

On Promise and Fulfillment

A Narrative Analysis of John 2:1-12 and John 19:16b-42

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses narrative criticism to analyze two narratives from the Gospel of John, with a focus on how the setting and narration, plot, characters, and literary devices work together to convey the central themes of the Gospel. The narrative of the wedding at Cana found in John 2:1-12, as the first sign performed by Jesus in his public ministry, is replete with themes that are only fulfilled in the glorification of Jesus on the cross in John 19:16b-42. Together, as the first and last of the signs performed by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, the two narratives depict the theological themes of the glorification of Jesus, the eschatological banquet of the kingdom, the gift of the Spirit, the birth of the church, and new creation.

Cette thèse utilise la critique narrative pour analyser deux récits dans l'Évangile de Jean, particulièrement la façon dont le cadre et la narration, l'intrigue, les personnages et les dispositifs littéraires contribuent à transmettre les thèmes centraux de l'Évangile. Le récit des noces de Cana qui se trouve dans Jean 2,1-12, en tant que premier signe accompli par Jésus dans son ministère public, regorge de thèmes qui se réalisent seulement à la glorification de Jésus sur la croix dans Jean 19,16b-42. Ensemble, comme premier et dernier signes accomplis par Jésus dans le Quatrième Évangile, les deux récits décrivent les thèmes théologiques de la glorification de Jésus, du banquet eschatologique du royaume, du don de l'Esprit, de la naissance de l'Église, et de la nouvelle création.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The stories that fill the Gospel of John were written down for a particular purpose, to reveal to the world Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, so that humanity might come to believe in him and in doing so have eternal life. The author of the Fourth Gospel ties the narratives of the Gospel together using a variety of theological themes and imagery in order to convey to the audience his message. In such a rich narrative, the author of the Gospel highlights two particular passages for special consideration: the wedding at Cana and Jesus' passion and death on the cross. These two narrative episodes are important due to their placement as the first and last of the seven signs that Jesus performed, due to the repeating set of characters of the mother of Jesus and the disciples, and due to the recurring theological imagery. Although sometimes overlooked, an investigation into the connection between the two narratives can be enriching, contributing to a deeper understanding of the message of the Gospel.

This thesis will present a narrative analysis of the passages of the wedding at Cana found in John 2 and the passion and death of Jesus in John 19, and investigate the meaning of the connection between the two narratives. This chapter will begin with an overview of the relevant scholarship, which will set the scene for the study needed to be done in this thesis, followed by a brief description of narrative criticism, which is the method of biblical exegesis that will be used to analyze the two chosen passages.

### **Overview of the Literature**

#### Historical Criticism

Modern biblical interpretation since the Enlightenment had, for a long time, been centered on historical criticism of the biblical text. A large corpus of the scholarship has been dedicated to reconstructing the historical context in which the text of the Bible was formed, and a

rich variety of criticism based on the source, form, redaction, and tradition of the text was developed. The Gospel of John, in particular, has been of interest to scholars of the historical-critical approach because of its uniqueness among the four Gospels. A major contribution to the historical criticism of the Gospel of John has been Raymond Brown's *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, in which he presents a comprehensive overview of the findings of historical criticism on the unity and composition of the Gospel, its historicity, the question of authorship, the place and date of writing, external influences on the text, the purpose of the Gospel, the language of the text, and some key disputed theological themes within the Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

For a large part, major commentaries on the Fourth Gospel have taken on this historical perspective, taking as presupposition the conclusions of historical criticism on the general composition and historical influences of the Gospel. These commentaries proceed with a verse-by-verse analysis of how grammar and certain vocabulary can be interpreted, largely by analysis of the Greek text and various translations, by looking at the religious and cultural context, and by referring to the varied composition of the Gospel and its relationship to the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>2</sup>

### Narrative Criticism

In response to the weaknesses of the historical-critical approach, other approaches, which view the text as a holistic unity and took into consideration the context of the readers, rose into prominence. Dominant among these approaches is the literary approach, which is also called narrative criticism. The point of departure for a narrative critique of the Gospel of John is the text of the Gospel, as a unified story that speaks for itself and whose message is conveyed through

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Major commentaries on the Fourth Gospel include: Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992); Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963); J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010); Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972); and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

the elements of the narrative. The narrative approach originated from secular literary studies, which looked at the various elements of a literary work.<sup>3</sup> Biblical scholars then adopted the spirit of the approach, accepting that while the Bible is the word of God, it is also a literary work, and adapted the methodology for the biblical text.<sup>4</sup>

As a spearhead in the narrative critique of the Fourth Gospel, Alan Culpepper gives a general overview of how the various narrative elements should be read within the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> In his text, not only does Culpepper provide clear definitions of the elements of a narrative, including narrator, point of view, time, plot, characters, literary devices, and the implied reader, he also demonstrates how these elements are expressed in the Gospel of John by providing brief, concise summaries as well as examples of analysis of the Gospel text. Culpepper's work inspired many other biblical scholars to study the various literary aspects of the Fourth Gospel, and his influence could be seen in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism*, which reflects on the history, influence, and trends of narrative criticism through a series of collected articles.<sup>6</sup> The book also features essays that probe into certain aspects of the narrative criticism of the Fourth Gospel, including the form and structure of the Gospel, symbols and imagery, as well as the portrayal of the Gospel in modern cinematic storytelling.

Subsequent Johannine scholars have also taken to looking at the Gospel of John in relation to its plot, characters, literary genre, and literary devices. Warren Carter studies the Gospel of John from three perspectives: from the literary perspective of John as a storyteller,

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<sup>3</sup> Scholarship on secular literary studies, which include relevant methodology for biblical narrative analysis, include Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore, *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

from a historical perspective as an interpreter of Scriptures and sources about Jesus, and from a theological perspective in relation to what the evangelist is attempting to convey.<sup>7</sup> In the literary perspective, he speaks on the topics of the genre of the Gospel, its plot and characters, symbolism and dualistic language, as well as other literary devices used in the Gospel. Jo-Ann Brant analyzes the Fourth Gospel from the lens of the literary genre of Greek tragedies.<sup>8</sup> She looks at how the plot of the Gospel matches that of a tragic drama, using conflict and irony to express its message to the audience, how the Gospel makes use of dramatic and theatrical conventions of the Greek tragedy in its storytelling, the portrayal of characters and identity, and the role of the narrator in presenting the drama of the Gospel narrative.

Commentators on the Gospel of John who took on a narrative approach analyzed the Gospel based on its narrative episodes. In Francis Moloney's tri-volume commentary on the Fourth Gospel, he breaks down the text into individual stories by identifying changes in setting, cast of characters, and time.<sup>9</sup> He proceeds to read and analyze the narrative episodes in terms of the shape of the plot, the thoughts and actions of the characters, the text's remarks on setting and narrator, as well as the central theological themes and imagery which permeate the episode, while also constantly referring to how the episodes serve to advance the overall plot and purpose of the whole Gospel. In reading the Fourth Gospel from a narrative perspective, Moloney attempts to elucidate the central message of the Gospel for its readers, which is that the Gospel calls readers to truly believe in the Word incarnate, and thereby enter into blessedness as children of God.

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<sup>7</sup> Warren Carter, *John: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading the Fourth Gospel, John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Francis J. Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonour: Reading John 13-21* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

Other than commentaries taking a narrative approach, literature on the Fourth Gospel has focused on how individual elements of a narrative are used in the Gospel to convey a central message. Primary in the narrative perspective are the symbols and the theological themes that permeate the Gospel. Craig Koester's work summarizes several major theological dimensions of the Gospel, such as God, the world, Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection, the Spirit, faith, and discipleship.<sup>10</sup> This theological interpretation of the Gospel is rooted in the text of the Gospel itself, by looking at how the narrative elements of the Gospel, including the words and actions of Jesus, the events and encounters with other characters, and the aspects of narration such as the narrator's point of view and the descriptions presented within the narration all come together to present the major theological themes.

Rather than the theological themes themselves, Paul Diel looks instead at the major imagery and symbols found within the Gospel, and presents how they express the theological messages which the author of the Fourth Gospel wished to convey.<sup>11</sup> He takes on a more modern, psychological approach to the meaning of the symbols than typical narrative critiques, yet he also approaches the symbols in the Gospel episodically, by looking at the symbols found within each narrative episode, while also tying them to the main message of the Gospel, which he sums up as "the sublimation and spiritualization of desires," and knowledge of "what the essential is, the source of all life."<sup>12</sup>

Since characters are an important part of a narrative, there has been special focus on the way certain characters are portrayed in the Gospel of John. The volume *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* is a collection of essays on all

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<sup>10</sup> Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Diel and Jeannine Solotareff, *Symbolism in the Gospel of John* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Diel and Solotareff, *Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, 217-18.

of the various characters found in the Gospel of John, from major characters such as Simon Peter, the Samaritan woman, ‘the Jews’, and Pilate, to minor and lesser-known characters such as the steward at the wedding at Cana, Judas (not Iscariot), and Barabbas.<sup>13</sup> The essays explore how the theological themes of the Fourth Gospel are revealed by each of the characters or character groups within the context of the narratives that they are presented in.

James Howard writes about the role of minor characters in Jesus’ ministry, especially in the presentation of Jesus’ major miracles.<sup>14</sup> Howard demonstrates how the minor characters of the mother of Jesus, the royal official, the lame man, the blind man, and the sisters Martha and Mary each play a role in their respective narrative episodes as a model of faith or unbelief, as a vehicle in revealing an aspect of the Messiah, and as an example of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Sandhya Manjaly looks specifically at the female characters in the Gospel of John.<sup>15</sup> She argues that the author of the Fourth Gospel uses these female characters to develop progressively the major theological themes and ideas, for many important revelations about Jesus were made to the women. It is the mother of Jesus who introduces important theological themes to the Gospel, and who prompts the beginning of Jesus’ mission, while the Samaritan woman, Martha, and Mary of Bethany reveal that Jesus is the living water, the Messiah, the resurrection, and the life. The women at the foot of the cross give witness to the hour of Jesus’ glorification, while Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Lord and becomes the messenger of the good news to the disciples.

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<sup>13</sup> Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> James M. Howard, “The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 649 (January 2006): 63–78.

<sup>15</sup> Sandhya Manjaly, “Women in the Fourth Gospel: Mouthpieces of Johannine Theology,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 82, no. 7 (2018): 504–22.

Nathan O'Halloran takes a look at the character of Mary in the narrative of the wedding feast at Cana, at her actions and the movement of the plot, in comparison to the character of Eve in the narrative of the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden.<sup>16</sup> He uses Rene Girard's mimetic theory to show how Mary and Eve are mimetic types for positive, loving obedience and negative, rivalrous disobedience respectively, and also, through careful comparison of the two narrative passages, how Mary is the antitype of Eve.

While some scholars may focus specifically on the major elements such as plot, symbolism, or characters, James Resseguie takes a special interest in how the author of the Fourth Gospel manipulates point of view in the narration.<sup>17</sup> In his book, Resseguie demonstrates how different points of view are expressed in the Gospel through rhetoric, setting, character, and plot. He argues that the author of the Gospel uses contrast between Jesus' point of view and the point of view of the other characters to create dissonance and a sense of strangeness for the reader, forcing the reader to ponder uncomfortable views and reflect on habitualized perspectives in order to grasp the marvelous message of the Gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond the point of view, the author and audience are also important parts of the narrative perspective. Among Richard Bauckham's collection of articles in *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple*, he writes on the topics of the ideal author and audience, as well as on the Christological themes found within the narrative of the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> He also investigates questions related to the historical aspect of the Gospel, including the origin of the Gospel, its relationship to the Qumran community, and the historiography of certain narrative passages.

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<sup>16</sup> Nathan W. O'Halloran, "Mimetic Type and Antitype: A Girardian Comparative Reading of the Women of Genesis 3:1-6, 20 and John 2:1-12," *Heythrop Journal* 58, no. 2 (March 2017): 222-38.

<sup>17</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 197.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

### Other Methodologies

Beyond the narrative approach to interpreting the Gospel of John, there are also other approaches that rebuke the weaknesses of historical criticism and look at the text from a different perspective. These include the socio-rhetorical approach and the contextual approach, the latter of which is commonly dominated by liberation and feminist theologies. An example of the socio-rhetorical approach is Ritva Williams' work on interpreting the story of the wedding at Cana.<sup>20</sup> By looking at the social and cultural contexts of Jesus' time, the meaning of Mary's interaction with Jesus is rooted in an understanding of a gendered division of space, familial relationships, and the cultural acquisition of honour. Mary's petition to Jesus, therefore, was made from a consideration of the potential loss of honour for the groom's family, and an opportunity for Mary's family to enhance their honour in the eyes of others by providing for others' need. As a result, Jesus' honour was enhanced in an unexpected way in the eyes of his disciples, and the incident turned out to have contributed positively to his divinely appointed mission.

In terms of contextual theology, Frederick Herzog provides an interpretation of the Gospel of John from a liberation perspective.<sup>21</sup> He searches for how the text of the Gospel challenges Christians to radically change their attitude of stubborn white supremacy and to embrace a 'black' theology. He attempts to show how the Fourth Gospel presents Christ as a liberator, challenging both the people of Jesus' time as well as modern Christians to break away from the ways of thinking which blind people to the real face of God. He argues that the theme of the Gospel is to reveal how Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is meant to liberate humanity and to reveal their freedom, which can be challenging and offensive to the people it addresses.

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<sup>20</sup> Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (October 1997): 679-92.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Herzog, *Liberation Theology; Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).

From a feminist perspective, Sandra Schneiders interprets the Gospel of John with a focus on how the Gospel can enhance the faith of the modern believer and guide them to enter into a deeper personal relationship with God.<sup>22</sup> She uses a combination of historical, literary, and ideology criticisms, as well as theological analysis from a feminist perspective, to read the Fourth Gospel, focusing on the representations of the female in the Gospel. She highlights how the Gospel explores a variety of theological themes, including revelation, witness, believing, discipleship, the glorification of Jesus through the cross, the return to the disciples in the resurrection, the promise of continued indwelling by the Holy Spirit, and the call to community.

#### Narrative Criticism of John 2

The weakness of volumes attempting to cover the large topic of the interpretation of the whole Gospel of John is that they are unable to dwell on specific passages or focus more in depth on certain topics. One particular passage that is sometimes overlooked in larger texts is the narrative of the wedding at Cana. Instead, there are many shorter articles that focus on this narrative episode and more specifically on certain themes, images, or ideas within the narrative. Bernadeta Jojko speaks of the “hour” in John 2, which she suggests points towards “the supreme act of Jesus’ self-revelation on the cross,” but which already began at the wedding feast at Cana.<sup>23</sup> Jojko links the various themes and images found in this narrative episode with the wider Old Testament context, bringing to light a central theme of fulfillment and suggesting that “the episode at Cana should be read within the framework of Jesus’ whole ministry and its ultimate effects of the eschatological salvation fulfilled in his death and resurrection.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Bernadeta Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2:1-11),” *Verbum Vitae* 38, no. 1 (2020): 144.

<sup>24</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 144.

Fausto Salvoni writes on the difficulty brought about by the phrase “my hour has not yet come” spoken by Jesus in John 2:4, and presents a different interpretation that is more harmonious with the symbolic meaning of the “hour” in the Fourth Gospel and with Jesus’ subsequent actions.<sup>25</sup> Salvoni suggests that the “hour” indicates the time of Jesus’ glorification on the cross, which is also the time when he will cut all earthly ties, including his ties to his mother. His words to Mary in John 2, therefore, would mean that since his hour had not yet come, he needs not cut his ties with his mother and can therefore still accomplish her request.

David Stanley speaks of the events of the wedding at Cana as an epiphany, a moment when Christ is revealed to the world as the incarnate Son of God.<sup>26</sup> He remarks that the symbolism found within the narrative all function as epiphany, from the marriage theme pointing towards God as intimate, personal, and loving, to the water and wine representing humanity’s call to adoption as God’s children through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. He also speaks of Mary’s role in the narrative as the symbol of the Church, of her intervention resulting in an anticipation of Jesus’ public miracles as representative of how the Church anticipates eternal life in the present. As such, Stanley argues that Mary is revealed in this narrative episode and at the foot of the cross as the New Eve and as mediatrix, as the representative of womankind in the battle with Satan.

