

The Nativity of the Lord Christmas Mass During the Day Jerome Biblical Commentary with Texts

Reading 1

[Is 52:7-10](#)

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings glad tidings,
announcing peace, bearing good news,
announcing salvation, and saying to Zion,
“Your God is King!”

Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry,
together they shout for joy,
for they see directly, before their eyes,
the LORD restoring Zion.
Break out together in song,
O ruins of Jerusalem!
For the LORD comforts his people,
he redeems Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations;
all the ends of the earth will behold

the salvation of our God.

7. *peace...salvation...your God is King!*: The messenger shouts this as he runs on the mountain ridges (40:9-10; Rom 10-15).**8.** This shout is now repeated by the watchmen who guard the ruined walls of Jerusalem. As the Word of God is absorbed into people and land, they see “directly before their eyes, the Lord restoring Zion” (62:6-7).**9-10.** This thanksgiving hymn will resound in other OT texts (Zeph 3:13-18; Jl 2:21) and echo in the NT (Lk 1:26-33; cf. R. Laurentin, *Luc I-II* [Paris, 1957] 64ff.)¹

OT Old Testament

NT New Testament

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6](#)

(3c) **All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.**

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
his right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and melodious song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Ps 98. A hymn of praise, commemorating Yahweh as king; it shows great similarity to Ps 96 and to Dt-Is. Structure: 1-3, invitation to praise Yahweh on account of salvation; 4-9, invitation to the world and nature to praise the king who is coming to rule. **1.** *new song*: Cf. 96:1; the emphasis here is on the saving “victory” Yahweh has wrought by his “arm” (Is 51:9; 52:10; 59:16). **2.** The parallelism between “salvation” and “justice” is typical of Dt-Is (cf. 45:8, 21). **3.** The victory has been achieved because Yahweh “remembered” his covenant with his people (cf. Ps 106:44-46). *all the ends of the earth*: Again, universality is characteristic of this celebration of Yahweh’s kingship. When Deutero-Isaiah says almost the same thing in Is 40:5, he is referring to the end of the Exile, which is a pledge of the messianic era. **4-9.** An extended hymnic invitation to lands and to nature to sing, rejoice, and offer praise “before the King” because he “comes” (cf. comment on 96:13).

Reading II

[Heb 1:1-6](#)

Brothers and sisters:

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways
to our ancestors through the prophets;
in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son,

whom he made heir of all things
and through whom he created the universe,
who is the refulgence of his glory,
the very imprint of his being,
and who sustains all things by his mighty word.
When he had accomplished purification from sins,
he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
as far superior to the angels
as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say:
You are my son; this day I have begotten you?
Or again:
I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me?
And again, when he leads the firstborn into the world, he says:

Let all the angels of God worship him.

(1:1-4). 1. incompletely and in varied ways: Some commentators see no difference between these two manners of designating God's speaking in times past; they regard the expression as an example of hendiadys. However, it is more likely that each refers respectively to the fragmentary nature of OT revelation and to the varied ways in which it was given. *the fathers:* The ancestors of Israel. This does not necessarily mean that the epistle was addressed to people of Jewish origin, for the same language is used in 1 Cor 10:1 to Gentile Christians. By their conversion to Christ, the descendant of Abraham, the Gentiles have been brought into the commonwealth of spiritual Israel (Gal 3:29). *the prophets:* Not only those whose preaching is preserved in the OT books bearing their names, but all in Israel's history through whom God spoke, e.g., Abraham (Gn 20:7), Moses (Dt 18:18), Nathan (2 Sm 7:2), and Elijah (1 Kgs 18:22). **2. in these, the last days:** Lit., "at the end of these days"; the Gk phrase translates in the LXX the Hebr **b' a 'rît hayy mîm**, "in the end of days." Here, "these" is added to the LXX formula, which does not always mean the "end time," the final age; but that is its usual meaning (cf. Is 2:2; Jer 23:20; Ez 38:16; Dn 10:14). The author of Heb, together with primitive Christianity in general, regarded the final age as inaugurated by the Christ-event, pre-eminently by Jesus' redemptive sacrifice (cf. 9:26), and he speaks of the Christians as those who have experienced "the powers of the age to come" (6:5). *through his Son:* Lit., "through a son," i.e., one who is Son; God's speaking to men, whether in the past or in the "last days," is not contrasted with his deeds, as if he had merely

