

During Lent we're going to look at the passion of Christ mainly from the perspective of John's gospel. Christ's mission was always to sacrifice himself on the cross for our sins. This was God's salvation plan for us from the beginning of time. In his death on the cross Christ fulfilled God's promises to Abraham:

“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.” (Ge 18:18 NIV)

Christ was, of course a descendant of Abraham and he brought in the New Covenant which had been promised through Jeremiah:

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Jer 31:31-33 NIV)

Christ's mission had been foretold hundreds of years before his incarnation by the prophet Isaiah:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isa 53:3-5 NIV)

The whole of Isaiah chapter 53 is actually a wonderful prophecy about Christ's mission.

Even Christ's resurrection was foretold:

“because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” (Ps 16:10 NIV)

The circumstances of Christ's birth have wonderful symbolism about his mission. He was born in Bethlehem [expand]. John the Baptist knew what Christ's mission was when he referred to him as God's sacrificial lamb:

“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Joh 1:29 NIV)

Now, having looked at a bit of background, I said we were going to look at the passion from the viewpoint of John's gospel. As you know there are four gospels the three synoptic gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke and the fourth gospel of John. John's gospel was almost certainly written by John the disciple of Jesus who was Jesus' favourite disciple and was with him throughout his ministry - so he's an excellent eyewitness to the events of which he writes. It was probably the last gospel to be written around 85-90 AD according to church tradition although some scholars place it earlier before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. This gospel comes at events from a slightly different point of view to the synoptic gospels but that doesn't make it any less an eyewitness account, it just means that John wanted to give a different perspective and not just repeat the synoptic gospels. There is absolutely no conflict between the various gospel accounts when you study them carefully.

I like the comparison of John's Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It's simple enough that any believer can profit from reading it, it's appeal is

immediate and never failing, yet it's also full of rich subtle language and ideas. Some of the most widely known and best loved verses come from this gospel. No matter how many times you read it you will always be able to find something new.

John was one of the sons of Zebedee and Salome (Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40), probably the youngest son of Zebedee and was born at Bethsaida. He was brother to the apostle James (often called the "Greater") – see (Matthew 4:21; 10:2). Zebedee was evidently a man of some wealth as the family apparently had a number of fishing boats and a house in Jerusalem (John 19:27), so John was probably reasonably well educated. When he grew up he worked as a fisherman on the lake of Galilee.

When John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, John, along with many others, gathered around him and was deeply influenced by his teaching. Then he heard John the Baptist announce "Behold the Lamb of God" and, on the invitation of Jesus, became a disciple (John 1:36). It would seem that they later returned to fishing for a while as the events of Matthew 4:21 appear to be a second calling of John. After this second calling he became permanently attached to the company of the disciples. Indeed, he became one of the innermost circle of disciples – the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was full of zeal and his intensity of character was such that Jesus described him as a "Boanerges" one of the sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). This strength enabled him and Peter to follow Christ after the betrayal in Gethsemane when all the other disciples fled (John 18:15). Indeed he followed Jesus to his trial (John 18:16) and the place of his crucifixion (John 19:26). Mary conveyed the first tidings of the resurrection to him and Peter (John 20:2). After this they returned to Galilee where Jesus revealed himself to John and Peter (John 21:1, 7). After this Peter and John were often together (Acts 3:1; 4:13).

John apparently remained in Jerusalem as the leader of the church there (Acts 15:6; Galatians 2:9), although he was not there at the time of Paul's last visit (Acts 21: 15-40). He appears to have retired to Ephesus, but we cannot be sure exactly when. He then suffered under persecution and was banished to Patmos where he had the visions described in the book of Revelation. After the persecution was over he probably returned to Ephesus and died a natural death there in around AD 98.

John's gospel is by far the most theological of the gospels and is the only gospel to contribute important insights on the major foundational focuses of the Christian faith. In my view these are:

1. The nature and attributes of God (e.g. 1:1-1, 14-18; 3:16; 4:24; 5:19-23; 6:45-46; 8:16-19; 10:27-30, 34-38; 12:27-28, 49-50; 13:3; 14:6-10; 16:5-15, 27-28; 17:11; 20:20-22).
2. Humanity: fallen and redeemed (e.g. 2:24-25; 3:3-8, 19-21, 36; 5:40; 6:35, 53-57; 7:37-39; 8:12, 31-47; 10:27-29; 11:25-26; 14:17; 15:1-8, 18-25; 16:3, 8; 17:2-3, 6-9; 20:22, 31).
3. The person and work of the Holy Spirit (e.g. 1:13, 32; 3:5; 4:24; 6:63; 7:39; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; 19:34; 20:22).
4. The church and its mission (e.g. 4:35; 13:31-16:33; 17:20-23; 20:19-23; 21:1-25).
5. The life in the next world (e.g. 3:15, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:27, 37, 39, 47, 51, 58; 8:24, 51; 10:28; 11:25; 12:25; 14:2).
6. The work of Christ (e.g. 1:29, 51; 2:19; 3:14, 34; 4:22, 42; 5:25, 28; 6:33, 40, 44, 51, 53, 62; 10:9, 11, 15; 12:24, 32; 13:8; 14:3, 18; 16:33; 17:2; 18:14, 36; 20:1-21:14)
7. And finally and, in many ways supremely, the person of Christ

His deity (e.g. 1:1, 14, 18, 49; 2:11, 19; 3:13, 18, 31, 34; 5:17, 22, 26, 28; 6:20, 27, 33, 35, 38, 45, 54, 69; 7:28; 8:12, 16, 23, 28, 42, 55, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 11, 14, 18, 30, 38; 11:4, 25, 27, 44; 12:41, 44; 13:3, 19, 31,; 14:1, 6, 9, 14; 16:7, 15, 23, 28; 17:5, 10, 24, 26; 18:5; 20:1-21, 25; 20:28).

The inseparability of Christ's deity from his true humanity (e.g. 1:14; 4:6; 6:42; 8:6; 11:33, 35, 38; 12:27; 19:5, 30, 31-42).

When the Nicene creed was formulated at the councils of Nicea in AD 325 and Chalcedon in AD 451, the gospel of John was particular helpful in supporting the nature of Christ as truly God but also truly man.

This nature of Christ as both human and divine was, of course, fundamental to his mission. Only a sinless person could be a sacrifice in our place because all sinful humans deserved to die for their sins anyway - that's Christ's nature as God who was therefore sinless. Yet only a human could be a substitute for us - that's Christ's nature as human. He was 100% God and 100% human.