#### Narrative Criticism of John 19

In connection to the narrative of the wedding at Cana, the passage of Jesus’ passion has often been brought up. In the Gospel of John, it has traditionally been noted that Jesus performs seven signs, or miracles. The first six signs can be found in the first portion of the Gospel, while

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<sup>25</sup> Fausto Salvoni, “Nevertheless, My Hour Has Not yet Come (John 2:4),” *Restoration Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1963): 236–41.

<sup>26</sup> David M. Stanley, “Cana as Epiphany,” *Worship* 32, no. 2 (1958): 83–89.

the seventh sign is Jesus' passion and death.<sup>27</sup> With the miracle at Cana being the first sign and Jesus' passion being the last, they form an *inclusio* for the chiasmic structure of the Gospel narrative. Alan Culpepper writes on the theology of the passion narrative found in John 19 from a narrative approach.<sup>28</sup> He highlights how the Gospel develops the central themes relating to the glorification of Jesus and the life of the Church through four short scenes that constitute the passion narrative. In the passion of Jesus, he is exalted and crowned as king of all peoples, unifying the world into one community, one new family of the children of God, fulfilling the mission of the Word incarnate and that which is written in the scriptures.

Ignace de la Potterie takes a narrative approach to the pericope of the division of Jesus' clothing among the soldiers, and argues that the seamless tunic is a symbol for the Messianic unity of the people of God.<sup>29</sup> He argues that the clothing divided into four parts represents universality, as the number four is a symbolic number that points toward completion in the world. The clothing of Jesus, both the clothes divided among the soldiers and the untorn tunic, represents a unification of all peoples in God, which is the purpose of the church to which the hour of Christ on the cross gave birth as well as the Messianic fulfillment.

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<sup>27</sup> Traditionally, scholars list the seven signs of Jesus as: 1) the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12), 2) the healing of an official's son (4:46-54), 3) the healing on the Sabbath at Bethesda (5:1-16), 4) the multiplication of loaves (6:1-15), 5) Jesus walking on water (6:16-22), 6) the healing of the blind man (9:1-40), and 7) the restoration of Lazarus to life (11:1-54). Recently, however, Johannine scholars have presented the argument for a different list of the seven signs. They argue that the fifth sign, Jesus walking on water, should not be counted as a sign, as the event of walking on the water does not fit the definition of a sign being "a prodigious deed with strong symbolic possibility that illustrates Jesus' salvific message." (Joseph A. Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel: A Reappraisal," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (January 1986): 68.) Furthermore, the author of the Gospel does not actually use the word 'sign' in relation to the narrative, whereas the word appears in relation to all of the other six signs. Instead, they argue that the seventh and final sign should be Jesus' passion and death, the extraordinary climax of the entirety of the Gospel, Jesus' hour of glorification and the fulfillment of the other six signs which are incomplete and point towards this final sign. (Marc Girard, "La composition structurelle des sept « signes » dans le quatrième évangile," *Studies in Religion* 9, no. 3 (1980): 315-24.) Moreover, the new list of the seven signs reveal a chiasmic structure where the themes of the signs relate to one another in sequence. Their argument for this new list of seven signs is compelling, and it is this list that this thesis adopts.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Culpepper, "The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative: John 19:16b-30," *Neotestamentica* 31, no. 1 (1997): 21-37.

<sup>29</sup> Ignace de la Potterie, "La tunique 'non divisée' de Jésus, symbole de l'unité messianique," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, vol. 1, ed. William C. Weinrich, 127-38 (Macon: Mercer, 1984).

Leonard Witkamp writes on the topic of Jesus' thirst, with a focus on why Jesus' thirst should be interpreted as a figurative statement on his desire to do the will of God rather than literal thirst, based on the language of fulfillment and completion that surrounds the statement, on the spiritual level of meaning, and on the passage's connection to Psalm 69.<sup>30</sup> Brian Tabb focuses on how Jesus' expression of thirst in the Passion narrative can be read as an irony, based on the facts that Jesus' thirst is double-layered, that there is tension between the two layers of meanings, and that the characters involved are ignorant of the irony playing out, while the reader is invited to find deeper significance in the narrative.<sup>31</sup>

Deborah Sawyer analyzes how the image of the water and blood flowing from Jesus' pierced side has been interpreted a symbolism for birth.<sup>32</sup> She looks at how the image was interpreted throughout history, and how the writings of St. Paul and the Church Fathers support an interpretation of Jesus as the new Adam, who then gives birth to the church. She remarks that water and blood are always present as part of the birthing process, and the place of the wound is the same as "the place on Adam's body where Eve was brought forth" in the creation narrative.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, however, she argues against using the image as birth imagery, for attributing female birth attributes to Jesus would only serve to subsume the unique nature of women into maleness and reinforce an androcentric interpretation of humanity. Instead she proposes to interpret the image as creation imagery, in terms of Christ as the new Adam, whom God uses to create humanity anew.

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<sup>30</sup> Leonard T. Witkamp, "Jesus' Thirst in John 19:28-30: Literal or Figurative?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 3 (1996): 489–510.

<sup>31</sup> Brian J. Tabb, "Jesus' Thirst at the Cross: Irony and Intertextuality in John 19:28," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (October 2013): 338–51.

<sup>32</sup> Deborah Sawyer, "Water and Blood: Birthing Images in John's Gospel," in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer*, ed. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson, 300–09 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Sawyer, "Water and Blood," 301.

### Studies on Mariology Rooted in John

Most sources that look at the narratives of the wedding at Cana and the passion of Jesus in John together, however, are the scholarship on the person of Mary, since she appears in both narratives, and only in those two narratives in the Gospel of John. These sources may take on a mixture of approaches to interpret the words and actions of Mary, including the historical, literary, socio-rhetorical, and contextual approaches. A collaboration between Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars, the book *Mary in the New Testament* summarizes the fundamental portrayal of the mother of Jesus based on the text of the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The volume attempts to understand the person of Mary based only on explicit mentions of Mary, Jesus' family, and Jesus' origins in the New Testament and in the literature of the second century, including both the New Testament Apocrypha and the writings of the Church Fathers. Taking a very critical and careful approach to reading the text, the writers avoid the tendencies to impose presuppositions, exaggerate the meaning of the text, and make conclusions based on the argument from silence. They conclude that although the portrayal of Mary in the New Testament was varied and not always harmonious with each other, and included positive, neutral, and even negative representations of Mary, two themes which can be traced are that Mary is a disciple par excellence and the virgin mother of Jesus.

Beverly Gaventa's work on Mary also takes on the task of compiling the references to Mary found in the New Testament text, with special focus on the narrative episodes in which Mary appears, in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke-Acts, John, and Protoevangelium of James.<sup>35</sup> She uses a literary and theological approach, analyzing the narrative episodes in which Mary

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<sup>34</sup> Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann, *Mary in the New Testament: a Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

appears, investigating how each author chooses to portray the character of Mary, and the theological ideas which are associated with the literary portrayals of Mary.

Francis Moloney takes on a different approach to analyzing the character of Mary in the four Gospels and in the writings of Paul. Rather than placing his emphasis on Mary as the model disciple of Christ, he focuses instead on her role as a woman and as a mother.<sup>36</sup> Moloney remarks that throughout the New Testament, Mary's identity as woman and mother is gradually developed with fuller and deeper meanings, from the earlier New Testament text simply remarking that Jesus was born of a woman and that Mary was his mother, to later texts presenting Mary as a woman of great faith, and as the mother of the Church.

Jean Galot places his focus on the infancy narrative in the Gospel of Luke and the narratives in which Mary is involved in the Gospel of John, with the goal of validating Mary's status in the Church.<sup>37</sup> Galot begins his analysis of the narratives by looking first at considerations of the literal meaning of the text, then at the relationship of the passage to the history of salvation written in the Old Testament, and finally at the deeper theological meaning, developing a Marian theology on the person, mission, and place of Mary in Christian tradition.

Elizabeth Johnson, in taking on a feminist perspective, explores a theology of Mary that is centered on Mary being a model and sister to the modern Christian.<sup>38</sup> She begins by presenting the history of women's voices and perspective in faith, particularly of how the female voice has often been suppressed historically. By looking at the historical context of Mary's world, Johnson demonstrates that Christians should not think of Mary as being above the rest of humanity for being the mother of God, but rather as a poor woman oppressed by her historical and cultural

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<sup>36</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Jean Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, trans. Maria Constance (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1965).

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

contexts, a woman in solidarity with all women in the world who are being oppressed in various ways. Finally, she looks at all of the passages in the New Testament in which Mary appears, and interprets them from the point of view of Mary's situation as a woman, and how her actions serve as a call to all women to imitate her in standing firm in faith, in the face of oppression.

There is also a variety of literature focused particularly on the character of Mary in the Gospel of John, rather than attempting to cover the entirety of the New Testament. Raymond Collins presents an overview of the history of scholarship on Mary in the Gospel of John.<sup>39</sup> He summarizes the scholarship on the exegesis of the Fourth Gospel produced in the decade of the 1960s, providing a comprehensive survey of the leading historical, literary, and theological ideas surrounding the passages of the wedding at Cana and Mary at the foot of the cross. He dedicates special attention to the work of André Feuillet, who spoke extensively on the person of Mary and an interpretation of the Gospel of John rooted in Old Testament typology.

Joseph Grassi, in looking at the role of Mary in the Fourth Gospel, argues for a restructuring of the signs of Jesus in the Gospel from what was historically established.<sup>40</sup> He presents the argument that Jesus walking on water should not be counted as a sign, and instead the seventh sign is Jesus' passion and death. In such a case, the role of the mother of Jesus is important, since she appears in both the very first and the very last signs of Jesus. Grassi argues that Mary is a witness of both Jesus' identity and his death, and she acts as a carrier of tradition and as a model in community life and worship. By looking at the imagery in the narrative of the wedding at Cana in the light of the narrative of the passion of Jesus, Mary at Cana can be seen as calling the Church to obedience to Jesus, just as Jesus was obedient to God on the cross.

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<sup>39</sup> Raymond F. Collins, "Mary in the Fourth Gospel: A Decade of Johannine Studies," *Louvain Studies* 3, no. 2 (1970): 99–142.

<sup>40</sup> Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel," 68.

Merle Salazar approaches the two passages of the Fourth Gospel from a more literary perspective, considering the character of Mary in the light of the other elements of the narrative, including setting, symbols, plot, and characters.<sup>41</sup> By doing a close literary reading of the passages, he concludes that the author of the Gospel presents Mary as mother-disciple, a characterization that cannot be divided, as she is neither simply Jesus' mother, nor simply a disciple of Jesus. Edward Kilmartin also approaches the two passages from a narrative perspective, and he argues that Mary's actions at Cana should be recognized as having significance on a Messianic level, a foreshadowing of the Messianic Eucharist.<sup>42</sup> Her petition at Cana was fully answered at Jesus' passion and death, when the glory and the kingdom of God were revealed, and so Jesus acknowledged Mary's special intercessory powers and appointed her as the mother of the Church on a Messianic level, with the task of strengthening the Church.

Justin Huang focuses particularly on the word "woman" in the two passages of the Gospel, which was the only form of address that Jesus gave to his mother.<sup>43</sup> As this title of Mary had caused many difficulties in interpretation throughout history, Huang attempts to present a few interpretations that are grounded in the text. He presents several well-founded interpretations of the term "woman", demonstrating how the term can be understood as pointing to Mary's spiritual motherhood rather than biological relationship, to Mary as the ideal model of faith, to Mary as the fulfillment of the feminine messianic expectations, to Mary as the new Eve, to Mary as the bride of Jesus the bridegroom, and to Mary as the image of the Church.

Mirasol Navidad looks specifically at the interpretation of Mary's character in the Passion narrative, at what the dialogue and symbolism associated with Mary's presence at the

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<sup>41</sup> Merle Salazar, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 43, no. 3 (2006): 271–86.

<sup>42</sup> Edward J. Kilmartin, "The Mother of Jesus Was There," *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 15, no. 2 (May 1963): 213–26.

<sup>43</sup> Justin Huang, "The Meaning of 'Woman' in John 2:4 and 19:26," *The Dunwoodie Review* 29 (2006): 163–67.

foot of the cross reveal about Mary and the implications for the modern reader.<sup>44</sup> By using a narrative approach and linking the Passion narrative with both the Synoptic Gospels and the narrative of the wedding at Cana, Navidad argues that the character of Mary exemplifies fidelity, love, active participation in God's plan, and family based on discipleship. Similarly, John Roskoski focuses on the theme of motherhood in the narrative of Jesus' passion and death.<sup>45</sup> He grounds his interpretation on the historical context of the Ancient Near East and on the tradition of motherhood in the Old Testament, demonstrating how Mary fulfills the archetypes of motherhood from the Old Testament. Jesus' address on the cross, therefore, redefines Mary's motherhood. Her motherhood is raised from the earthly dimension of being related to Jesus by blood to the dimension of Jesus' glorification and of the kingdom of God, becoming the mother of all Christians. Mary, as the personification of Mother Zion, becomes then the mother of the Church.

These sources on Mary are useful in that they are able to go into depth on the relevant themes and imagery, and make insightful connections between the two chosen passages. The weakness of these passages, in return, is that they are often focused too narrowly on the character of Mary, and can lose track of what other characters, narrative elements, and the plot can contribute to the interpretation of the text.

### **Importance of the Topic**

From an overview of the existing literature on the interpretation of the Gospel of John, therefore, it can be seen that narrative analysis on the Gospel of John is a very enriching endeavour, revealing a multitude of theological themes and imagery, as well as developing

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<sup>44</sup> Mirasol C. Navidad, "Jesus' Mother at the Foot of the Cross: A Narrative Reading of John 19:25-27," *Landas* 26, no. 1 (2012): 49–77.

<sup>45</sup> John Roskoski, "Behold, Your Mother: John 19:5-27, Redefinition of the Motherhood of Mary," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 20, no. 16 (2019): 1–21.

characters as models of believers, through the analysis of plot, character, narration, and literary devices. Yet there is a lack of a deeper analysis on the connection between the narrative episode of the wedding at Cana and the episode of Jesus' passion and death that takes a holistic approach and involves all of the major literary elements, rather than only on one very specific aspect of the two episodes. There is a more extensive investigation on the message of the connection between the two episodes in the scholarship on Mary, but such literature is often too narrowly focused and lacks a more holistic vision. Yet it can be argued that the relationship between the two narrative episodes in the Gospel of John is important, as the author of the Gospel attempts to convey their significance through the placement as the first and last sign of Jesus' mission, through the recurring characters, and the repetition of theological themes and imagery.

### **Thesis Statement**

This thesis, therefore, will attempt to provide a holistic narrative analysis of the episodes of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) and Jesus' passion and death (John 19:16b-42), and to investigate the meaning expressed by the connection between the two narratives and its significance for a reader of the Gospel.

### **Methodology**

This thesis will analyze the chosen narratives from the Gospel of John using the narrative approach, which focuses on the literary elements and the text in its final form, with minimal input from external factors and sources. While there are a multitude of literary elements, not every element can be found in or are relevant to the chosen narratives. As a result, the analysis will focus on four literary elements: setting and narration, plot, characters, and literary devices.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Important studies on narrative criticism in biblical studies include, but are not limited to: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994); Cornelis Benema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014);

## Setting and Narration

The setting of a narrative can reveal many unspoken elements which contribute to the interpretation of the story. Setting consists of both the physical location in which the story takes place, as well as the temporal aspect of the narrative. Location includes the geographical location, spaces relative to each other, movements into and out of places, and details about physical objects present in a location. Time includes both the chronological passing of time within a story, as well as the pace with which the story is told by the narrator.<sup>47</sup> These aspects are important, for the context of the world of the narrative can point towards details that help the reader understand the values, motivations, and actions of a character. The setting is important to the interpretation of the narrative because it is not a neutral description of a place or time. It is a tool used by the author to create “a metaphoric structure to frame and highlight ideological points of view.”<sup>48</sup> What the author chooses to include in the description of the setting will, either explicitly or implicitly, bring certain interpretations to the mind of the reader. This is especially relevant to the Fourth Gospel, which employs relatively short narratives that cannot provide expansive descriptions of setting, so that when the author does choose to include remarks on setting, it becomes important to the interpretation of the narrative.<sup>49</sup>

Related to the setting is the narration of the story. Narration describes the point of view taken by the narrator in the story, and the way and timing in which the narrator reveals information throughout the narrative. The work of the narrator is most exemplified in the

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Gina Hens-Piazza, *The Supporting Cast of the Bible: Reading on Behalf of the Multitude* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020); Jean Louis Ska, *“Our Fathers Have Told Us”*: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1990); and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 55.