OT Old Testament

Gk Greek

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

Hebr Hebrew

announced truths unconnected with history. Predominantly, the OT revelation was a prophetic interpretation of certain events of Israel's history as acts of God. God's speaking through his Son is primarily the revelation of his saving purpose in respect to mankind through the coming of Jesus and the "eternal redemption" (9:12) achieved through his death and exaltation. "Christ is God's last word to the world; revelation in him is complete, final and homogeneous" (J. Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2). *heir of all things...through whom he created the worlds*: The Son's role as redeemer and mediator of creation. Although it comes at the end of the ages, the former is mentioned first. His being made heir was not an event outside time, previous to the incarnation; it took place when he entered glory after his passion (cf. Rom 8:17). The connection of "heir" with the "inherited" of v. 4 shows that the Son's being made heir means his inheriting the "more excellent name" that he received after his humiliation (cf. Phil 2:6-11). Yet it could not be more clearly stated that he existed before he appeared as man: Through him God "created the worlds" (*tous ai nas*). The Gk word *ai ncan* mean either "world" or "age," but its use in 11:3 in connection with the creation of the universe suggests the former meaning here. Unless the plural should be regarded as lacking significance (Bl-Deb-F § 141, 1), there appears here the conception of a number of worlds, visible and invisible, the latter being the many heavens (cf. *T. Levi* 3:1-9; 2 Cor 12:2; Heb 4:14; J. Bonsirven, *Le judaïsme palestinien* [Paris, 1935] 1, 158).

3. Some scholars think that vv. 3-4 contain a liturgical hymn that the author has incorporated (cf. U. Luck, *Charis kai sophia*, [Fest. K. H. Rengstorf; Leiden, 1964] 200), or at least the elements of such a hymn (cf. J. Jervell, *Imago Dei* [FRLANT 58; Göttingen, 1960] 198, n.99). The description of the Son in v. 2 as the mediator of creation assimilates him to the personified Wisdom of the OT (Prv 8:30; Wis 7:22), and this verse continues in that vein. He is the "refulgence" (*apaugasma*) of the Father's "glory" (cf. Wis 7:26). *Apaugasma* can be understood either actively (radiance) or passively (reflection, refulgence); in view of the dependence on Wis 7:26 and of the following phrase, the passive meaning is more likely intended here. *the very imprint [charakt r] of his substance*: This recalls the designation of Wisdom as the "image" (*eik n*) of God's goodness (Wis 7:26). *Charakt r* probably means the same as *eik n*, which is applied to Christ in Col 1:15 (cf. R. Bultmann, *TNT* 1, 132; E. Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk* [FRLANT 55; Göttingen, 1959] 61f.). *supports all things*: He guides and sustains all that has been created through him (cf. Col 1:17), just as Wisdom "reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well" (Wis 8:1). *having made purification from sins*: Attention is

Gk Greek

Bl-Deb-F F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, tr. R. W. Funk (Chicago, 1961)

T. *Levi Testament of Levi*

Fest. Festschrift (generic name for *any* publication honoring a person)

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen)

OT Old Testament

now turned from the cosmological role of the pre-existent Son to the redemptive work of the humiliated and glorified Jesus. A similar juxtaposition is found in Col 1:15-20; in the OT, Wisdom's role is both cosmological and soteriological (Prv 8:22-36, Wis 9:9-18). *the Majesty*: A reverent periphrasis for God, like "the power" of Mk 14:62 (for this Jewish usage, cf. J. Bonsirven, *Judaïsme*, 128-49). Jesus' enthronement "at the right hand" of God is seen as the fulfillment of Ps 110:1 (cf. 1:13). This text is frequently used in the NT to describe the glorification of Jesus (Acts 2:34-36; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; 1 Pt 3:22); its use is probably based on Jesus' reply to the high priest (Mk 14:62; cf. W. Grundmann, "Dexios," *ThDNT* 2, 39f.). This glorification is connected immediately with the resurrection, and no significance should be seen in the fact that Heb does not explicitly refer to the resurrection except in 13:20, for it is always presupposed when Jesus' exaltation is mentioned (cf. O. Kuss, *Auslegung und Verkündigung* [Regensburg, 1963] 1, 320). It may be questioned, however, whether the connection of resurrection and enthronement belongs to the most primitive stage of the tradition (cf. F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel* [FRLANT 83; Göttingen, 1963] 126-32, for the view that the original reference was to the parousia).

