 an introduction to the ministry of Jesus
- 4.35-8.25 **the challenge of discipleship** – “Come and follow me”
- 8.26-10.52 the way of the cross – the cost of discipleship
- 11.1-16.8 the final week of Jesus’ life.

How Mark is symbolised

Mark the Evangelist is symbolized by the winged lion. It is related to Mark because his Gospel emphasizes the majesty of Christ and his royal dignity, just as the lion has traditionally been regarded as the king of beasts. Mark’s Gospel begins with the prophetic voice of John the Baptist, crying out in the wilderness like a lion’s roar.

God speaks to us

Through the Gospel of Mark, God speaks of the power of Jesus’ call to “come and follow” him.

Luke

Jesus' ministry in Luke is inclusive, bringing salvation to all and breaking down human barriers. It's full of stories of rogues, vagrants or vagabonds without means of support who are given new hope. Its stories are the most memorable in the New Testament. It was the last to be written; it is the last to be read.

A favourite quote

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4.18-19).

The Gospel of Luke

Luke's Gospel, like all the Gospels, tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Luke's Gospel is often said to have been written for a more Gentile audience. There is much discussion about whether Luke was a Gentile or not. He certainly knew, and was able to quote from, the Jewish scriptures. This might suggest that he was a God-fearer. From his writings we can tell that he was a keen historian and laid out both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles in a style reminiscent of historical accounts of his day.

Luke has a delightful skill as a story-teller (with little scenes with entry, dialogue and exit; memorable parables with lively and complex characters, who do the right thing for the wrong reason, who vividly express their joys and worries) and these would have made his writing highly acceptable among such contemporary literature. It is in Luke's Gospel that we see the breaking down of barriers. Since Luke's Gospel originated in a non-Jewish-Christian community, he gives very much attention to the universal character of the Gospel Message – breaking down barriers wherever they existed, insisting on mercy for sinners . . . For example, He forgave the paralytic man of his sins then he cured him (Luke 5:17-26). Luke tells the story of how Jesus told three parables about finding the lost: the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10) and the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). These stories are a response to the complaints, and a vindication of Jesus' association with sinners.

In Luke's Gospel, we see that Jesus also broke barriers with tax-collectors, including Zacchaeus, a sinner in the eyes of his fellow Jews (Luke 19:9) and with Samaritans (Luke 10:25-37). In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan is portrayed as an example of someone open to salvation in contrast to the Jews. Jesus broke down barriers with women. Jesus chose twelve apostles from his disciples (Luke 6:12-16) and women also accompanied Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). The high standing of women in Luke's Gospel is evident from the beginning with two women playing enormously important roles in the history of salvation - Mary and Elizabeth, as well as Anna - roles which are described in such detail only by Luke 1-2. In addition, it is also evident that there is concern for widows in the Gospel; they are mentioned occasionally (Luke 2:37; 4:25-26; 7:12; 18:3; 20:47; 21:2). Mark 15:41 and Matthew 27:55 relate that women accompanied Jesus during his ministry but only Luke mentions that they provided for him out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3). Martha and Mary received Jesus into their house and Mary sat at Jesus' feet, the position of a disciple (Luke 10:38-42).

Suggested Reading

Chapter 10: the Good Samaritan; Chapter 15: the three lost items; and Chapter 24: The Walk to Emmaus.

Who wrote this book?

Since the second century, Luke has been seen as the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14) who accompanied Paul from Troas to Philippi, where he probably lived between 50-58 CE. Paul’s letter to Philemon (v. 24) also mentions Luke as being with him; 2 Timothy 4:11 and Colossians 4:14 describes Luke as a doctor. Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are ascribed to the authorship of this Luke. Many modern scholars would argue that, when writing the Gospel, the author certainly used Mark’s Gospel. The author is very conversant with the cities of the eastern Mediterranean and their constitutions.

Liturgical notes

The Gospel of Luke is well-loved for its interesting and attractive characters and for its challenging parables. In the medieval Mystery Plays of York, Lincoln and Chichester much of the story is woven around the Gospel of Luke. Luke’s parables were especially used in medieval times to decorate the interior of churches at times when many people could not read. Luke’s stories of Jesus’ birth and infancy provide the Gospel readings not only for Midnight Mass but also for the days around Christmas. Luke’s story of the Journey to Emmaus is also the Easter Monday Gospel. The Gospel of Luke is read at Sunday Masses of Year C. On weekdays, Luke 4-20 is read semi-continuously during Weeks 22-35.

How is it structured?