<sup>48</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Jan P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 36.

sections of a narrative that do not contain the active involvement of the characters, the texts that present “information (e.g. description), comments, explication or a value judgement.”<sup>50</sup> The perspective of the narrator is important because the entire story-world is revealed to the reader only through mediation of the narrator, and everything “bears traces of the narrator’s selectivity and evaluation.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the role of the narrator is to manipulate the reader, expertly evoking within the reader emotions, reactions, and reflections in accordance with the author’s wishes. For example, the narrator can choose to reveal all of the important information at the beginning of the narrative, or to withhold information in order to keep the reader in suspense for a more impactful reveal at the end.<sup>52</sup> Narration also plays an important role in guiding the reader towards a particular set of values, themes, or images that emphasize the purpose of the writing. In the Gospel of John, the narrator plays a particularly significant role in guiding the reader to seeing the central message of the Gospel, for “from the outset... the narrator extends his omniscient viewpoint to the reader,” and tells the story from a “retrospective, interpretation-enabling” perspective.<sup>53</sup>

### Plot

The plot “is the main organizing principle of a story,” for there would be no story to tell without the sequence of actions and events that make up the plot.<sup>54</sup> The plot is defined as a temporal sequence of events in a story. The plot is not just any random group of actions, but rather, the group of actions must also have a causal relationship with one another.<sup>55</sup> It is not necessarily an accurate historical account, but rather serves the emotional and artistic purpose of

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<sup>50</sup> Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 123.

<sup>53</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 47; 48.

<sup>54</sup> Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 14.

the author.<sup>56</sup> The main elements of a plot include an exposition, a conflict or complication, a climax, and a conclusion.<sup>57</sup> The exposition is the beginning of the story, presenting the initial situation and setting the stage for the subsequent action. Then arises the middle section, where a conflict, complication, or tension threatens the equilibrium established in the exposition. The climax is the focal point of the narrative, a pivotal moment in which the conflict is addressed. Finally, the conclusion describes how the conflict is resolved and a new equilibrium is reached.

The core of a plot, therefore, is the change that occurs during the sequence of events, whether that be a change in situation, in the moral values of a character, or in their thoughts or feelings.<sup>58</sup> There can also exist the presence of multiple subplots within an overarching narrative, pertaining to different aspects of change, or to the experiences and development of different characters, or to different underlying themes of the narrative.

### Characters

The characters of a story form another important aspect for interpretation, for the author can express different ideas through different characters' thoughts, actions, or even descriptors. Moreover, the plot and characters influence each other, since the plot is the result of characters acting and interacting, while the characters are primarily portrayed through their actions.<sup>59</sup> Characters are typically placed into categories depending on their function in a narrative, or on how they are described by the narrator. In terms of function, there are protagonists, minor characters, and background characters.<sup>60</sup> Protagonists are central to the narrative, the main actor in the plot. Minor characters have roles in the narrative that affect the main character either

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<sup>56</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 103-4.

positively or negatively, propel the movement of the plot, or act as foil to reveal the character of the protagonist. Background characters are present or implied in the scene, but they do not have any memorable roles, or they appear very briefly. A characteristic of the difference between the important characters and the others in the Bible is the use of names. In the Bible, “anonymity is the lot (and mark) of supernumeraries, type characters, institutional figures, embodied plot devices... To remain nameless is to remain faceless, with hardly a life of one’s own.”<sup>61</sup>

In terms of description, characters can be either round or flat. Round characters are those whom the narration presents as complex and “autonomous beings with traits and even personalities,” while flat characters are “types or caricatures which embody a single idea or quality.”<sup>62</sup> Each of the characters present in a narrative, no matter how large or small, can help reveal a theme, idea, or detail through their presence, words, actions, thoughts, and emotions.

The narrator can reveal information on the characters either explicitly, by stating it within the narration of the story, or implicitly, by showing through the character’s words or actions, which may mean one thing on the literal level of meaning, but may point towards a deeper meaning on a hidden level of interpretation. Furthermore, the presence of characters on a scene, their entrance and exit, can also be important to the interpretation of the story. Tying closely with the plot and the narration of the story, careful attention to which characters and when they appear onstage can point towards the point which the author wishes to express.<sup>63</sup>

### Literary Devices

There is a variety of literary devices that an author can use. These literary devices are an implicit commentary made by the author on the narrative, for the purpose of conveying the

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<sup>61</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330.

<sup>62</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 102.

<sup>63</sup> Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 97.

message to the reader in an evocative and impactful manner.<sup>64</sup> Literary devices are rich in meaning beneath the surface, and requires the reader to move between the levels of literal and metaphorical meanings while reading. The main types of literary devices found in the Gospel of John are misunderstanding, irony, and symbols.

Misunderstanding typically involves a statement that is misinterpreted by its hearers in the story. They only hear the literal meaning of the statement, whereas the true intention of the statement is actually revealed in the deeper level of meaning. The misinterpretation of the statement then leads to an offering of the true explanation. In the Gospel of John, this occurs most often in dialogues with Jesus, and they “provide an opportunity to explain the meaning of Jesus’ words and develop significant themes further,” and “their effect on the reader is greater than if the meaning had merely been stated plainly from the beginning.”<sup>65</sup>

Irony also involves the interaction between an apparent meaning and a hidden layer of meaning, but it is also an invitation for the reader to share in the narrator’s perspective. The characters within the narrative are unaware of the irony being played out, which is different from misunderstandings, because a misunderstanding between characters is typically addressed within the narrative. In the irony, the characters are ignorant or willfully blind to the deeper level of meaning, which is usually contradictory or incompatible with the surface level, while “the reader is invited by the irony to leap to the higher level and share the perspective” of the narrator.<sup>66</sup>

A symbol is commonly an object used by the author that points toward or represents a different meaning, and connects different spheres of meaning within one symbol. The symbol is the vehicle in which meaning is represented, and the reader must determine the tenor, or

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<sup>64</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 151.

<sup>65</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 152.

<sup>66</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 167.

meaning, of the symbol. A symbol does not have one exclusive meaning, but rather has a surplus of richness in meaning.<sup>67</sup> The purpose of a symbol is to bring about new insights or different perspectives in the reader. Furthermore, metaphors, imagery, and repeated motifs can often have a symbolic function, and there can arise clusters of symbols that relate to one another. What differentiates biblical symbolism from secular literary symbolism is the necessity for intertextuality, as the symbols found in the Gospel of John often find their roots in the Old Testament, and individual narratives within the Gospel are tied together by common symbols and themes that lend to a fuller definition and a richer interpretation.<sup>68</sup>

### **Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter 2 of the thesis will present a narrative analysis of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) with a focus on what the setting, narration, plot, characters, and literary devices reveal about the message of the narrative. In the same way, chapter 3 will present a narrative analysis of Jesus' passion and death found in John 19:16b-42. Chapter 4 will investigate the common elements and recurring themes between the two narratives, and develop how the connection between the two can unveil a different facet of meaning in interpreting the Gospel of John.

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<sup>67</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 182.

<sup>68</sup> Jean Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 123.

## CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF JOHN 2:1-12

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. 12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days (John 2:1-12 [NRSV]).<sup>69</sup>

The narrative of the wedding at Cana is the first sign that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John. The passage is delimited by a number of contextual factors, including the passage of time, a change in location, and a different set of characters. At the beginning of the episode, a clear time difference is indicated by the statement of “on the third day” (John 2:1a), which places a temporal separation between the previous episode and the present one. Furthermore, a new setting is presented, the village of Cana, whereas Jesus was previously indicated to be near Bethsaida. The end of the episode is primarily marked by a change in location, as the next episode speaks of Jesus going up to Jerusalem in John 2:13, although a change in time can also be interpreted, as the mention of the festival of the Passover introduces a new moment in time. The beginning and end of the narrative of the wedding at Cana is also demarcated by the mention of a character who does not reappear until much later in the Gospel. The mother of Jesus is

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<sup>69</sup> Scriptural quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

introduced for the first time at the beginning of the episode in John 2:1, and the episode concludes with the final mention of his mother in John 2:12, which marks a natural conclusion to the passage.

### **Setting and Narration**

At a glance, the narrative is set in a town called Cana, in the region of Galilee. More specifically, the events take place at the wedding banquet of a townsman. The narrative opens with a statement that establishes the setting: “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee” (John 2:1a). With the phrase “on the third day,” the narrator is already setting up the audience with high expectations for the story, as the length of three days is both symbolic to the Jews and foreshadows Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>70</sup> It was on the third day that God descended on Mount Sinai and gave the Law to Moses, and it will also be on the third day that Jesus rises from the dead.<sup>71</sup>

Alongside the temporal setting, the geographical and situational setting is also established in the simple opening statement. The wedding takes place in Cana of Galilee. There is nothing to indicate that the town of Cana has symbolic significance, but if the geography of Israel is taken into consideration alongside Jesus’ movements in the Gospel immediately preceding and following the narrative, it can be seen as another indication of the importance of this narrative. For preceding the narrative, the narrator described how Jesus was near the Sea of Galilee when he called Philip and Nathaniel to be his followers, as it was specified that “Philip was from Bethsaida” (John 1:44) and therefore implied that Philip and Nathaniel were actually in or near Bethsaida when they encountered Jesus. At the end of the narrative, it was said that “after this he went down to Capernaum” (John 2:12), which was closer to Bethsaida than Cana. Looking at the

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<sup>70</sup> Salazar, “The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” 273.

<sup>71</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 77.

path that Jesus travelled, he was first up at Bethsaida, travelled to Cana, and then returned in the same direction as Bethsaida to Capernaum. It means that Jesus went out of his way to attend the wedding at Cana, highlighting its significance. Furthermore, the setting of a wedding banquet is significant for its symbolic meanings and its relation to the Messianic expectations, which will be further explored in a later section of this chapter.

The only other statement made by the narrator on the setting is halfway through the narrative, when the narrator points out that “standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons” (John 2:6). This information is included only when it became relevant to the plot of the narrative, and its appearance breaks the flow of the dialogue and therefore becomes significant.

No other description of setting is included in the narrative by the narrator. The reader does not come to know how the wedding banquet proceeded, how many guests there were, nor what the groom’s house looked like. This minimalistic description of the setting calls the reader to focus instead on the plot and the characters, on the nature of Jesus’ miraculous sign of turning water into wine. It can be argued that even what the narrator does include in the description of setting is only present for its symbolic meaning, and every detail and moment is chosen by the narrator to correlate to the message they wish to convey.

The narrator, however, does not explicitly express their central message within the narrative. While in other parts of the Gospel of John the narrator takes on an omniscient, omniconnunicative perspective and explains the meaning of the signs and misunderstandings to the reader, this is not the case with the narrative of the wedding at Cana.<sup>72</sup> In the narrative, the narrator follows two perspectives, Jesus and the steward. Verses 1-8 are presented through the

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<sup>72</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 19.

perspective of Jesus, while verses 9-10 briefly follow the perspective of the steward for the revealing of the sign, and the narrative concludes with a return to Jesus' perspective. Although it can be seen that the narrator is able to move between the perspectives of different characters, they are no longer omniscient when the story follows Jesus' perspective. During the first part of the narrative, the narrator has a very limited, or even nonexistent knowledge of the psychological sphere, of the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters.<sup>73</sup> Only external words and actions are depicted in the encounter between Jesus, his mother, and the servants. The reader gets no hint of the thoughts or emotions of Jesus, unlike later with the steward, whose thoughts, "when the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from" (John 2:9), are revealed by the narrator.

Furthermore, unlike many of the other signs and stories in the Gospel, the author of the Gospel never provides an explanation for the meaning or purpose of the sign, either through the narrator or through Jesus' explicit speech. This makes the narrative feel incomplete, missing the concrete answer, the point of including the narrative in the Gospel. This, however, draws the reader to make connections between the narrative of the wedding at Cana and the narrative of the Cross, which is another sign that is never explicitly explained and is seen as the fulfillment of the sign of the wedding. This connection between the two narratives will be more fully expounded in chapter 4 of the thesis.

The narrator also manipulates the pace of the story to highlight the important parts of the event, which differs from what the readers might expect to hear about a wedding. The events before the wine ran out are completely missing. The story skips from the narrator's comment that "Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding" (John 2:2) straight into the mother

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<sup>73</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 5.

of Jesus approaching him “when the wine gave out” (John 2:3a). The events from Jesus departing Bethsaida, arriving in Cana, and the entirety of the wedding feast – and it must have been a long feast, for all the wine to have been drunk by the guests – were omitted. This abrupt jump disorients the reader, creating a confusing and suspenseful tone to the narrative, which is then maintained by a slow narration of the words and actions of Jesus, his mother, and the servants. The *in media res* beginning to the story, the limited perspective of the narrator, and the slow, moment-by-moment recounting of speech and actions combine to create the effect of keeping the reader in the mystery of the moment, for the readers are held in suspense just as the disciples were, having no advanced knowledge of how the story is going to end.

Through the manipulation of the setting and narration, therefore, the author of the Fourth Gospel both highlights the importance of this narrative and creates a suspenseful and pensive tone, which encourages the reader to delve more deeply into the narrative and to figure out the meaning communicated through the plot, characters, and literary devices.

### **Plot**

The plot of narrative can be divided as follows: verses 1-2 mark the exposition; 3-5 introduce the complication; 6-8 describes middle of the plot, the activity of the miraculous sign; 9-10 can be seen as a reaction to the sign and a movement towards the end; and 11-12 mark the conclusion, describing the newly established situation and transitioning to the next episode of the Gospel.<sup>74</sup> In the exposition, the narrator establishes the setting and introduces the characters. They present the pre-complication situation of the narrative. There was a wedding, a joyous occasion, which Jesus and his disciples were invited to partake in. Everything appears to be progressing well, though it was to be only very brief.

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<sup>74</sup> This structure of the plot is adapted from the divisions made by Salazar, “The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” 272 and by Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 78-79.

The complication that then arises can seem almost inconsequential at first glance – it is not an issue which threatens the life or livelihood of any person, unlike the people who later approach Jesus with sickness, permanent disability, or even death.<sup>75</sup> On closer consideration, however, perhaps the running out of wine does indeed have major consequences for the wedding feast, because wine is a source of happiness and merriment and a symbol of the hospitality of the bridegroom, and running out of wine would be an embarrassment to the family.<sup>76</sup> Jesus’ mother brings this complication to the attention of Jesus by telling him that “they have no wine” (John 2:3), and makes it Jesus’ concern by her implicit request for him to do something.<sup>77</sup> His mother’s statement is neutral in and of itself, and the request hidden within is only made apparent by Jesus’ response of “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” (John 2:4a).<sup>78</sup> The tension rises, as Jesus’ response to his mother of “my hour has not yet come” (John 2:4b) appears to be a refusal to act.<sup>79</sup>

Jesus’ response to his mother can seem problematic when reading the narrative, because Jesus’ refusal appears to contradict with his subsequent actions, and therefore it becomes an illogical point in the plot. Furthermore, his rebuke of his mother is difficult to interpret, and it has been commented on by many scholars who dealt with this passage. To the reader, it is evident that “there was nothing inordinate [in Mary’s request], which would have deserved a refusal.”<sup>80</sup> Yet Jesus appears to distance himself from the situation, and in some translations of the text to also distance himself from his mother, as he says “Woman, why do you involve me?” (John 2:4 [NIV]), or “what have you to do with me?” ([RSV]), or “how does your concern affect me?”

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<sup>75</sup> Diel and Solotareff, *Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, 79.

<sup>76</sup> Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel,” 77.

<sup>77</sup> Salazar, “The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” 274.

<sup>78</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 81.

<sup>79</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 83.

<sup>80</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 141.