9 **4. made superior to the angels:** By his exaltation Jesus "inherited a more excellent name than they." In Semitic thought, the name designated what a person was, and reception of a new name indicated some change in the person who received it. In Phil 2:6-11 the name that indicates the new status of the Exalted Jesus is "Lord" (cf. O. Cullmann, *Christology of the NT* [Phila., 1959] 204; for a differing view, cf. L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* [N.Y., 1959] 477-79). Here it is "Son." The application of this name to Jesus before his exaltation (5:7) may be explained as prolepsis, but it is not purely proleptic. The author shares the view found in Rom 1:3f. that so far as his human nature is concerned, Jesus became Son of God in the fullest sense at his resurrection; until then, he existed in that condition Paul calls "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3; cf. Heb 5:7; 10:20). But the sonship he received when he was glorified (cf. J. Dupont, *RSR* 35 [1948] 522-43) is based ultimately on the relation that he had with the Father before the incarnation; as the pre-existent One, the title "Son" belonged to him always (Rom 8:3, "God sent his Son..."; Gal 4:4), thus the name properly (though imperfectly) belonged to the incarnate Jesus even before his exaltation. The reason for introducing Jesus' superiority to the angels is connected with the purpose of Heb: The addressees are in danger of falling away from the word of God spoken through his Son. The consequences of that would be fearful, much worse than the punishment received by those Hebrews who disobeyed the word spoken through angels (2:2), the Mosaic Law, because the Son through whom the final word of God was spoken is superior to the angel mediators of the Law. (For angels as mediators of the Law, see Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19;

NT New Testament

ThDNT G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1964-). English version of *ThWNT*

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen)

NT New Testament

RSR *Recherches de science religieuse*

Josephus, *Ant.* 15.5, 3 §136). However, the primary contrast that Heb draws between the old and the new covenant is that the latter has a new, superior priesthood, whose sanctuary is not on earth but in heaven (8:1-2). The priesthood of the old covenant, with which that of the new one is contrasted, is the Levitical priesthood; but the author may have also taken into account the late-Jewish conception that the ministering priest of the heavenly sanctuary was the angel Michael (cf. **b agigah** 12b). In emphasizing Jesus' superiority to the angels, he possibly has in mind the major concern of Heb, the heavenly priesthood of Jesus, and wishes to say that Jesus, and not an angel, is the priest who functions in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* [Tübingen, 1951] 129, n. 1). Finally, these introductory verses of Heb have remarkable similarities with the writings of Philo, in which the Logos is the image (eik n) of God (*De spec. leg.* 1.81) and the instrument through whom the universe was created (*Cherubim* 127; *De sacrif. Abel et Cain* 8). The Gk word **charakt r**, which occurs in the NT only in Heb 1:3, is frequent in Philo, used often of the human soul but also of the Logos (*De plant.* 18).

(II) The Son Higher Than the Angels (1:5-2:18).

(A) The Messianic Enthronement (1:5-14). **5.** Jesus' superiority to the angels is now shown by a catena of seven OT texts. The first, Ps 2:7, belongs to one of the royal Pss celebrating, most probably, the enthronement of the king of Judah. According to 2 Sm 7:14 (the second text in the catena), the relationship between God and the Davidic ruler was that of father to son; consequently, the day of the king's accession to power was the day on which he was "begotten" as the son of God. The messianic interpretation of these texts, a natural result of the belief that the messiah would be of the Davidic line, is found outside the NT in the QL (cf. J. Allegro, *JBL* 57 [1958] 350-54). From Heb 1:3 it is clear that the author understood the "today" of Ps 2:7 as the day of the exaltation of the Risen Christ (cf. Acts 13:33). **6.** The third quotation, a combination of Dt 32:43 (LXX) and Ps 97:7, is introduced by "he says" (for justification of the translation "he" rather than "it" [the book] and its significance, cf. M. Barth, *CINTI* 59). It is not

Ant. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

Gk Greek

NT New Testament

OT Old Testament

NT New Testament

QL Qumran Literature (See *Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts*)

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

CINTI W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder, eds., *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (Fest. O. Piper; N.Y., 1962)

certain to what event v. 6a refers. Some scholars think that it is the parousia (cf. J. Héring, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 30; H. Strathmann, *Brief an die Hebräer*, 78); if “again” is taken as modifying the verb (“when he again leads his firstborn into the world”), that interpretation receives strong though not conclusive support. However, “again” may be simply an introduction to the new scriptural quotation (as in 1:5; cf. 2:13; 10:30); the fact that it occurs within the temporal clause does not rule out that possibility (cf. Wis 14:1). In that case, the reference is probably to the exaltation of Jesus; the world into which he is led is the “world to come” that is made subject to him, and not to the angels (2:5). Since the incarnate Son was “for a little while made lower than the angels” (2:9), it is not likely that the birth of Jesus (cf. H. Montefiore, *A Commentary*, 45) is meant.