1:1-4	Prologue
1:5-2:40	the announcement and the births of John the Baptist and Jesus
2:41-4:13	events leading up to Jesus’ ministry
4:14-9:50	Jesus’ ministry in Galilee
9:51-19:27	Jesus’ journey towards Jerusalem
19:28-21:38	Jesus in Jerusalem
22:1-23:56	the Last Supper, Jesus’ arrest, trials and crucifixion
24:1-53	Jesus’ resurrection and ascension

How Luke is symbolised

Luke is symbolised by the ox, because his Gospel focuses on the sacrificial character of Christ’s death, and the ox has always been a sacrificial animal par excellence, both for Judaism and Roman paganism.

God speaks to us

Perhaps God is asking how you can bring about Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom in your parish and in our Church - a kingdom which is all inclusive, and one that offers hope.

John

The Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels; like the other Gospels, it narrates the life of Jesus but it does so in a very different way. John's Christ is the one who reveals the Father to us through his words, his signs, his miracles, his actions and his way of life.

A favourite quote

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

The Gospel of John

John's Jesus is very human; he has our body and our psychology. Tired, he quenches his thirst by a well, and asks for a drink from an unknown woman (John 4:5ff); he has a home where people can spend an evening with him (John 1:38; 3:2); he has a friend, Lazarus, and women friends, Martha and Mary (John 11-12); he knows distress and weeps for his friend Lazarus (John 11:33, 35); he goes to a wedding (John 2:1ff); he is capable of getting angry and overthrows the heavy tables of the merchants (John 2:15).

This Gospel is the most reflective and theological of all the Gospels. It has been called the spiritual Gospel. John, wishing to impress upon his community the importance of the Eucharist and of Baptism for the community, often lets Jesus explain these realities, notably in chapter 6. John's Gospel is very different from the other Gospels. The outline pattern is different: the synoptics show Jesus making a single, week-long visit to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry; but John shows him making four separate visits to Jerusalem. In the synoptics, Jesus' opponents are described as sadducees, pharisees and scribes; in John, sadducees and scribes are not mentioned and the opponents are described overwhelmingly as "the Jews".

Suggested Reading

Chapter 6, which records Jesus' miracles of feeding the five thousand and walking on water, the Bread of Life Discourse, popular rejection of his teaching and Peter's confession of faith, and anticipates his betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In addition, the seven "I am" sayings where Jesus uses the words "I am" about himself and how he is the answer to our human spiritual needs.

Who wrote this book?

The identity of this author is mysterious. Tradition associates the Gospel with John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, whose two sons feature strongly in the synoptic Gospels, but are mentioned only in John 21:2. The Gospel itself describes its author as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20-25), but does not go on to say who this disciple was. Christian tradition identifies him as John son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles. Other possible identities for the beloved disciple include Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, John, Mark, Jesus' brother James or an unknown disciple of Jesus. No one really knows who the beloved disciple was – the way in which John's Gospel was written suggests that this was deliberate.

It is worth noting that the Gospel seems to have evolved over time. The prologue (John 1:1-18) and epilogue (chapter 21), as well as various sections in the middle of the Gospel, suggest that the final Gospel emerged over time. Some have suggested that this means it wasn't written by one person but by a community of people inspired by the ideas of their leader (who was possibly John).

Liturgical notes

In the last weeks of Lent, Year A, the Sunday Gospels are drawn from John, a series of personal encounters with Jesus, in the contexts of water, light and life: the encounter with the Samaritan (John 3), the cure of the man born blind (John 9) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11), preparing for Easter by the great mysteries of Water, Light and Life. Each represents some aspect of the fullness of life in which catechumens are being invited to share by their baptism at Easter. The faithful, too, are invited to reassert in these ways their commitment to Jesus at the renewal of baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil.

How is it structured?

I	the Prologue	1:1-18
II	the Ministry of Jesus	
	A the call of the first disciples:	1:19-4:54
	B the Second Festival at Jerusalem	5
	C the Passover of the Bread of Life	6
	D the Festival of Tabernacles	7:1-10:21
	E the Festival of Dedication	10:22-42
	F Jesus moves towards his death	11-12
III	the hour of Jesus: his Passion, Death and Resurrection	
	A Jesus' last meal with his disciples	13-17
	B the Passion	18-19
	C The Day of Resurrection	20
IV	the Epilogue: Appearance on the Shore of Tiberias	21

How John is symbolised

John is symbolised by the eagle for two reasons: first, because his Gospel describes the Incarnation of the divine Logos, and the eagle is a symbol of that which comes from above. The second, because like the eagle, John, in his Revelation, saw beyond what is immediately present.

God speaks to us

Through the Gospel of John, God is saying "these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).