([NAB]).<sup>81</sup> At the level of the plot, this verse is illogical, while the talk about the ‘hour’ of Jesus invites the reader to look further in the narrative for answers, it has “little role in the story at hand.”<sup>82</sup> Different perspectives, however, will provide a different interpretation of this incongruence and reveal new insights, through the characterization of the mother of Jesus and through the meaning of the hour and what it foreshadows.

Set up for the complication is completed with the following verse, which shows how Jesus’ mother seemingly ignores Jesus’ denial and instead speaks to the servants to “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). The narrator uses this verse both to push the plot forward by introducing the relevant characters who would carry out Jesus’ orders, but also to indicate to the reader that something unexpected is going to happen. Since Jesus had just rejected his mother’s request for help in the narrative, the reader would not expect that she would act as if he had agreed instead. Her unexpected and seemingly senseless words to the servants are the first indication that something extraordinary is going to happen in the narrative. Secondly, her words “do whatever he tells you” seem to convey the feeling that she was “afraid that the servants might be abashed by an order given them [by Jesus], and not seeing how the order will provide the wine, might hesitate to fulfill it.”<sup>83</sup> When the reader reads Mary’s words, they come to realize that “Mary is looking for a miracle,” and would therefore begin to expect something marvelous to happen in the narrative.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Greek text of John 2:4 is written as “Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί”, which, translated literally, it says “What is it to me and to you?” The question is ambiguous in meaning, and the context does not make it clear what the statement could mean. Many translations refer to other appearances of the phrase in the Bible, where the statement is usually used by the speaker as a rejection of commonality between the speaker and the addressee. Yet the phrase does not appear elsewhere in the Gospel of John, so there is no reference for how the author of the Fourth Gospel intended to use the phrase, which results in a variety of translations that reflect different theological understandings of the role of Mary and her relationship to Jesus.

<sup>82</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 87.

<sup>83</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 113.

<sup>84</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 113.

The core of the plot, the miraculous sign performed by Jesus, is contained in the next section of the narrative, although it is not evident at first glance that something miraculous is happening. The section is opened by an interjection by the narrator about the presence of the water jars, which delays the action and prolongs the suspense. Jesus first instructs the servants to fill the jars with water, and then to “draw some out, and take it to the chief steward” (John 2:8). The servants are shown to simply follow Jesus’ orders, and it is only when the steward tastes what the servants brought that the miraculous transformation is revealed.<sup>85</sup> The scope of the transformation is further revealed through the steward’s interaction with the bridegroom, in which the steward reveals that “everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk” (John 2:10a), and that the wine which Jesus transformed is indeed excellent wine, perhaps even the best.

Notably absent from the narrative, however, is a clearly identifiable climax, a ‘moment’ of dramatic and heroic action which acts as the direct causal agent for the resolution of the complication.<sup>86</sup> The narrator shows the orders of Jesus and the actions of the servants in preparation for the changing of water into wine, and the reader sees the reaction of the steward to the wine, but any indication of a miraculous action from Jesus himself is omitted. Instead, the water has changed into wine in between moments, sometime between the servants drawing the water and it being delivered to the chief steward. Although not a satisfactory resolution from a narrative perspective, this decision made by the author highlights for the reader the theological message that the power of God is rooted in mystery, not requiring an outward sign of word or action, and that Jesus is not to be equated with a worldly miracle-worker.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 88.

<sup>86</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel,” 78.

The narrative concludes with a summary statement of the outcome of the sign which Jesus performed, and while it is short, it is both significant and spectacular. The author reveals to the reader that this episode is not a story about a mere miracle or simple action, but a sign one which is so marvelous that it contains a revelation of Jesus' glory, which is the glory of God.<sup>88</sup> The conclusion also reveals that Jesus' disciples believed in him as a result, which sets an example for the reader as to what the proper response to the revelation of God's glory is, whether encountered through immediate experience as the disciples did, or through the reading of the Gospel. The final verse of the passage is a transitional sentence which indicates that Jesus departed from the village of Cana with his family and disciples, decisively concluding Jesus' interactions with the place within this narrative.

A subplot of this narrative is the development of the disciples. Although they appear to be background characters in the story, their development is remarked upon by the narrator, and the events that occurred had a large influence upon them. The theme of the subplot can be called a change from unbelief to belief. At the beginning of the story Jesus had just gathered his disciples. They do not know anything about Jesus except the testimony of John the Baptist, who proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and the wedding at Cana is the first time that the disciples see Jesus acting in a semi-public manner. Throughout the narrative, the disciples are beside Jesus, listening and observing. They know what happened, are witnesses to the miraculous sign which Jesus performed. As a direct result of the events of the narrative, they come to believe in Jesus.<sup>89</sup>

The message of the plot, therefore, is that through the changing of water into wine for the wedding banquet, Jesus revealed his glory as the Word incarnate, and in beginning his ministry

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<sup>88</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 88.

<sup>89</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 81.

through this manifestation of his power, Jesus invited his disciples to believe in him, setting an example for the proper response the reader of the Cana narrative should have to Jesus, so that in believing in him they “may have eternal life” (John 3:15).

### **Characters**

The characters in the Cana narrative, in order of appearance, are the mother of Jesus, Jesus, his disciples, servants, the steward, the bridegroom, and Jesus’ brothers. Jesus is the protagonist of the story, while the mother of Jesus, the servants, and the steward are minor characters with dialogue or actions. The background characters include Jesus’ disciples, who are silent witnesses to the events, the bridegroom, who is mentioned but does not actually do anything in the narrative, Jesus’ brothers, who are not introduced until the very end, as well as the bride and the rest of the guests, who are implied in the scenario but never mentioned.

#### Jesus

Several important aspects about Jesus are revealed through the narrative. The first point of note is the relationship between Jesus’ divinity and humanity. Following the prologue of the Gospel of John, in which the divinity of Christ, the Word of God incarnate, is established, the author of the Gospel highlights the human aspect of Jesus’ identity.<sup>90</sup> From the very beginning of the narrative of the wedding at Cana, the narrator points out the relationship of Jesus to his blood relatives. Firstly, in presenting the characters of the narrative, the mother of Jesus is listed first and separately from all others, even before Jesus is named. The first verse of the narrative says that “on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there” (John 2:1). When it follows with the phrase “Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding” (John 2:2), it is implied that Jesus’ presence at the wedding is a result of familial

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<sup>90</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 81.

connections to the newly wedded couple, most likely through his mother. At the conclusion of the narrative, Jesus is told to have gone “down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples” (John 2:12), revealing the fact that although he has begun his earthly ministry by gathering his followers and revealing his glory through the sign performed at Cana, his ties to his family, the human aspect of his identity, is present and important to him.

Jesus’ humanity, though important, lies separated from his divinity and from the Messianic mission, and it is expressed through his objection to his mother’s request. Since the nature of his mother’s request and Jesus’ subsequent actions prove that he has not actually rejected her request, his words to her in that moment are significant in a different manner, that of revealing the nature and purpose of his mission. If Mary’s request is understood as a mother’s request to her son for a prodigious miracle, then Jesus would reject such a request on the basis that “he had not come to obtain worldly joys for the benefit of his family,” and therefore “resolutely dispels the idea of a favor granted to Mary by virtue of the family bonds which unite him to her.”<sup>91</sup> He is, therefore, denying a relationship to Mary based on blood, as seen by his address to his mother as ‘woman’, and instead stressing his “independence from human suggestions” where it pertains to the fulfillment of the plan of God.<sup>92</sup> Jesus’ mission, therefore, is to bring salvation to all, independent of familial bonds and worldly connections.

Yet Jesus was not opposed to the miraculous provision of wine for the happiness of the wedding guests, a material rather than spiritual need, as it is through “becoming savior of this wedding through a miracle” that Mary is requesting him to “manifest himself at last as the savior of men,” and the human and divine are closely connected.<sup>93</sup> Jesus, therefore, is revealed to

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<sup>91</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 133.

<sup>92</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 134.

<sup>93</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 119.

understand himself as both divine and human, but also to make the distinction between these two aspects of his identity. The reader is made aware that “if Jesus acts, it will be in accord with his own conscious purpose and design, not that of others.”<sup>94</sup>

Another characteristic of Jesus revealed through the narrative is the centrality of his role. The center is the source or focus of transformation, and in the narrative Jesus is depicted at the center through a manipulation of setting and narration.<sup>95</sup> Jesus is depicted as being stationary due to the fact that only speech passages are associated with Jesus, and it is the other characters who enter and exit the scene. He speaks, and the people around him act. His mother approaches him with the request, and moves away to speak to the servants. The servants come and go, filling the jars with water and then leaving to deliver the wine to the steward. These actions hold Jesus as the physical center, but also point towards a necessity of having Jesus as the spiritual center of believers’ lives, especially as the author establishes him as the source of divine power and grace.

### Mary

The mother of Jesus is the second-most prominent character in the story, and although she is active in only half of the narrative, the role she plays is quite large. She is the first character to be introduced, which indicates from the very beginning her importance, both for the narrative and as an example to the reader. In the narrative of the wedding at Cana, Mary is presented as a type character, modeling for the reader the kinds of traits that a child of God, a believer of the Word, should demonstrate.<sup>96</sup> Her role as a type character is indicated by her anonymity throughout the Gospel, but her situation is also unique. It is typical in the Bible that “anonymity is the lot (and mark) of supernumeraries, type characters, institutional figures,

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<sup>94</sup> Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel,” 78.

<sup>95</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 75.

<sup>96</sup> Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 32.

embodied plot devices,” and that “a character’s emergence from anonymity may correlate with a rise in importance.”<sup>97</sup> Since the mother of Jesus is never named, and always addressed as “mother of Jesus” or “woman,” there is a certain degree of typology in the character of Mary. The author wishes to convey that the reader is invited to imitate the traits that she exhibits, and she becomes a model and example of faith. At the same time, her anonymity is contradictory to the importance and uniqueness of her role in the Gospel, which will be discussed later. This creates the opening for a variety of opinions on Mary, with some Christians arguing against any importance of Mary, while others place her on a high pedestal based on her uniqueness.<sup>98</sup>

For now, however, the character of Mary is presented in the narrative as exhibiting several traits that are necessary for a person to “become the children of God” (John 1:12) and to “have eternal life” (John 3:16). Firstly, within the narrative, the character of Mary has a symbolic function. Through her words and actions, she points the reader ahead, towards the hour of Jesus’ glorification.<sup>99</sup> It is in response to her that the narrator makes Jesus reveal the concept of the hour, triggering the first foretelling in the Gospel of the fulfillment of the Messianic mission that will occur. She is, therefore, an exemplar of how Christians, as bearers of the Word, should act in pointing humanity towards Christ. She is the human instrument “in bringing the revealer to the church,” and it is both a unique role of Mary and an example of the Christian calling.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, Mary is shown to have a deep and unwavering faith. In the Fourth Gospel, when she approached Jesus, he had yet to manifest his power and there is no indication in the

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<sup>97</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330.

<sup>98</sup> This thesis will not seek to answer the debate on Mary. Instead, it will take a more central stance that is focused on the analysis of the chosen texts based on the chosen methodology. By taking a more balanced stance, the text will neither be reduced to a more literal reading that is focused solely on her character as a type, nor will the analysis attempt to attribute meaning to the text that is more influenced by external sources and theology from other parts of the Bible than by the chosen narratives themselves.

<sup>99</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 133.

<sup>100</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 134.

Gospel that Mary has witnessed any miracle performed by Jesus.<sup>101</sup> Yet, she is confident in asking Jesus to provide the wine, rather than looking for other, more conventional solutions, because she already believes in the power that Jesus has, without requiring any outward or previous proof.<sup>102</sup> It is further developed in her reaction to Jesus' objection. She does not become disappointed or bitter at his distancing from her, nor does she give up. Jesus makes the distinction between his Messianic identity and his familial relationships, and his mother recognizes it and acts accordingly. She shows "total and unswerving trust in the efficacy of the word of Jesus," and takes the initiative to instruct the servants to obey Jesus.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, her faith is humble and open. Her confidence that Jesus will act is not based upon the influence of her familial relation, nor on unceasing demands from herself, but on humility and love, and she demonstrates an openness to Jesus' will in that she does not dictate to Jesus how the miracle should occur, but rather tells the servants to be open to whatever Jesus might tell them to do.<sup>104</sup>

Thirdly, the narrative reveals the depth of Mary's concern and love for the community. Although it is unknown her relationship to the bridegroom or bride, she is presented as the only person who notices the lack of wine at the feast and is concerned enough to take initiative to resolve the issue.<sup>105</sup> She was "sensitively present to the situation," and becomes proactive.<sup>106</sup> Not only was she aware of the arising issue, she was also aware and sensitive to the proper time for Jesus' manifestation of power. With the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, as indicated by the calling of the disciples, Mary is aware that "the period in which Christ willed to reveal himself as Savior had begun," and therefore she sensed the endorsement for her boldness to ask for the first

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<sup>101</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 115.

<sup>102</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 83.

<sup>103</sup> Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 141.

<sup>105</sup> Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel," 79.

<sup>106</sup> Salazar, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 283.

manifestation of God's glory.<sup>107</sup> As a result, the mother of Jesus was invited to cooperate with Jesus and to participate the salvific mission and the glorification of God, for the phrase "what concern is that to you and to me" (John 2:4) can be seen as Jesus' acknowledgement of the cooperation between them, that the concern relates to both himself and his mother. As a character, she can be viewed as a type and example for all believers, to not wait passively but to take action in addressing the problems and injustices of the world, to participate in God's plan of salvation, and to help realize the glorification of God.<sup>108</sup>

While the traits and actions of Mary serve as an example that the reader is called to follow, Mary's uniqueness and importance is also not to be forgotten. As emphasized by the narrator through giving Mary the primary position in the listing of characters both at the beginning of the narrative and at the conclusion, the reader is reminded that Mary is the very first person to have true, unwavering faith, even before Jesus' first manifestation of power, and her primacy in both faith and participation in God's salvific plan is special.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Jesus' address of her as 'woman' and rejection of her biological motherhood raises her to the level of spiritual motherhood, a symbol which will be fully revealed at the foot of the cross.<sup>110</sup> Mary's importance, however, must be remembered as always secondary to Jesus, who is both the protagonist in the story and the divine Word of God, while she is merely human.

#### Minor Characters

The minor characters who play relevant roles include the servants and the steward. The servants are obedient to both Mary's instruction and Jesus' orders, performing the actions without any indication of doubt, hesitation, or derision, even though the requests from Jesus

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<sup>107</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 117.

<sup>108</sup> Salazar, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John," 274.

<sup>109</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 84.

<sup>110</sup> Huang, "The Meaning of "Woman" in John 2:4 and 19:26," 164.

would have seemed ridiculous or at the very least confusing. Their role, however, demonstrates a “perfect obedience to Jesus’ word. This is noted three times: by Mary’s word, by the waiters filling the jars as Jesus directed, and by their obedience to his command to bring the jars to the chief steward.”<sup>111</sup> The steward serves as a plot device to reveal the miracle to the reader, but he also becomes the subject of irony. The reader knows that the wine came from the transformation of water into wine by Jesus, but the steward clearly does not know and ends up confronting the wrong person, the bridegroom, who does not have the answers. The steward is the example of a person who is foolishly ignorant of the amazing miracle which has occurred in his presence, who is blind to the manifestation of God’s power. The steward, then, becomes a type for those who are unable to see or to accept God’s grace, for Jesus’ ministry is veiled.<sup>112</sup> The narrator clearly wishes to juxtapose the steward with the servants by commenting that “though the servants who had drawn the water knew” (John 2:9b), even breaking the flow of narration to highlight this, creating a contrast between the foolishness of the steward and the knowledge of the servants.

Although background characters have a very minimal role in the narrative, sometimes their presence contributes to the themes of the overall narrative. The disciples, it has been established, come to believe in Jesus after the sign he performed. Although it is a faith based on visible signs, and therefore not completely adequate, it can represent the first step of faith, to see the sign and come to believe in Jesus.<sup>113</sup> The disciples also represent the aspect of bearing witness to the manifestation of God’s power.

Similarly, the brothers of Jesus are included in the narrative to serve a particular purpose. They are never mentioned in the narrative except at the very end, just as they were departing

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<sup>111</sup> Grassi, “The Role of Jesus’ Mother in John’s Gospel,” 78.

<sup>112</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 173.