Gospel

[Jn 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14](#)

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.
A man named John was sent from God.
He came for testimony, to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.
He was not the light,
but came to testify to the light.
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to those who believe in his name,
who were born not by natural generation
nor by human choice nor by a man's decision
but of God.
And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,

full of grace and truth.
John testified to him and cried out, saying,
“This was he of whom I said,
‘The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me
because he existed before me.’”
From his fullness we have all received,

grace in place of grace,
because while the law was given through Moses,
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God.
The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side,
has revealed him.

or

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to those who believe in his name,
who were born not by natural generation
nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision
but of God.
And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father’s only Son,

full of grace and truth.

(I) The Prologue or Overture: Assertion of the Major Johannine Themes (1:1-18). This poetic section asserts the major theological themes developed throughout Jn. Faithful to Semitic tradition, Jn begins with a “genealogy”; but it is a history of divine, not human origins. Though corresponding closely to the Johannine vocabulary, the key term *logos*, “Word,” occurs only here in a Christological sense in Jn (though, also in Ap 19:13 and possibly in 1 Jn 1:1). This is one reason why many scholars believe that the prologue was an already existing Christological hymn, probably of liturgical origin, which John adapted to his purposes as the overture to his Gospel (see D. M. Stanley, *CBQ* 20 [1958] 188f.). In this acceptance, at least the prose vv. 6-8, 15 are regarded as Johannine additions to relate the hymn to the first business of the Gospel in the witness of the Baptist (cf. M. F. Lacan, *LumVi* 33 [1957] 91-110); however, usually other verses (12, 13, 17, 18) are suggested as further adaptations (so S. de Aulsejo, *EstBib* 15 [1956] 381-427; R. Schnackenburg, *BZ* 1 [1957] 69-109). Antecedently, this theory is not unlikely; however, by similar paring away of verses, others (C. F. Burney, J. R. Harris, R. Reitzenstein, H. H. Schaefer *et al.*) have been able to see the “original” of the prologue as a Jewish or Gnostic hymn to personified wisdom, to the archetypal man, to John the Baptist, etc. The dividing line is thin between poetic structure and the rhythmic prose accompanied by parallelism and inclusion found elsewhere in Jn. Whatever the provenance, the Evangelist has made the prologue an integral part of his Gospel, and it must be interpreted in this light.

40 **1. *in the beginning*:** This allusion to Gn 1:1 is not merely typological of the new creation of Christ (1:19-2:11); as Jn goes on to show, Jesus is truly the creative Word of God who already existed at the beginning of time. *was*: The impf. tense denoting continuous, timeless existence contrasts with the aorist used in vv. 3, 6, and 14 (creation, the mission of the Baptist, the incarnation) for events that have taken place at determined points of time. *the Word*: We may confidently find the origin of this and other Johannine concepts in Jewish tradition (→ 16 above), acknowledging at the same time that John was not unaware of their relevance to Hellenistic thought (on the Word of God in the OT, see J. L. McKenzie, *TS* 21 [1960] 183-206). In Hellenistic thinking *logos* meant divine utterance, emanation, mediation. In the OT the word of God is God’s manifestation, the revelation of himself, whether in creation, in deeds of power and of grace, or in prophecy. All these strains of thought are taken up by Jn, who shows that

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

LumVi Lumière et vie

EstBib Estudios biblicos

BZ Biblische Zeitschrift

OT Old Testament

TS Theological Studies

Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the ultimate and complete revelation of God (cf. Heb 1:1-4; Col 1:15-20). Two strands of Jewish speculation have especially assisted in the development of this concept. One is the late OT personification of the wisdom of God (with 1a cf. Prv 3:19; 8:22; Sir 1:4; 24:9; with 1b, Prv 8:27, 30; Sir 1:1; Wis 9:4, 9; with 2, Prv 8:27; with 3, Prv 3:19; 8:30; Wis 9:1-2, 9; with 4a, Prv 3:18; 8:35; Bar 4:1; with 4b, Wis 6:12; 7:10, 26; Sir 24:30; Bar 4:2; with 5, Wis 7:24-30; with 10a, Wis 8:1; Sir 24:3-6 [a paraphrase of the Gn creation story]; with 10c, Bar 3:31; with 11, Bar 3:12; 4 *Ezra* 5:10; with 12, Wis 6:12; 7:27; Bar 3:37; with 14b, Sir 24:8; Bar 3:38; with 14c, Wis 9:11; with 14d, Wis 7:25). The other strand is the glorification of the Torah (the Law) in rabbinical Judaism: The identification of Torah with the divine wisdom is already found in Sir 24:22-27 (in which Gn 2 is paraphrased) and in Bar 3:38-4:4. On the rabbinical conception of the pre-existence of the Torah, see Str-B 2, 353f. Jn's synthesis of this Jewish thought with Christian revelation is partly polemical: Christ is the true Word of God existing from eternity, through whom, and not through the Law, comes grace and truth (v. 17; → Johannine Theology, 80:21-24). *the Word was in God's presence*: A distinction in godhead is asserted: The Word existed along with God (determined with the article, as in 2 Cor 13:13 = the Father). Judaism, of course, could say this of Wisdom or Torah, but it would have been a strange assertion in pantheistic Hermeticism, according to which *logos* was simply divine emanation. *the Word was God*: Such a statement could not have been made in Judaism, which could go only so far as to say that Wisdom is God's effulgence (Wis 7:25), the Law his daughter (Str-B 2, 355f.). Here "God" without the article is predicative: The Word is divine, but he is not all of divinity, for he has already been distinguished from another divine Person (cf. 7:28f.; 8:42; 16:28).² For the fourth time Jn insists that the Word *was* with God at the beginning. Unlike created things, of which he is about to speak, there never was a time when the Word was not.

41 **3.** *through him all things came into being*: Jn does not call Christ the Creator, a title reserved in the NT to the Father (cf. Col 1:15ff.). The Word is the instrumental or mediative cause of creation; this does not imply subordination but a logical order. The creative Word of God, eminently a biblical conception (Gn 1:3; Is 48:13; Sir 42:15), identified by the rabbis with Torah (Str-B 2, 356f.), was also common in Hellenistic speculation; the rabbinic *mēm̄r* ' (word) considered as "Creator" (Str-B 2, 304ff.) is only an apparent parallel, since *mēm̄r* ' was merely a verbal surrogate for the holy name of Yahweh. *apart from him nothing came to be*: This expresses the same truth negatively; against it is emphasized that creation in distinction to the Word, came into being, and that the Word is the cause of this existence. An interesting verbal parallel occurs in 1QS 11:11: "Through his [God's] knowledge all things have come to be, and

Str-B H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (6 vols.; Munich, 1922-61)

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NT New Testament

Str-B H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (6 vols.; Munich, 1922-61)

1QS Serek ha-Ya'ad (Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline) (→ 68:71)

everything that is, is ordained by his thought; and without him nothing is made” (cf. also 1QH 1:20).⁴ The final words of v. 3 should be read as the beginning of this verse: “What came to be in him was life.” This is the punctuation of the text that was known to the Fathers of the first four centuries (cf. I. de la Potterie, *VD* 33 [1955] 193-208), and it was abandoned only after it had led to heretical interpretations. Probably this was the punctuation intended by the scribe of P⁶⁶ (cf. E. Massaux, *SP* 1,203 f.). It was also the original punctuation of the Vg, as evidenced by its appearance in the Douay-Rheims NT of 1582. The meaning is generally taken to be: All created existence has always had its origin in the life of the Word (the reading “is life” is also well attested [S and D among the major codices]). Jn’s emphasis is now on the nature of life and its origin. Life is not mere existence—even inanimate things exist; life for Jn signifies some kind of sharing in the being of God. This statement prepares for vv. 14ff., which bring out that the supernatural life of man is a sharing in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. Further, since life always has this fullness of meaning in Jn, we should understand that this is “what came to be” in the Word: The life that men receive from the Word, they receive as God’s gift through the One who has manifested him (cf. 3:35f.; 5:26f.; 6:57; cf. M. F. Lacan, *RScRel* 45 [1957] 61-78; B. Vawter, *CBQ* 25 [1963] 401-6). Jn agrees with Col 1:15-20 in seeing in the work of creation the model and exemplar of the second creation of salvation. *this life was the light of men*: The life of which Jn speaks, as truly a sharing in the life of God, must be a life of ultimate understanding, the revelation of God. The rabbis spoke similarly of the Torah as light (cf. Str-B 2, 357). John will later apply to Jesus the Word other designations that they used of Torah, such as water (4:10) and bread (6:35).

42 **5.** *the light shines in the darkness*: Darkness is the antithesis of light, and by it John habitually means that which is set in opposition to God, the rejection of God, which is natural to a world bound over to sin (cf. 3:19). The second part of the verse can be translated “the darkness did not grasp it” (cf. 7:33f.; 8:21), but probably better “the darkness did not overcome it”: Man is in darkness, but he is not darkness itself. Throughout history God’s revealed word has been present for the enlightenment of man—he did not need to succumb to the darkness, though he invariably did (→ Johannine Theology, 80:12-14).