<sup>113</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 116.

from Cana, although it was implied by the narrator that they had been at the wedding feast as well. They serve no role in the passage immediately following the Cana narrative, so their purpose is not to set up for the next section of the Gospel. Their inclusion, therefore, has a particular significance, which is that they help highlight the human aspect of Jesus. The presence of Jesus' brothers, along with the mention of his father in the previous chapter (John 1:45) and the inclusion of his mother in the Cana narrative, serve to establish the humanity of Jesus as a counterpart to his divine identity as the Word of God incarnate.<sup>114</sup>

Through an analysis of the individual characters present within the narrative, several themes are revealed. The character of Jesus is the roundest, and the author uses the narrative to reveal to the reader several aspects of Jesus' life and mission, including both his divinity and humanity, as well as how the human aspect of his identity must not have any influence on the divine mission of God. The other characters in the narrative are types, with traits that represent either a proper or a wrong response to the manifestation of Jesus' glory in the sign at Cana. The mother of Jesus is an example of unconditional and unwavering faith, of great love and humility, and of active participation in the mission of Christ. At the same time, she is unique in her place among humanity. The servants represent the obedience to the Word of God that the reader is called to imitate, while the disciples demonstrate faith and bearing witness in the world. The steward is the antitype, acting as a negative example of foolishness and ignorance.

### **Literary Devices**

Literary devices are extremely rich in meaning and often have a deep impact on the reader, which is probably why the author of the Fourth Gospel employs so many literary devices in a myriad of ways in the narratives. The narrative of the wedding at Cana is replete with

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<sup>114</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 89.

symbolism, and dramatic irony also plays a significant role in the narrative to emphasize the message of the story. To be able to understand the meaning of the symbols employed by the narrator, it is necessary to have knowledge of Old Testament motifs as well as the prologue of the Gospel of John, which summarizes and presents all of the key concepts and symbols of the entirety of the Gospel, and acts as a meta-narrative.<sup>115</sup>

## Symbols

### Word

In the prologue of the Gospel, the author establishes that Jesus is the Word of God incarnate, through whom light, life, grace, and truth comes into the world. Jesus, the Word, was with God in the beginning, and the world was created through the Word. This theme is reflected in the narrative in Jesus' orders to the servants. Jesus speaks, and it was done: "Jesus said to them... And they filled them up... He said to them... So they took it." (John 2:7-8). The structure of the phrases echo the creation narrative in Genesis 1, to which the prologue of the Fourth Gospel refers. Furthermore, Mary told the servants to "do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). This repeated emphasis on the theme of word and speech by the narrator points towards Jesus' identity as the Word incarnate, and also towards Jesus' mission to call humanity to faith and obedience to the Word.<sup>116</sup>

### The Third Day

The phrase that sets up the scene of the narrative is already replete with symbolic meaning that alerts the reader to the significance of the proceeding events in the narrative. In relation to the Old Testament, the third day represented the manifestation of the presence of God to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, and the giving of the Law to the people (Exodus

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<sup>115</sup> Zumstein, "Intratextuality and Intertextuality in the Gospel of John," 123.

<sup>116</sup> Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother*, 34.

19:11).<sup>117</sup> By linking the wedding at Cana to the Israelites at Sinai, Jesus' manifestation of his glory is equated to God's manifestation at Sinai, and the reader is made to understand that the miracle turns into a sign that reveals "the incarnate Son whose very presence in our world is God's definitive revelation of His infinite love."<sup>118</sup> This connection between Mount Sinai and the wedding at Cana will also shape the understanding of the symbolism of water.

Furthermore, if the narrative is read in relation to the previous narrative, the wedding at Cana can be seen also "as the climax of the first week of the "new creation", occurring on the seventh day in the Gospel narrative.<sup>119</sup> It is possible to make a connection between the narrative of Cana and the seventh day because the narrator had been very deliberate in marking the passage of time in John 1:19-51.<sup>120</sup> As a result, the Gospel's parallel to the creation narrative in Genesis is highlighted, and the message of new life as children of God which Jesus invites the reader into in the rest of the Gospel is previewed in the wedding at Cana.

Not only is the phrase "on the third day" a reference to the themes of creation and the manifestation of glory in the Old Testament, it is also a prefiguring of the resurrection and contains Eucharistic overtones in relation to the joy and celebration of the victory over death.<sup>121</sup> By drawing attention to the symbolism of the third day, Jesus' glory revealed at Cana anticipates "the time of fulfilment and of the glory of Jesus revealed in his resurrection "on the third day", and heightens the reader's expectations of the narrative.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 77.

<sup>118</sup> Stanley, "Cana as Epiphany," 86.

<sup>119</sup> Stanley, "Cana as Epiphany," 85.

<sup>120</sup> Through the narrative of 1:19-51, the events are presented with clear temporal vocabulary marking out four days. The first day (John 1:19-28) sees the Jewish officials confronting John the Baptist, on the second day (1:29-34) Jesus is baptized, the third day (1:35-42) witness Jesus calling his first disciples, and on the fourth day (1:43-51) Jesus travels to Galilee and calls Philip and Nathaniel. Thus, the narrative of the wedding at Cana, by beginning with the phrase "On the third day" (2:1), can be regarded as occurring on the seventh day.

<sup>121</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 193.

<sup>122</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 128.

## Wedding

The setting of the wedding also draws the reader's attention to a deeper symbolic meaning. Jesus is presented by the narrator as a bridegroom in place of the actual bridegroom of the wedding in two ways. The first is the irony of Jesus' centrality in the narrative. The second is the fact that Jesus' actions can "be seen as fulfilling the role of the bridegroom," by providing the wine for the wedding when it ran out.<sup>123</sup> The narrator reveals this even to the reader who may be unaware of cultural conventions of the time by including within the narrative the confrontation between the steward and the bridegroom, as the steward "places the responsibility for [the good wine] on the bridegroom: "but *you* have kept the good wine until now.'" (John 2:10).<sup>124</sup>

The wedding as a symbol, therefore, points towards Jesus as the bridegroom of a different kind of marriage. As the prologue of the Gospel stated, the purpose of the Word coming into the world is to draw people to God, to give them the "power to become children of God" (John 1:12), which can be understood as "the wedding of the Messiah and his people."<sup>125</sup> Moreover, throughout the Old Testament, the covenant between God and the people of Israel is represented by the image of a wedding.<sup>126</sup> The eternal love of God for his bride, the people, is the central motivation for the incarnation of the Word, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus' presence at the wedding, and its existence as the locale of the first sign, therefore, "is a sign that the eschatological messianic time has already arrived."<sup>127</sup> It is through Jesus that

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<sup>123</sup> Edward W. Klink III, "The Bridegroom at Cana: Ignorance is Bliss," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 236.

<sup>124</sup> Klink, "The Bridegroom at Cana," 236.

<sup>125</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 193.

<sup>126</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 129. Wedding as the symbol of the covenant and the relationship of husband and wife symbolizing the relationship between God and Israel can be found throughout the Old Testament. Some examples include Isa 54:4-10; 62:2-5; Jer 2:2, 31:32; Ezek 16:8-14, 59-60; Hos 2:2-23.

<sup>127</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 130.

the world will be reunited to God, and the reader is invited by the wedding narrative to belief and to a more intimate relationship with God. This understanding of the wedding as a Messianic banquet is conveyed through the interaction between Jesus and his mother. On one level, Mary was asking Jesus for natural wine, and on this level Jesus' objection to her kind-hearted request to help the bride and groom is unwarranted, and Jesus is shown to recognize this by ultimately fulfilling her request. On a different level, however, Mary is seen as requesting Eucharistic wine, "a bestowal of the Spirit" and a fulfillment of the Messianic promise, to which Jesus expresses that it is not yet time for the final hour of his Passion and glorification.<sup>128</sup> Although it is not yet the hour of the fulfillment of all Messianic expectations, the narrative reveals that the Messianic implications of Jesus' mission are already present and acting, and points forward in anticipation of that final fulfillment. Through the narrative, it is revealed that Jesus "is the Bridegroom who fulfills, deepens, reinforces and perfects all the announcements of the Scriptures."<sup>129</sup>

### **Wine**

Closely connected to the symbol of the wedding banquet is the symbol of wine. Wine can represent passion for life, a source of positive emotions such as joy, celebration, happiness, and love.<sup>130</sup> To run out of wine can mean running out of love for God and for the world, resulting in a lack of goodness, light, and even life itself, which is a sad situation for humanity. On a physical level, the wedding banquet has lost its source of joy. On a spiritual level, Jesus sees the darkness that is in the world and in peoples' hearts, and his purpose in coming into the world is to bring light and life to the people. Through the symbolism of the wedding banquet, Jesus is presented as the one who gifts "the food of the soul, capable of awakening spiritual enthusiasm."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Kilmartin, "The Mother of Jesus Was There," 220.

<sup>129</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 130.

<sup>130</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 193.

<sup>131</sup> Diel and Solotareff, *Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, 81.

Not only does Jesus restore joy to the banquet and to the world, the gift which he bestows is presented to be abundant and of the highest quality, and it is shown through the steward's statement of "but you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). The good wine represents all of the "grace upon grace" (John 1:16) that Jesus bestows, while the keeping of the good wine until *now* points towards the Word now incarnate in the world, and the fact that "the fulfilment of God's plan in salvation history begins to be fully realized *now*."<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, the details included in the narrative demonstrate the sheer "great quantity of good wine and highlights the time of eschatological abundance" brought into the world by the incarnation of the Word, for the water which was turned into wine was described to be a large quantity, six jars "each holding twenty or thirty gallons" (John 2:6) and filled "to the brim" (John 2:7).<sup>133</sup>

### **Water**

Just as the wine points toward the grace and abundance of joy Jesus provides, the water that is transformed points toward the incompleteness and lack of vitality that people experience without the grace of God. The water is poured into "six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification" (John 2:6), but "as a purification ritual, the use of this water is nothing but a convention."<sup>134</sup> When Jesus transforms the water into wine, symbolically he replaces "the water of the Jewish institutions, festivals, and Law with the wine of the Spirit and truth."<sup>135</sup> The symbolism of the third day has already prepared the reader for this level of understanding. For if Jesus' manifestation of glory at Cana is an echo of God's manifestation and giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, then the imperfections of Jewish Law and traditions "given through Moses" can

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<sup>132</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 132.

<sup>133</sup> Jojko, "The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana," 133.

<sup>134</sup> Diel and Solotareff, *Symbolism in the Gospel of John*, 80.

<sup>135</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 173.

only be perfected by the “grace and truth” that “came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).<sup>136</sup> The water of purification and the stone jars of Jewish ritual, therefore, are transformed into the wine of joy and celebration for the bridegroom who has come into the world. Furthermore, the number of the stone jars present further highlights the incompleteness of Judaism.<sup>137</sup> While the number seven represents perfection, the six stone water jars are just short of completeness, unable to provide the perfection that humanity is called to be by God, and so awaits the completion and perfection brought about by God’s coming.

### “Woman”

Jesus’ dialogue with his mother is troublesome in two major ways. The first is his address of her as ‘woman’. While it is understood that the word ‘woman’ is a polite address or an honourable title, and Jesus is shown to have used this form of address with other women in the Gospel, it is not what is expected of Jesus to call his own mother.<sup>138</sup> Yet in the narrative Mary’s name is never introduced, and the reader only knows of the mother of Jesus as ‘woman’. This is a purposeful choice by the author of the Gospel, and it is used by Jesus to convey a separation from biological relationships, and to represent the Messianic level of meaning in the narrative. By calling Mary woman instead of mother, Jesus intended “to mark a distance between her and himself [...] and to set a relationship with her on a plane where her title of mother by itself had no efficacy.”<sup>139</sup> Jesus does this to show that his mission must lie separate from human relations and blood ties, and that Mary “stands “outside” a mysterious “hour” that is part of the unknowable union between the Father and the Son.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 85.

<sup>137</sup> Salazar, “The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” 276.

<sup>138</sup> Kilmartin, “The Mother of Jesus Was There,” 219.

<sup>139</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 135.

<sup>140</sup> Moloney, *Belief in the Word*, 81.

The term ‘woman’, however, also sheds light on a different aspect of the relationship between Jesus and his mother. By calling Mary ‘woman’, Jesus is raising her to the level of his spiritual work, and “her presence is no longer exercised *on* Jesus, but *in the service of* Jesus.”<sup>141</sup> By raising Mary up to the Messianic level of meaning, the wine that she requests and the associated symbolism become more evident and poignant. Furthermore, this emphasizes Mary’s spiritual motherhood and involvement in Jesus’ Messianic mission, and “she may now participate in this messianic mission as ‘woman’ by involving herself in His first sign.”<sup>142</sup> By denying her biological motherhood, Mary becomes the mother of spiritual goodness, advocating on behalf of the people for Jesus to bestow the abundant graces of God.<sup>143</sup>

If it is acknowledged that the Gospel of John writes of a new creation that mirrors the creation narratives in Genesis, then the title of ‘woman’ also leads to another interpretation, that of Mary as the new Eve. Both are called ‘woman’, but while there existed “rivalry between Eve and the divine command as mediated by the serpent,” Mary exhibited obedience in response to her son and therefore became “a mimetic antitype to the character of Eve in Genesis 3:1-6.”<sup>144</sup>

### **The Hour of Jesus**

The other difficult aspect of Jesus’ dialogue with his mother is on the definition of the ‘hour’. There are several interpretations to what the hour can be pointing towards. On one hand, based on the context of the text, the hour of Jesus can be pointing toward the time of Jesus’ first miracle. This is a problematic interpretation because Jesus then immediately contradicts himself by performing the miracle, and could result in a view of Mary’s actions as an “imprudent meddling in the Messianic work of her Son and [...] an improper insistence upon her first

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<sup>141</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 135.

<sup>142</sup> Huang, “The Meaning of “Woman” in John 2:4 and 19:26,” 164.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 290.

<sup>144</sup> O’Halloran, “Mimetic Type and Antitype,” 234.

request.”<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, the hour can be speaking of the hour of Jesus’ passion and death, the fulfillment of the Messianic mission, and since it is not yet time, Jesus cannot recognize Mary’s motherhood.<sup>146</sup>

A suitable interpretation of the meaning of the hour should take into account both the context of the narrative as well as the connection to the rest of the Fourth Gospel. While the hour points toward the hour “of the glorification which comes to pass in the death of the cross,” it also designates the moments “in the development of the work of salvation.”<sup>147</sup> When Jesus speaks of the hour in the narrative of the wedding at Cana, it both foreshadows the hour of Jesus’ glorification on the cross, when God’s salvific plan will be fulfilled and God’s glory will be revealed, and indicates that the Messianic mission has already begun.<sup>148</sup> This first sign performed by Jesus “expresses a duality of the hour which is *already, but not yet* realized.”<sup>149</sup>

### Irony

The symbolism of the wedding works alongside the literary device of irony to further express the message of the narrative. A wedding marks the unification of two persons. They enter into a more intimate, lifelong relationship with one another. Typically, the bride and groom should be the main characters of such an event, as it is their day of union. In the narrative, however, the supposed main characters are pushed off to the side: the bride is never mentioned, and the bridegroom is identified, but is given no acting or spoken role. Instead, Jesus is the main character of the narrative, as the action revolves around him.<sup>150</sup> The narrator, by omitting mention of the bride and only speaking of the groom when it becomes necessary for the plot, sets

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<sup>145</sup> Kilmartin, “The Mother of Jesus Was There,” 213.

<sup>146</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 121.

<sup>147</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 123.

<sup>148</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 141.

<sup>149</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 138.

<sup>150</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 75.

up a situational dramatic irony, where Jesus becomes the main character of the wedding instead. This makes the wedding symbolism more poignant than it otherwise might have been, and calls the reader to share in the irony that Jesus has become the bridegroom, who “kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10). In such a context, the good wine represents the spiritual gifts and grace, and it is only with the coming of Jesus into the world that the culmination of goodness will be given to the world.<sup>151</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Through an analysis of the setting and narration, plot, characters, and literary devices of the story of the wedding feast at Cana in John 2:1-12, a number of literary and theological themes can be uncovered. The story highlights its own importance in the Gospel through the manipulation of setting. It begins with statements that alert the reader of a symbolic significance, therefore hinting towards something important happening in the narrative. The narrative also uses tools to immerse the reader into the world of the story, creating suspense through its pace of narration and employment of limited perspective, and disorients by jumping into the middle of the story. All of these literary ideas serve a higher function, to make the reader pay attention to the story, drawing their awareness and helping to interpret the theological themes present.

The narrative reveals two categories of theological insights: those pertaining to Jesus, and those pertaining to the believers. Through the episode of the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ identity as developed in the prologue of the Gospel has been confirmed, and the theme of Jesus’ salvific mission has been revealed. Jesus is the Word of God incarnate in the world. His power is demonstrated by drawing parallels between the impact of his speech and the creation narrative in Genesis, as well as by the performance of a miraculous sign without needing any external causal

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<sup>151</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 173.

agent. Jesus is both divine and human: he has a human family, but he also separates his divine mission from his human connections. The elements of Jesus' salvific mission is also revealed in the narrative, which can be summarized as: the Word became incarnate to draw people to union with God by revealing God's glory through the sign, which has the result of bringing joy and life into the world, and bestowing grace in abundance.

The narrative also describes how believers are called to respond. Through the example of the servants, the reader is called into knowledge rather than the foolish ignorance of the steward. By the example of the disciples the reader is called to believe in Jesus and bear witness to his life and work. His mother exemplifies the type of faith the children of God are to have, which is humble and steadfast. In her example humanity is also called to active participation in the works of Jesus. Through the wine of the wedding banquet the reader is called to be filled with love, joy, and passion for life.

Throughout the narrative, however, there are themes of incompleteness. The six stone water jars represent how the Jewish laws and traditions fall short of perfection. The hour of Jesus points towards the glorification of the Messiah and the fulfillment of Messianic promises, which, although it has already begun with the public ministry of Jesus, is also not yet realized, and looks forward to its completion on the cross.

## CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF JOHN 19:16b-42

**19** <sup>16</sup> So they took Jesus; <sup>17</sup> and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup> Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. <sup>21</sup> Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” <sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

<sup>23</sup> When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. <sup>24</sup> So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” <sup>25</sup> And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

<sup>28</sup> After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” <sup>29</sup> A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup> When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

<sup>31</sup> Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. <sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup> Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. <sup>35</sup> (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) <sup>36</sup> These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” <sup>37</sup> And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

<sup>38</sup> After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. <sup>40</sup> They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been

laid.<sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:16b-42).

Jesus' death on the cross marks the climax of the Gospel of John, the fulfillment of all that has been anticipated throughout the Gospel. The passage chosen for analysis is a series of six pericopes that tell the story of Jesus being crucified on the cross. The beginning of the narrative is demarcated by a change in geographical setting, as the judgement on Jesus has been proclaimed, and the crowd follows Jesus to the place of his crucifixion, Golgotha (John 19:17). The end of the narrative is marked by a change in time, as the next narrative, the story of Jesus' resurrection, begins with the statement that it was "early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark" (John 20:1), and a change in the cast of characters, as Mary Magdalene is presented as a central character. Furthermore, the final sentence of the present narrative marks a natural conclusion to the story, as the action of Jesus being laid in the tomb holds a tone of finality that concludes Jesus' crucifixion and death.

The narrative marks the seventh and final sign of the Fourth Gospel, closing the chiasmic structure of the narrative of the Gospel and forming an *inclusio* with the sign of the wedding at Cana.<sup>152</sup> In the book of Glory (John 13:1-20:31), which is the meta-story of the Last Supper, Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the narrative is part of the middle section depicting the events of the Passion and death of Jesus. The crucifixion narrative is preceded by the arrest and interrogation of Jesus (John 18:1-27), and the trial of Jesus before Pilate (John 18:27-19:16a).<sup>153</sup> The placement of the narrative in the meta-story, as the final section of the Passion and immediately preceding the resurrection account, is indicative of its position as the climax of the story, as the previous sections build up the tension and anticipation for this final sign.

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<sup>152</sup> Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel," 69.

<sup>153</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 545–47.

### Setting and Narration

The narrator reveals to the reader that the geographical setting is that of a place called The Place of the Skull, also known as Golgotha. Even from the beginning the setting gives off an ominous feeling, as the skull symbolizes death and points to the inevitable. Further information about the location of Golgotha are hidden within the narrator's commentary on other aspects of the narrative. Firstly, Golgotha was located outside of the city of Jerusalem, as it is indicated by the narrator that Jesus "went *out* to what is called The Place of the Skull" (John 19:17). The location of Golgotha is further clarified in the narrator's statement that "the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city" (John 19:20), meaning that it is a place not actually in the city. This, if read in the light of understanding that Jesus' crucifixion is the final sign and the hour of his glorification, could point towards an interpretation that the glory of God is not to be trapped within city walls, nor would it be exclusive to a single group of people. Considering that these details are found in the pericope of Pilate's inscription of Jesus' kingship, it can be seen that the setting is used by the narrator to add to the impact of the theological themes of the narrative. Furthermore, the narrator reveals at the very end that there was a garden situated in Golgotha, and that within the garden there was a new tomb (John 19:41). As a place of crucifixion, it follows logic that burial grounds would be situated nearby.

The temporal setting is indicated twice in the latter half of the narrative, but can also be found before the start of the narrative, as the whole narrative is a continuation of the meta-story of the Passion of Jesus. Jesus' crucifixion is said to have taken place on the day of Preparation for the Passover, in the afternoon (John 19:14). Combined with the recollection of John the Baptist's proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), the temporal setting is meant to direct the reader's

attention towards the Passover imagery in the narrative. This is most evidenced by the fact that the narrator interrupts the flow of the narrative to remind the reader of the fact that these events are happening on the day of Preparation at the beginning of the fifth pericope of the narrative (John 19:31), which is the pericope that contains the most evident Passover imagery. This direct reminder makes the Passover imagery all the more noticeable to the reader. Moreover, this detail is important in that it prompts the Jews to ask for the bodies on the cross to be removed, which then became a motive that led to the symbolic event of the piercing of Jesus' side.

Other relevant pieces of information on the setting are only included when they become relevant to the movement of the plot. The presence of the sour wine, sponge, and branch of hyssop (John 19:29) at the site of the crucifixion, and the fact that the place of crucifixion is near a garden with a new tomb, is revealed by the narrator only when they became necessary and served their purpose for plot and symbol. The narrator, therefore, uses the description of the different aspects of setting purposefully, to highlight the symbols that appear.

The narrator also manipulates the pace of narration and the perspective to make the story more poignant. The narrative consists of six individual snapshots in time, and the broken pace of narration serves to disorient the reader and immerse the reader more fully in the story, creating and heightening tension until the point of Jesus' death. Furthermore, the narrator focuses on the aspects of the events that are important to the author's message rather than the aspects typically expected of a crucifixion. While the reader "has waited so long for the event of the "lifting up" of Jesus," the narrator disappoints the reader by describing the event of the crucifixion in the briefest of terms, and "the narrator does not dwell on the bloody reality of a Roman crucifixion."<sup>154</sup> Instead, the pericopes chosen are unexpected and therefore disorienting.

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<sup>154</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 143.

Furthermore, the narrator uses the point of view to create a movement and a heightening of expectations that lead to the climax of the narrative, the moment of Jesus' death. Jesus, crucified on the cross, is presented as the center, and the characters of each pericope are located a certain distance from the cross. The author chose to order the pericopes so that the perspective shifts from the characters who are furthest away from the cross to those who are closer to the cross, and finally to the perspective of Jesus himself, at the center. In the first pericope, while there are no contextual clues as to whether or not Pilate and the chief priests have followed Jesus to Golgotha, they would have been the furthest away from the cross whether they were present or back in the city. The next pericope brings the perspective one step closer with the group of soldiers dividing Jesus' clothes between them. They would have carried out their actions not far from where they crucified Jesus, as the clothes were probably laid aside nearby after being removed. In the third pericope, the narrator clearly stated that the characters are "standing near the cross" (John 19:25b), within speaking distance to the crucified Jesus, which is another step closer to the cross as the center.

In the fourth pericope, the perspective arrives at the center, and the pericope is focused upon the words and actions of Jesus himself, as well as the moment of his death. The fifth pericope has the perspective move away from and then return to the cross, signalling a winding down of the plot away from the climactic moment, while in the last pericope the perspective moves away from the cross completely, as the body of Jesus is removed and placed in the tomb. This movement of perspectives creates a reading experience that gradually increases in tension and highlights the centrality of the cross as the focal point of transformation, while also outlining the shape of the plot.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 75.

Another aspect of narration that is prominent in the narrative of the cross is the presence and function of narrative interjections and commentaries. Each of the interjections serve to provide important information. Some reveal details that impact the interpretation of a certain symbol, while others speak of the relevant actions as the fulfillment of scripture. In the entire narrative, four instances of scriptural fulfillment can be found (John 19:24, 28, 36, and 37), and the emphasis made by the narrator on fulfillment points toward the overall theme that Jesus' death on the cross is the perfection and completion of Messianic expectations. By explicitly stating that Scripture is being fulfilled, the narrator makes it clear and leaves no room for misunderstanding that this is indeed the climactic moment of the Gospel when all expectations are brought to completion. Yet the narrator does not take away from the depth of the symbols themselves, for the narrator never explains the meaning of the scriptural passages or of the ultimate sign of Jesus' death, only simply stating that they have been fulfilled.

One unique narrative interjection that stands out is a narrative redundancy. John 19:18 states that "there they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them." The redundancy of the passage is that the relative position of the three crucified individuals is stated twice, firstly "with him two others, one on either side," and then "with Jesus between them." If the narrator was simply describing the setting in a typical manner, the first phrase is more than enough to paint the picture of how Jesus is crucified in between two others. Yet, as the only sentence that the narrator spares on the actual action of Jesus' crucifixion, the redundancy of the text draws the reader's attention to the point that it makes, which is the centrality of Jesus in the narrative.<sup>156</sup> By placing this commentary at the beginning of the narrative, it also serves the purpose of making the reader notice the theme of centrality

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<sup>156</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 194.

throughout the narrative, and makes the reader more perceptive to seeing how the shifting perspectives between pericopes move closer and closer to the center.

The setting and narration in this narrative, therefore, are used by the author to convey the importance of the centrality of Jesus on the cross, highlighting the crucifixion and death as the climax of the Gospel as well as providing insight to the meaning of the symbols in the narrative.

### **Plot**

Although composed of six individual pericopes, the shape of the plot can be seen through the perspective of the narrator, which sheds light on the development towards the climax of the narrative. The brief exposition can be considered as verses 16b-18, while 19-27 describe the complications that precede Jesus' death. Verses 28-30 mark the climax of the narrative, the moment of Jesus' death, and verses 31-42 tell of the events after Jesus' death, a movement toward the resolution of Jesus being buried.

In the exposition, the narrator sets up the situation, but does not introduce the characters until they are relevant to each pericope. From the outset, Jesus is described to be crucified on the cross, dying. By making the crucifixion part of the exposition and moving on quickly, the narrator dashes the reader's hope that the devastating event of Jesus' crucifixion is to be a complication that will be resolved happily at the end of the narrative, and accepts the fact that the crucifixion has become the reality and the backdrop in which other things will take place.

Three pericopes take place in the complication section of the narrative: the argument over the inscription (John 19:19-22), the division of garments (23-25a), and the dialogue with Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple (25b-27). If the initial situation is that Jesus is dying on the cross, then the complication can be thought of as the things which 'prevent' the death of Jesus:

events that must occur before Jesus can take his final breath, in order that his death might fulfill its purpose of the glorification of God and the birth of the church.

Firstly, Pilate orders that an inscription be written and placed on the cross, declaring Jesus to be “the King of the Jews” (John 19:19). Pilate’s action here serves as the means through which Jesus’ kingship is revealed to the world. Enthroned upon the cross, the pronouncement of Jesus as king takes on a deeper theological meaning, pointing to the fact that Jesus’ crucifixion and death are, in fact, his exaltation and glorification. Furthermore, the narrator’s commentary that “many of the Jews read this inscription,” because the inscription of the title “was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek” (John 19:20) reveals the nature of Jesus’ kingship. The fact that many Jews read the inscription points to the fact that the place of the crucifixion is not a remote and inaccessible place, but rather at a location of high traffic, where many passers-by can see. This, with the fact that the inscription was written in the three common and official languages of the land, as well as the fact that Golgotha is located outside of the city gates, point toward the desire of the narrator to express the universality of Jesus’ kingship.<sup>157</sup>

The Jews, with the chief priests at their head, take offense at Pilate’s wording of the inscription. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the author of the Fourth Gospel has portrayed ‘the Jews’ as being in opposition to Jesus at every turn, and it is they who have called for the death of Jesus. Not long ago in the narrative, the chief priests had just denied Pilate’s proclamation that Jesus is their king, and claimed that they had “no king but the emperor” (John 19:15). Pilate’s inscription, therefore, is a mockery of the Jews.<sup>158</sup> So they wish to change the wording of the inscription so

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<sup>157</sup> Hebrew (Aramaic) was the common language of Israel, Latin was the language of the Roman Empire, and Greek was the language of the Hellenistic culture that dominated the Mediterranean world. Mavis M Leung, “The Roman Empire and John’s Passion Narrative in Light of Jewish Royal Messianism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168, no. 672 (October 2011): 441.

<sup>158</sup> D. Francois Tolmie, “Pontius Pilate: Failing in More Ways Than One,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 596.

that the inscription proclaims to the world the criminal charge of Jesus' blasphemy rather than reflecting their own guilt and inability to accept the truth. Pilate, however, refuses to change, stating, "What I have written I have written" (John 19:22).

Secondly, for the soldiers who have finished their task of crucifying Jesus, it has come time to divide their reward. It is revealed that four soldiers have participated in the crucifixion of Jesus, as they divided the clothes "into four parts, one for each soldier" (John 19:23). The seamless tunic which the soldiers cast lots for is replete with symbolic meaning on the unity of the people of God and on the divine nature of Jesus' kingship. This pericope alerts the reader to the subversive character of the Messianic kingdom, as the glory of Jesus is revealed "in a context of humiliation."<sup>159</sup> The nakedness of Jesus on the cross is seen as "utter humiliation and deprivation of dignity," yet at the same time represents glory and victory, for through this Scripture is fulfilled.<sup>160</sup> The scripture passage to which the author of the Fourth Gospel refers is Psalm 22:18, "they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." Here, the intention of the author is not merely to comment on what happens to Jesus' clothing. To evoke the fulfillment of Scripture on something as worldly as clothing is not in the style or theology of the Fourth Gospel. Instead, here the fulfillment of Psalm 22:18 points toward not only the passage itself, but also to the whole psalm, which is a message of both lament and thanksgiving.<sup>161</sup> Through the psalm, the ultimate victory of God shines through, and the reader is made to understand that though the situation is one of humiliation and despair, through the cross will come glory and victory, and the fulfillment of the Messianic kingdom.

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<sup>159</sup> David A. Hubbard, "John 19:17-30," *Interpretation* 43, no. 4 (October 1989): 399.

<sup>160</sup> Juraj Fenik, "Clothing Symbolism in the Elijah-Elisha Cycle and in the Gospel of John," *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 13, no. 1 (2021): 64.

<sup>161</sup> John H. P. Reumann, "Psalm 22 at the Cross: Lament and Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ," *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1974): 39.

Thirdly, Jesus speaks to his mother and the beloved disciple, who, with the other women at the foot of the cross, have borne silent and unflinching witness of the crucifixion. Jesus gives the beloved disciple to his mother as her son, to provide and care for her now that her only son is dying on the cross. On the surface, this action of Jesus represents his filial love for his mother, in finding someone to care for her since he no longer could. The pericope, however, points to a deeper level of understanding that is related to the birth of the church. Firstly, Jesus “solemnly establishes a new relationship between his mother and his disciple” by using language that “explicitly calls upon a pattern of revelation.”<sup>162</sup> Secondly, Jesus first entrusts the beloved disciple to his mother by saying “Woman, here is your son” (John 19:26) before telling the disciple “Here is your mother” (John 19:27), which overturns the understanding that these words are Jesus’ dying request to the disciple to take care of his mother. Instead, by speaking to her first, “Jesus gives his mother a significant role as the mother of the disciple *par excellence* and the disciple is given a role as the son.”<sup>163</sup>

Mary and the beloved disciple are portrayed to have unhesitatingly accepted this, for “from that hour the disciple took her into his own home” (John 19:27). This points to the formation of a new form of family, which is based on discipleship, born of the cross, and exemplifying community as “children of God” (John 1:12). Finally, this third pericope references the ‘hour’ of Jesus, which has finally arrived. On one hand, the phrase “from that hour” (John 19:27) could mean ‘from that particular time’, but if the reader understands the symbolic meaning of the ‘hour’ in the Fourth Gospel, and recalls how the narrative of the wedding at Cana, which is the chiasmic counterpart to this narrative, has been pointing toward the hour of Jesus’ glorification, then the phrase “from that hour” takes on a different meaning. In this

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<sup>162</sup> Moloney, *Mary: Woman and Mother*, 45.