1QH Hôd yôt (Hymns of Thanksgiving) (→ 68:74)

VD Verbum domini

SP J. Coppens *et al.*, eds., *Sacra pagina* (2 vols.; Gembloux, 1959)

f. and the following verse

Vg Vulgate (common Latin version of the Bible)

RScRel Revue des sciences religieuses

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

Str-B H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (6 vols.; Munich, 1922-61)

43 **6.** *there appeared a man:* John the Baptist is introduced with the same distinction of verbs that has contrasted the eternity of the Word with the temporality of creation. That this man was sent by God, like the prophets of old and Jesus himself, is what gives relevance to his mention here. (H. Sahlin, *ZNW* 51 [1960] 64-69, would translate “he [the Word] became man,” and refer v. 7 to the Word; v. 8 and the other references to the Baptist would be later additions, influenced by Mk r:4. The chief internal argument against this reconstruction is that it would effectively destroy the climax achieved in v. 14.) **7.** *came as a witness to the light:* Witness is one of Jn’s fundamental ideas—not only the Baptist (1:19, etc.), but the Samaritan woman (4:39), the works of Jesus (5:36, etc.), the OT (5:39), the crowd (12:17), the Holy Spirit and the disciples (15:26f.), the Father (5:37), the Evangelist (21:24), all bear witness to Jesus the Word (cf. I. de la Potterie, *SP* 2, 193-208). Though the incarnation is not mentioned explicitly until v. 14, the fact that the Baptist, who is a witness to the Incarnate Word, is introduced at this point shows that John has been thinking throughout of the Word both in his eternal existence; and in his incarnate state. *that through him all men might believe:* Faith and its converse of unbelief because of the influence of the darkness are the theme of the first half of the Gospel. **8.** John carefully points out, as he does elsewhere (v. 20ff.; 3:28ff.), that the Baptist is a witness to the light, not the light itself. This polemical attitude is motivated not by the Baptist himself, but by the fact that his position had been misinterpreted by some who had not understood that he was the forerunner and not the inaugurator of God’s kingdom (cf. Acts 19:1-7; see T. F. Glasson, *ExpT* 67 [1956] 245-46). **44** **9.** *he was the true light:* In Hebraic usage, “true” pre-eminently characterizes the divine order (cf. 7:28; 17:3), thus distinguished from the deception and illusion of the order of sinful man (cf. Rom 3:4); in the Hermetic sense, the “true” pertains to the archetypal world of reality, compared with which any other is only a pale reflection. The Baptist was a light (5:39), but he was not the light in the fullness of the meaning of light: Only the Word gives this light to all men. *coming into the world:* This phrase may modify “every man,” or it may refer back to “the light.” The latter seems to be the more probable construction. **10.** “The world” “this world” in Jn invariably means the world of men and their affairs, which concretely is a world subject to sin and darkness (→ Johannine Theology, 80:14). The Word, John says, was in the world. He is not speaking merely of the incarnation of the Word. *the world did not know him:* These words are not to be restricted to the rejection of Christ by his own people. We may think, first of all, of the failure of the world to acknowledge the truth that God—through his creative word—had made known in creation (Rom 1:18-23). “Know” in Jn does not mean simply to perceive, to be aware of, but has the full Semitic sense attached to knowledge in which personal involvement is always supposed. Also, in a particular way the history of Israel was characterized by its failure to know the prophetic word of God (cf. Acts 7:51-53), and this attitude was to be repeated in their rejection of the Word become man (cf. Mt 23:29ff.; Lk 13:33). **11.** The statement of the preceding verse is repeated in other terms, now evidently specified to the people of Israel. As applied to the life of Christ, a parallel can be found in Mk 6:1-6. **12.** At the same time, rejection

ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

OT Old Testament

SP J. Coppens *et al.*, eds., *Sacra pagina* (2 vols.; Gembloux, 1959)