<sup>163</sup> Navidad, “Jesus’ Mother at the Foot of the Cross,” 64.

pericope, “from that hour” takes on the causal meaning of “because of that hour,” for the church is born “as a result of the lifting up of Jesus on the cross.”<sup>164</sup>

In the complication section, therefore, three things have taken place that are vital to the hour of Jesus’ glorification on the cross. Together, the three pericopes present the central theme of the crucifixion: that through Jesus’ death on the cross, he is proclaimed king over the whole world, and with his crucifixion comes victory over darkness and death (as promised in the prologue of the Gospel, John 1:4-5), and the beginning of the Messianic kingdom, which draws all peoples to Christ, to form a community of discipleship. The narrative recognizes the necessity of these things to occur before Jesus’ final breath, as the next pericope begins with the statement that it was only “after this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished” (John 19:28), that he “gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). It is possible, therefore, to view these three pericopes as the complication of the plot, things which impede the movement of the plot toward its destined end.

The climax of the narrative, when the final complication is resolved and all things foreshadowed in the Gospel comes to fulfillment, is presented in the fourth pericope (John 19:28-30). Jesus, knowing that “all was now finished” (John 19:28), says that he is thirsty, in order to fulfill the Scriptures. The difference, however, is that “in contrast to the statements of fulfillment in verses 24 and verses 36 and 37 the scripture reference is not quoted.”<sup>165</sup> Instead, Jesus’ thirst refers to earlier discussions in the Gospel on his suffering and death, such as when he says “Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11), which point towards the suffering he was to undergo to complete his mission. Therefore, Jesus’ statement that he was thirsty indicated that “he is ready to drink the last swallow from the cup given to him.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 145.

<sup>165</sup> Culpepper, “The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative,” 31.

<sup>166</sup> Culpepper, “The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative,” 32.

Sour wine is offered to him with a sponge on a branch of hyssop, and Jesus drinks both the physical wine and also the symbolic cup of suffering. After having received the wine, Jesus said “It is finished” (John 19:30), which is “an exclamation of achievement, almost of triumph,” for Jesus has completed the task which was given to him.<sup>167</sup>

Finally, Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). In the narrative, it is understood that this did not simply mean death, the spirit of life leaving his body to return to God, but also the outpouring of his spirit into the world, gifted to the church that had just been born at the foot of the cross.<sup>168</sup> This was to fulfill the promise that Jesus gave to his disciples that he would send the Spirit to them (John 16:7), and that those who believe in the Word will receive Spirit when Jesus is glorified (John 7:39). This is the climax of the narrative, the moment of the hour of death and glorification, of suffering and victory, and of the birth of the church at the foot of the cross, culminated in the outpouring of the Spirit at the moment of Jesus’ death.

The resolution of the narrative consists of two pericopes that speaks of the events following Jesus’ death (John 19:31-37, 38-42), which ends with the burial of Jesus. After Jesus had died, the Jews asked Pilate to have the bodies of the crucified men removed, for they were concerned with ritual purity for the Passover and for the Sabbath. The two who were crucified with Jesus were not yet dead, so the soldiers broke their legs. The reasoning and necessity for this act is revealed only indirectly by the narrator by commenting that “when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs” (John 19:33), but it is conveyed that the purpose of breaking their legs is for the rapid death of the men on the cross.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 146.

<sup>168</sup> The Greek verb that the author of the Fourth Gospel uses is “παρέδωκεν,” which has the primary meaning of to grant, bestow, or hand over, from the roots παρά and δίδωμι (to give). Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 146.

<sup>169</sup> Erkki Koskenniemi, Kirsi Nisula, and Jorma Toppari, “Wine Mixed with Myrrh (Mark 15.23) and Crurifragium (John 19.31-32): Two Details of the Passion Narratives,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4 (June 2005): 388.

Without the necessity of breaking Jesus' legs, the reader is told that, instead, "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out" (John 19:34). The soldier's motivation is unknown. Perhaps it was to ascertain that Jesus was indeed dead. In any case, the crucial point of this action lies in its symbolic meaning, and the narrator takes special care to emphasize that this event happened, by saying that "he who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (John 19:35). This repeated emphasis on testimony and truth highlights for the reader the importance of the water and blood flowing from Jesus' side.<sup>170</sup> In particular, the narrator states that the testimony given is "so that you also may believe," meaning that the symbol of the water and blood crucial for the faith of the reader. It can be seen as the culminating symbol of the narrative of the cross, and it is indicated that this event fulfilled two separate passages of Scripture: that "none of his bones shall be broken," and that "they will look on the one whom they have pierced" (John 19:36, 37). The former contributes to the imagery of Jesus as the Passover Lamb, while the latter is a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10 and points toward Jesus as the salvation. The fulfillment of "they will look on the one whom they have pierced" (John 19:37) is meant to indicate to the reader that "all will look on the pierced Jesus, and that they should look with faith, toward their salvation," and it is a completion of the theological theme of the Gospel, that Jesus is glorified in being lifted up and brings salvation and new life to those who believe.<sup>171</sup>

Finally, two men, who were shown to be disciples of Jesus but who were seemingly not at the foot of the cross during Jesus' crucifixion, come forth to take care of the burial rites for Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea obtained from Pilate the permission to take Jesus' body, and

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<sup>170</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 147.

<sup>171</sup> See John 3:14-15; 8:28; and 12:32 for how Jesus talks about believing in him who is to be lifted up on the cross as a source of life, and as a reference to Num 21:8-9. Martinus J. Menken, "The Textual Form and the Meaning of the Quotation from Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (July 1993): 507.

Nicodemus provided the spices and linens required to embalm Jesus. They find “a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid” (John 19:41) in the garden at Golgotha, and place Jesus in the tomb. The reader is given the sense that Jesus’ burial was done hastily, for the reasoning behind Jesus’ burial in that particular tomb was that “it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby” (John 19:42), indicating a lack of time for any other option. Interestingly, the preparation of Jesus’ body for burial was not done by any of the women who were at the foot of the cross, nor by Jesus’ own mother, but by two secret disciples of Jesus.

The plot of the crucifixion narrative, therefore, can be seen as that of glorification and victory, fulfillment, and the birth of the church. Leading up to the climactic moment of Jesus’ death as the completion of all things, it was necessary to make clear the meaning and impact of Jesus’ death through the symbolic pericopes, so that all who read the narrative come to understand that the crucifixion is the means through which God proclaims victory over darkness and death, ushering in the Messianic kingdom with Jesus as the king, which takes on the form of a community rooted in belief in the Word incarnate, in love and discipleship, and in unity. Having made these things clear, Jesus’ moment of death is revealed as the moment of the outpouring of the Spirit to the believers, so that those who come to believe are born into new life.

### **Characters**

The characters of this narrative include Jesus, the other two crucified men, Pilate, the Jews led by the chief priests, the soldiers, four women (Jesus’ mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene), the beloved disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. Aside from Jesus, these characters serve as type or functional characters, demonstrating either a proper, positive response in faith to the glorification of Jesus on the cross, or a negative response of unbelief.

## Jesus

Jesus is once again the central protagonist of the narrative, for even though he appears only briefly at the beginning and then only in the latter three pericopes, the events surrounding the inscription and the division of clothing can still be seen as divine providence coming from Jesus' identity as the Son of God.<sup>172</sup> Three things are revealed about Jesus through the narrative: that he always maintained autonomy and power over his life, that he has an intense love for the people of the world, and that he demonstrated full and unhesitating obedience to God's plan.

Firstly, it is indicated throughout the narrative that all of the events of the crucifixion, up to and including the moment of his own death, were of Jesus' own volition and according to his will and that of the Father. The narrator stated that Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha "by himself" (John 19:17). This was the first sign in this narrative that Jesus' crucifixion and death were playing out in accordance with God's plan, and that Jesus had control over his own autonomy. Another indication was that Jesus had full knowledge of all that needed to take place, for he knew when everything had been completed, and acknowledged it by saying "It is finished" (John 19:30). Most importantly, the moment of Jesus' death was of his own choosing. When he gave up his spirit, he had control over the precise moment when he would give it up and pass into death, and "no one takes his life from him."<sup>173</sup> Jesus' autonomy points toward his divine nature even as his human body is undergoing humiliation and suffering, and reveals to the reader that all of these events took place according to God's will, so that the cross is transformed into the locus of salvation and life.

Secondly, Jesus' words on the cross in relation to his mother and the beloved disciple points towards his love for humanity, who is represented through the two figures receiving his

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<sup>172</sup> Hubbard, "John 19:17-30," 399.

<sup>173</sup> Culpepper, "The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative," 32.

words. From the perspective of the character, Jesus saw two people that he loved dearly, both from a human perspective as persons close to him and from a divine perspective as exemplars of true faith, standing at the foot of the cross.<sup>174</sup> He saw their unwavering strength to witness his death even in the face of grief, so by giving son to mother and mother to son, he gave them support for each other out of his love for them. This points to how the church is called to be a community of love in imitation of Jesus, to care for and support one another in faith.

Thirdly, Jesus' willingness to drink the sour wine offered to him represents his obedience to God. The sour wine that was offered was the cheap drink of the soldiers, and, as the name suggests, sour.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, symbolically it represents the bitter cup of suffering that the Father had given to Jesus (John 18:11).<sup>176</sup> Jesus is shown to have willingly drank the sour wine that was offered, just as he willingly suffered humiliation and pain for the salvation of the world, without any regret or word of complaint. Here, his willingness is also obedience, since his suffering and death were part of the Father's salvific plan, which he obeyed with an open heart.

While Jesus' words and actions on the cross have meanings with more ecclesiological significance, a few things can also be revealed about Jesus himself and his motivations. By showing how Jesus had sole control over the events surrounding his death, the narrator transforms the understanding of the crucifixion and death of Jesus from humiliation and shame into victory and the completion of God's plan. The narrator also reveals, through the drinking of the sour wine, Jesus' full obedience to God's plan and his willingness to suffer for the sake of the salvation of the world, which is motivated by his intense love for all humanity, who is represented by Mary and the beloved disciple.

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<sup>174</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 144.

<sup>175</sup> Hubbard, "John 19:17-30," 400-01.

<sup>176</sup> Tabb, "Jesus' Thirst at the Cross," 348.

## Mary

At the foot of the cross, the mother of Jesus stood as a witness to his suffering and as the recipient of his words. She is, out of all the characters involved in the narrative other than Jesus, the one with the deepest symbolic significance and richness, even though her role is passive. In this narrative, she is presented equally as the model of faith for believers and as finally coming into her spiritual motherhood. While at Cana she pointed to the hour of Jesus, here she is present and bearing witness to Jesus' hour of glorification. Her presence at the cross alerts the reader that what her presence had begun to reveal at Cana has finally come to completion.

Mary, as a type character, continues to be a model for all who believe in Christ. Firstly, she is portrayed as bearing witness to the passion and death of Jesus. She is among the women who stood at the foot of the cross, who followed Jesus and saw him crucified, who remained there even in the face of great grief.<sup>177</sup> She received Jesus' words and the gift of the Spirit, and demonstrated obedience. She also witnessed the fulfillment of the salvation of the world and the inauguration of God's kingdom. As a model for all Christians, she demonstrated the essential qualities of faith: being living witnesses of God's grace to all peoples, obedience to God's word, courage rooted in faith, and participating in the work of the kingdom of God. Secondly, Mary demonstrated an exceptional amount of love. Her commitment to remain at the cross in spite of grief comes not only from her faith in God, but also from her love for her only son.<sup>178</sup> Her motherly love connects her with the "desolated people under all the crosses set up in the world."<sup>179</sup> It is through her example that believers "find strength in their bitter struggle[s], and therefore her presence at the foot of the cross is a powerful and rich image."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 296.

<sup>178</sup> Navidad, "Jesus' Mother at the Foot of the Cross," 67.

<sup>179</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 297.

<sup>180</sup> Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 296.

Mary's unique role as the spiritual mother of the church also comes to fullness in this narrative. Her primacy is expressed in two places: she is listed first among the four women at the foot of the cross, and Jesus speaks first to her and entrusts the beloved disciple to her, before he entrusts her to the care of the beloved disciple.<sup>181</sup> Although her role in the narrative is a passive one, her identity as a woman and as a mother are the crucial elements to the birth of the community of faith. In being "possessed by her narrative role," her womanhood and motherhood are "sufficient for the theological goal of the narrative to be completed as disciples become children of God."<sup>182</sup> In being entrusted to Mary, the beloved disciple, who represented all believers, became the son of Mary, and therefore a brother to Jesus and a child of God.<sup>183</sup>

The theological significance of Mary's motherhood, therefore, is a crucial part of the narrative, without which the birth of the church as a community of disciples called to be children of God would be incomplete. Mary was given a unique and special status as the mother of the church and as a spiritual mother to all. It is a status accomplished not by her own merit, a point which the narrator makes by portraying her as a fully passive character in the narrative, but by the grace of God who chose her to help fulfill the salvific plan of God. The spiritual motherhood which the reader was given a glimpse of at the narrative of the wedding at Cana at is now fully realized at the cross. Jesus redefines Mary's motherhood, and raises it from the level of human biology to the level of spirituality and faith.<sup>184</sup> He gives her a mission, to care for and watch over the children of God, and "to play a maternal role in the diffusion of spiritual blessings."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Navidad, "Jesus' Mother at the Foot of the Cross," 64.

<sup>182</sup> Mary L. Coloe, "The Mother of Jesus: A Woman Possessed," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 213.

<sup>183</sup> Coloe, "The Mother of Jesus," 208.

<sup>184</sup> Huang, "The Meaning of "Woman" in John 2:4 and 19:26," 167.

<sup>185</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 187.

Mary at the foot of the cross, therefore, is a character who is portrayed as the model for Christians in faith, witness, obedience, and love. At the same time, she is uniquely the mother of all disciples, as it is through her participation in the hour of Jesus as woman and mother that God willed the church to be born, transforming her motherhood into a spiritual motherhood.

### The Beloved Disciple

Alongside the mother of Jesus, the beloved disciple is a type character for those who come to believe in Jesus and to follow him as a disciple. Like Mary, the beloved disciple is never named in the Fourth Gospel, although he had a distinctive role. Instead, his anonymity, like Mary's, serves to draw the reader to view the character as a type whose traits are worthy of imitating. Furthermore, the lack of names given to Jesus' mother and his beloved disciple serves to highlight the nature of their relationships to Jesus, and "in each case the designations are characteristic of closeness, markers of intimacy."<sup>186</sup> From the title itself, the reader can know that the beloved disciple is the one whom Jesus loved, who was especially close to Jesus. At the foot of the cross, the intimacy between Jesus and the beloved disciple is raised to a higher level. In entrusting his mother to the beloved disciple, Jesus made them brothers by adoption.<sup>187</sup>

As a type character, the beloved disciple embodied similar characteristics as Mary. The beloved disciple was also at the foot of the cross out of faith and out of his love for Jesus. He also stood at the foot of the cross to witness Jesus' death, and he displayed obedience by immediately taking Mary into his own home as his mother in response to Jesus' words (John 19:27). Furthermore, the beloved disciple is portrayed as the disciple *par excellence*, who, in receiving the mother of the Word into his own home, overturned the situation described in the

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<sup>186</sup> Jean Zumstein, "The Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple: How a New Family is Established Under the Cross," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 642.