ExpT Expository Times

of the Word was never complete. Both in the OT phase of the history of salvation as in the fulfillment in Christ, faith in the Word has been the principle of immortality (cf. Rom 4:1-17), whereby through the acceptance of God's grace men might become the children of God (cf. Dt 14:1; Ex 4:22; Hos 1:10). How men become God's children through faith (→ Johannine Theology, 80:35-38) in the Incarnate Word, is the theme of the second half of Jn's Gospel. *in his name*: So also with "believe" in 2:23; 3:18, and frequently elsewhere throughout the Gospel. In Semitic usage, "name" is equivalent to the person. Faith is not simply the acceptance of a proposition, but a commitment to a person. See Thomas Aq. *Summa* 2-2.1, 2 ad 2: "*Actus credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem.*" The Jewish practice of calling Yahweh "the Name" appears to have been imitated in primitive Christian references to Christ (cf. Mk 9:41).¹³ This birth as children of God, Jn insists emphatically, has nothing to do with human generation, but is a special gift of God (cf. 3:3ff.). "Flesh and blood" is an OT and later Jewish expression for mankind and human potentialities. Implicitly, we are told here that this new birth is that of the Spirit, as in 3:6. Various patristic quotations and some Lat mss. have a sing. verb in this verse, referring this spiritual birth to the Word rather than to those who believe in his name; this reading was probably motivated by the desire to find an allusion to the Virgin Birth, otherwise not mentioned by Jn; it has no support in the Gk mss.

45 14. *the Word became flesh*: Once more there is a contrast with the "was" of v. 1, for John now reaches the climax of his hymn in relating what was the ultimate manifestation of God's Word. And what a paradoxical climax it is! The utter newness of this revelation in respect to Judaism, despite the OT language in which it is phrased, can only be appreciated by comparing the assertion with such a passage as Is 40:6-8, where the Word of **God** is contrasted with flesh. "Flesh," it is true, is not evil, the antithesis of God; but it is all that is transitory, mortal, and imperfect, and at first glance incompatible with God (cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body* [SBT 5; London, 1952] 17-26). This is the tremendous mystery of the incarnation, by which the eternal Word took on our exact human nature, becoming one with us in everything except sin (Heb 4:15); in everything, that is, except what was impossible with divinity. This is one of the most serious and sobering statements in the Gospel, the magnitude of which it would be difficult to exaggerate. To express this mystery, John has deliberately chosen a word connoting man in his concrete, fallen state. That the Word became man in the fullest possible sense is of the very essence of the incarnation and of the redemption, that is its result. In doing this, John was

OT Old Testament

Summa Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*

Lat Latin

mss. Manuscripts

Gk Greek

OT Old Testament

SBT Studies in Biblical Theology (London and Naperville, Ill.)

striking at the incipient Docetism and Monophysitism that even then were appearing in the Christian world. *and made his dwelling among us*: Lit., “he pitched his tent among us.” The Word dwelt for a time in the midst of man as God once dwelt with the Israelites in the Tent of Meeting (Ex 25:8; Nm 35:34). The vb. **sk** noun has probably been deliberately chosen to reproduce both the idea and even the sound of the vb. **š kan** used in the OT with reference to Yahweh’s presence in the Holy of Holies above the Ark of the Covenant; the rabbis used the noun **š^ekîn h**, “presence,” as a surrogate for the name of Yahweh as the God present in Israel (Str-B 2, 314f.). “Glory” was another OT term (**k bôd**) for the presence of God visibly manifested, especially in connection with the Tent of Meeting (cf. Ex 40:34f.) and the Temple (1 Kgs 8:11). *we have seen his glory*: Though the Word concealed his glory in becoming flesh, the Gospel is witness to its having been perceived by men. To what does Jn have reference? Some have thought of the transfiguration, at which the beloved disciple was present (Lk 9:31 speaks of Jesus appearing on this occasion “in glory,” and in the following verse, “they beheld his glory”; expressions that do not appear in the Mk-Mt par.). While this meaning is by no means to be excluded, it would be a mistake to limit Jn’s meaning to this instance. It would also be to underestimate the full significance of “glory,” which in both the OT (Is 60:1; Hab 2:14; etc.) and in the NT (Mk 8:38; Rom 8:18; etc.) means pre-eminently the divine presence in salvation (see comment on 2:11; → Johannine Theology, 80:30-32). Thus Jn’s testimony is to the entire ‘I;f, salvific life of the Incarnate Word (cf. 1 Jn 1:1). *glory of an only Son*: Now that John has definitively reached the climax of his introduction in speaking of the Word become flesh, he never again calls him the Word: The Gospel is testimony not to the eternal Word but to the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, the Son of God (cf. G. Kittel in *ThDNT* 4, 132). The glory to which Jn testifies is now specified: it is the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. The Son’s relation to the Father, his coming from the Father, and his return as the condition of giving the Spirit of sanctification, that is to say, his character as Savior, is the theme of the second part of the Gospel and especially of Jesus’ discourse in 13:31ff. Hence in Johannine language the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are especially his “glorification.” “Rich in kindness and fidelity” further specifies the glory possessed by the only-begotten who has come from the Father. These terms are the characteristic of the God of Israel’s covenant. In Ex 24:6 they appear together as a virtual definition of God. “Kindness” (Hebr **esed**, Gk **charis**) was the word used in the OT to signify

Str-B H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (6 vols.; Munich, 1922-61)

par. Parallel pasage(s) in the Synoptic Gospels

OT Old Testament

NT New Testament

ThDNT G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1964-). English version of *ThWNT*

Hebr Hebrew

Gk Greek

the loving kindness exercised by God toward Israel in election and covenant; “fidelity” (Hebr ^εmet, Gk *al theia*) denoted God’s faithfulness and reliability in his covenant commitment. Jn uses *charis* only in the prologue, but *al theia* occurs about 25 times as one of the technical terms of the Gospel. In the great majority of cases it must be translated in its more proper Gk sense as “truth,” for it represents, as indeed it did in the OT, divine revelation (8:32), and therefore is identified with Jesus himself (14:6).

46 **15.** Jn introduces the witness (see comment on v. 7) of the Baptist as recorded in 1:30. This verse interrupts the flow of the poetry, but has its place in the development of the prologue. The sense of the verbs used by the author is of a present proclamation, contrasted with the past tense in vv. 6-8; now that John has spoken explicitly of the incarnation of the Word, he presents the Baptist as the first of a series of witnesses who testify on behalf of the Christ-event.**16.** “The riches” that we—the Church—have shared are those in which the Son is rich according to v. 14. The mission of the Word into the world was precisely to enable men to become God’s children (v. 12), to share in the divine life. (See Thomas Aq., *Summa* 3.8, 5: “The personal grace whereby the soul of Christ is justified is essentially the same as his grace by which he is head of the Church and justifies others.” *Summa* 3.8, 6: “The interior flow of grace is from none other than Christ, whose manhood, through its union with the godhead, has the power of justifying.”) *fidelity after fidelity*: Or “grace [the underlying meaning of *charis*] upon grace”; what was promised in the covenant with Israel has come superabundantly in the revelation of the Son of God.**17.** The thought is that of Heb 1:1-4, and constitutes a final break of John’s thought with that of Judaism. The revelation of the Old Dispensation was but a foreshadowing of what was to be fully revealed in Christ. The Midrash on Ps 25:10, one of the many passages of the OT in which *esed* and ^εmet are joined, interpreted the former (= *charis*) as the deeds of God’s love, the latter (= *al theia*) as Torah (cf. Str-B 2, 361); Jn, however, says that, although Torah was God’s gift through Moses, the fullness of his revelation has come only through Christ. This theme of the figures represented by Moses and the Law fulfilled in the realities coming from Christ will appear frequently in the Gospel, especially in 6:31-33.

18. Doubtless the same idea has inspired this verse. Though the OT sometimes represents God anthropomorphically, looked upon by creatures, the Jewish belief was firm: God was an invisible God and could not be seen by man (cf. Str-B 1, 206ff.) John is probably thinking of Ex 33:20-23,

Summa Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*

Or *Orientalia*

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according to which Moses was not permitted to see the glory of God (cf. v. 14), since no one may see God and live, but was allowed to see his back. But in the Incarnate Word God has been revealed completely (cf. Col 1:15); only the Son sees the Father (6:46), and it is through him that we, too, see God (14:9) with the eyes of faith. *God, the only So*: This is the reading of some of the best Gk mss. (including P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵); others have “the only-begotten Son.” The sense is the same in either case, for Jn has already identified the Word with the Son, and the Son with God (cf. R. E. Brown, *TS* 26 [1965] 553-54). *who is in the Father’s bosom*: This expression denotes complete intimacy, a community of life; correspondingly in 13:23 Jn notes not without significance that the beloved disciple was lying close to the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper.

(See also Boismard, M.-E., *St. John’s Prologue* [tr. by Carisbrooke Dominicans; Westminster, Md., 1957]. Debrunner, A. *et al.*, “*Logos, logos*,” *ThDNT* 4, 69-136. Gibley, J. “Jésus et ‘le Père’ dans le IV^e Évangile,” *L’Évangile de Jean* [RechBib 3; Louvain, 1958] 111-30.)

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Gk Greek

mss. Manuscripts

TS *Theological Studies*

ThDNT G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1964-). English version of *ThWNT*

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