<sup>187</sup> Coloe, "The Mother of Jesus," 208.

prologue of the Gospel, when the Word “came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:11), and so the beloved disciple embodied those who believed in Jesus’ name and was given “power to become children of God” (John 1:12).<sup>188</sup> The beloved disciple also demonstrates the necessity of welcoming the presence of Mary into one’s own soul.<sup>189</sup>

### The Women

As a group character, the four women were portrayed to have been standing near the cross, presumably the entire time, since the beginning of the crucifixion.<sup>190</sup> Their presence reveals the characteristic that they are devoted and loyal to Jesus, and so they represent “all those who confess faith in their crucified Lord, who, through faith, overcome the scandal of the cross.”<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, their presence at the foot of the cross during the hour of Jesus’ glorification meant that they were the first to receive the outpouring of the Spirit, and were the first members of the spiritual family of God.

The identity of the four women also reveals the nature of the newly born spiritual family. The narrator states that “standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25). Two of the women were relatives of Jesus, while the other two did not have any familial relationship with Jesus, but were part of his followers. These two groups can “be viewed as two concentric circles around the cross of Jesus, already suggesting the outward effect that he has on the gathering of the new spiritual family.”<sup>192</sup> It symbolizes how Jesus calls all peoples, whether related or unrelated, to be his

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<sup>188</sup> In both John 1:11 and John 19:27, the Greek used is the same phrase εἰς τὰ ἴδια, meaning “to one’s own” which forms an inclusio that links the two passages together. Coloe, “The Mother of Jesus,” 209.

<sup>189</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 197.

<sup>190</sup> D. Francois Tolmie, “Women by the Cross: Creating Contrasts,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 622.

<sup>191</sup> Navidad, “Jesus’ Mother at the Foot of the Cross,” 70.

<sup>192</sup> Tolmie, “Women by the Cross,” 624.

disciple. The women stand in contrast to the male disciples, who were absent from crucifixion with the exception of the beloved disciple, and also in contrast to the soldiers who crucify Jesus, who are used by the narrator to present to the reader an example of unbelief and of the improper response to the glorification of Jesus and to the salvation poured out from the cross.<sup>193</sup>

#### Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

Both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have conflicting characteristics. On one hand, they are followers of Jesus, who have listened to his words and believed in him in some capacity. On the other hand, neither of them are public disciples of Jesus, and remained hidden. They represent a transitional group of believers, who hang on to both Jesus and the Jewish tradition, who have not yet been able to take the step and be truly reborn in Christ.<sup>194</sup> The only fact known about Joseph of Arimathea was that he was a secret disciple of Jesus, because he feared the Jews. His hidden discipleship “leaves him relatively undefined; while he is not encountering Jesus for the first time as a corpse [...] neither is Joseph openly proclaiming his faith in the one sent by the Father.”<sup>195</sup> His blatant “fear of the Jews” (John 19:38) hinders him from true faith.

Neither is Nicodemus presented as a full, public disciple of Jesus. The narrator reminds the reader that Nicodemus “had at first come to Jesus by night” (John 19:39), which brings to mind darkness and secrecy that is contrary to Jesus’ light. In choosing to include this remark in the narrative, which is rather negative and without a further clarifying statement on the status of Nicodemus’ faith, the narrator reveals that Nicodemus has also not been able to fully proclaim his faith in Jesus. Furthermore, the narrator repeatedly highlighted the connections of these two

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<sup>193</sup> Tolmie, “Women by the Cross,” 623.

<sup>194</sup> William J. Lyons, “Joseph of Arimathea: One of “the Jews,” But with a Fearful Secret!” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 654.

<sup>195</sup> Lyons, “Joseph of Arimathea,” 653.

disciples to the Jews, who were the enemies of Jesus, throughout the pericope. The narrator stated that they embalmed Jesus' body "according to the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:40), and described how they themselves were still concerned with the ritual purity associated with Passover, that they hastily buried Jesus only "because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby" (John 19:42).

These two characters are presented by the narrator as disciples who have not yet come into full faith in Jesus, still holding on to some of the old traditions of the Jews, which is why they were not presented among those who received Jesus' outpouring of the Spirit at the foot of the cross. Yet, at the same time, the narrator chooses these two characters to be the ones to care for Jesus' body and to bury him, and especially Nicodemus, who brought an extravagant amount of spices for embalming, as a way to demonstrate that they are moving toward Jesus in their willingness to become associated with him, even if this only occurred after his death.<sup>196</sup>

#### The Romans

Both the character of Pilate and the group character of the soldiers appear in the crucifixion narrative. Pilate ordered for the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19) to be written and rebutted the Jewish authorities when they demanded that the inscription be changed, and interacted a second time with the Jews when they requested for the "legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed" (John 19:31). The soldiers took Jesus and crucified him, then divided his clothing among themselves. They also offered sour wine to Jesus when he said that he was thirsty, and broke the legs of the other crucified men and pierced Jesus' side with a spear on the orders of Pilate.

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<sup>196</sup> Alan Culpepper, "Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 259.

Pilate represents someone who has heard the Word yet does not come to belief in him. At the trial, Pilate came to know that Jesus was the Son of God and that he was a king from above. Yet he still chose to reject Jesus' identity as the Truth, and instead succumbs to the pressure of the Jews and handed Jesus over to be crucified.<sup>197</sup> Pilate's lack of understanding of Jesus' divine nature is expressed through the inscription, which repeatedly emphasized the human aspect, portraying Jesus as a worldly king, "the King of the Jews," and highlighting his human origins in "Jesus of Nazareth." At the same time, Pilate's contempt for the Jews is conveyed through his interaction with the chief priests.<sup>198</sup> His refusal to change the wording of the inscription is an attempt to regain his authority by refusing the request of the Jews after he had succumbed to their pressure, and he uses the inscription itself to mock the Jews, for a person whom they hate, a humiliated criminal, is exalted as king over them. Pilate's other appearance in the narrative of the cross "can simply be regarded as a sensible response by Pilate to reasonable requests."<sup>199</sup>

The Roman soldiers are a group who represent unbelief and clear hostility against Jesus, as they commit violent acts against him in nailing him to the cross. It was revealed that the soldiers who crucified Jesus were a unit of four men, which places them in stark contrast to the four women standing at the foot of the cross in love and compassion for Jesus. In the narrative, the soldiers are functional characters, who carry out their actions to serve the plot. They crucify Jesus on the orders of Pilate, divide his clothing among themselves according to custom, offer sour wine because it was their customary drink, and pierce his side with a spear to confirm that he is indeed dead. Yet they are also portrayed as ironic characters, as it is through their hostile actions that the full symbolic meaning of the crucifixion and death of Jesus is revealed, for the

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<sup>197</sup> Tolmie, "Pontius Pilate," 587.

<sup>198</sup> Tolmie, "Pontius Pilate," 596.

<sup>199</sup> Tolmie, "Pontius Pilate," 596.

crucifixion fulfills glorification of Jesus, while their other actions are all accompanied by the statement that Scripture is fulfilled. The power and will of God and the marvel of his salvific plan are exemplified through the narrator's use of these soldiers in the narrative, for "unwittingly they serve God's will," and "with their hostility, they fulfill God's will."<sup>200</sup>

### The Jews

Presented as hostile characters who reject Jesus as the Word of God incarnate, who call for the crucifixion of Jesus with vigor, two aspects of the Jews are exemplified in the crucifixion narrative. Firstly, in the incident of the inscription, their offense at what Pilate wrote demonstrated their self-righteousness and inability to accept the truth of Jesus' identity and teachings. They would prefer to think of Jesus as a blasphemous man than reflect on what the truth is, as they wished to change the wording of the inscription to say "This man said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21). Secondly, The Jews' concern with traditions and ritual purity is maintained even to the very end, for the narrator reveals that they wish to have the bodies of the crucified men removed from the cross so as not to defile the day of Passover.<sup>201</sup> At Cana, Jesus revealed the imperfections of Jewish traditions by transforming the water in the jars meant for ritual purification into wine, yet the Jews are seen to continue to stubbornly cling on to these traditions even to the end, rejecting the true eternal life poured out by Jesus.

### The Crucified Men

The two men who were crucified on either side of Jesus serve as literary foils that highlight the centrality of Jesus in the crucifixion narrative. Through the narrator's narrative redundancy, "the spatial centrality of Jesus' cross functions to reinforce the notion of Jesus'

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<sup>200</sup> Michael Labahn, "The Soldiers Who Crucify: Fulfilling Scripture," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 602.

<sup>201</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonour*, 147.

cosmic centrality.”<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, in the process of the soldiers breaking the men’s legs, they first break the legs of the one on one side, and then of the one on the other side, before finally approaching Jesus. This order is determined thusly by the narrator so that Jesus is “encountered third and last,” “as the final and climactic figure,” just as the narrative of the cross was the third and last narrative in the larger Passion narrative.<sup>203</sup> The crucified men also act as contrast to Jesus, whose unbroken legs point toward Passover imagery in the crucifixion narrative.

Through an analysis of the characters in the narrative, therefore, it is revealed that Jesus’ passion and death occurred as part of God’s salvific plan, which Jesus fulfilled out of his love for humanity and out of his complete obedience to God’s will. The characters of Mary, the beloved disciple, and the women at the cross are contrasted by Pilate, the soldiers, and the Jews. The former group of characters demonstrated their faith in God, devotion to Jesus, and obedience, and so witnessed the glorification of Christ and became the first members of the church to receive the outpouring of the Spirit, serving as positive examples to the reader on the proper response to the revelation of God’s glory. The latter group demonstrated their unbelief and rejection of Jesus as the Word, crucifying Jesus and rejecting his salvific power in their lives, and serving as negative models for the reader. Ironically it is through the latter group’s actions that Jesus is glorified, yet they themselves cannot see it. The two men who were crucified on either side of Jesus served as literary foils to highlight the centrality of Jesus in the narrative.

### **Literary Devices**

The crucifixion narrative contains many literary devices that make the narrative rich in meaning and help express the theological message of the narrative more fully. The various

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<sup>202</sup> Chelsea N. Revell and Steven A. Hunt, “The Co-Crucified Men: Shadows by His Cross,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 613.

<sup>203</sup> Revell and Hunt, “The Co-Crucified Men,” 613, 614.

symbols used by the narrator demonstrate in a visible way the unity of the children of God, the victory over sin and death and the completion of God's salvific plan, and the birth of the church. The narrator also uses irony to highlight the dichotomy between those who unwittingly reveal the glory of Jesus and those who see and believe in him.

## Symbols

### **The Seamless Tunic**

The symbolism revolving around the tunic that “was seamless, woven in one piece from the top” (John 19:23) and the division of Jesus' clothing by the soldiers is highlighted by the narrator, who states that these objects are central to the fulfillment of Scripture in the pericope. As the symbol that follows immediately after the inscription in which the universality of Jesus' kingship was proclaimed, the seamless tunic has symbolic significance in representing how the kingdom of God and the community of disciples was to be a unified whole, not torn apart by any forces.<sup>204</sup> When combined with the significance of the number four – the number of portions the rest of Jesus' clothing was divided into – the meaning of the symbol as ecclesial unity is further expressed. The number four itself has the symbolic meaning of wholeness, especially in the physical world, as represented by the four winds, the four corners of the earth, or the four great rivers.<sup>205</sup> Jesus' clothing, therefore, represents both the unity of the people of God and the universality of God's kingdom, open to and calling all peoples from every time and place.

Another interpretation of the seamless tunic, especially the fact that it was “woven in one piece from the top,” is that the tunic represents Jesus' divinity. As the tunic is the “intimate inner garment” of Jesus, it represented his most intimate identity.<sup>206</sup> The quality of the tunic, being

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<sup>204</sup> Fenik, “Clothing Symbolism,” 65.

<sup>205</sup> La Potterie, “La tunique ‘non divisée’ de Jésus,” 134.

<sup>206</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 143.

woven from the top, points to the source of Jesus' divine identity, which comes from God the Father. It cannot be torn or destroyed, even as Jesus the human being is dying on the cross. In the crucifixion, the tunic represents "the Father's all-encompassing power that protects the Son," and Jesus' continued oneness with God.<sup>207</sup> Together, the two layers of meaning of the symbol of the tunic expresses that "the unity of believers [is] rooted in Jesus' oneness with the Father, so that just as Jesus was one the Father, 'his own' will find their unity through their unity with him."<sup>208</sup>

### **“Woman”**

Jesus' address of Mary as 'woman' is found also in the narrative of the cross. Like in the narrative of the wedding at Cana, Jesus' decision to address his mother by a term that puts distance between them represent the necessity of worldly relationships to fade into the background at the climax of the Messianic mission. In the hour of the glorification of Jesus, it is the relationship between God the Father and the Son that must take precedence. Instead of earthly relationships, Jesus' connection to his mother is raised to a spiritual level, on the level of faith, so that when Jesus entrusts his mother and the beloved disciple to each other, it is based on spiritual relationships that the church is born. This is also why Jesus first addresses his mother as 'woman' before he says "here is your son" and "here is your mother" (John 19:26-27).

Furthermore, by addressing Mary as 'woman', her womanhood is emphasized, and evokes the image of giving birth to the community of disciples. Mary's situation is a reflection of Mother Zion, who, "in the midst of her grief and sorrow over the loss of her children, suddenly has been given a new and larger family which is the occasion for rejoicing," so Mary becomes the fulfillment of Zion in the moment when all things are fulfilled in the glorified Christ.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Fenik, "Clothing Symbolism," 65.

<sup>208</sup> Culpepper, "The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative," 28.

<sup>209</sup> Roskoski, "Behold, Your Mother," 10.

The title of ‘woman’ also supports the interpretation that Mary is portrayed as the new Eve. As both are called ‘woman’, Mary’s spiritual motherhood of all children of God reflects Eve’s physical motherhood of all humanity. Moreover, while Eve “was expelled from Eden where the victory was foretold, Mary is prominent at the place of victory,” the cross.<sup>210</sup>

### **Jesus’ Thirst**

Jesus’ thirst on the cross, which could be understood as a literal thirst, also points towards a symbolic meaning, particularly in the context of the pericope, in which the narrator repeatedly emphasizes “a triangle of full consciousness, completion, and fulfillment.”<sup>211</sup> When the narrator states that Jesus’ thirst is a fulfillment of Scripture, it points the reader towards Psalm 69, which read “I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched” (Psalm 69:3), and “they gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21).<sup>212</sup> Although both the psalm and the narrative depicts a literal, physical thirst, the narrator of the Fourth Gospel impresses the idea that Jesus’ thirst is a spiritual thirst, and that the drink offered by the soldiers should take on the meaning of the cup that the Father has given him to drink (John 18:11). So Jesus receives the drink not primarily “as a soldier’s gift, but most of all as his Father’s gift,” demonstrating his desire to do God’s will.<sup>213</sup>

### **The Passover Lamb**

Imagery surrounding the Passover is found throughout the narrative, and it points toward the understanding of Jesus as the Passover lamb, who takes away the sin of the world and saves the people from death by his own death on the cross. Firstly, the temporal setting of the narrative is the most direct hint towards the Passover imagery, as Jesus’ death occurred on the day of

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<sup>210</sup> Roskoski, “Behold, Your Mother,” 6.

<sup>211</sup> Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst in John 19:28-30,” 492.

<sup>212</sup> Tabb, “Jesus’ Thirst at the Cross,” 343.

<sup>213</sup> Witkamp, “Jesus’ Thirst in John 19:28-30,” 502.

Preparation for the Passover, when the Passover lamb is to be slain.<sup>214</sup> This reminds the reader of John the Baptist's proclamation in the prologue of the Gospel, that Jesus "is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Furthermore, at the very end of the narrative, it is stated that Jesus' legs were not broken, in order to fulfill the Scripture that said "none of his bones shall be broken" (John 19:36), which is a reference to how "the Passover Lamb is slain without a bone broken."<sup>215</sup> Another reference to Passover imagery is the hyssop branch on which the soldiers placed the sponge of sour wine in John 19:29. The branch of hyssop was significant because God had ordered the Israelites, on the night of the first Passover, to "take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin" (Exodus 12:22) to identify those who were to be spared.<sup>216</sup>

These references to Passover imagery in relation to Jesus' death on the cross lead the reader toward the realization that Jesus is the Lamb of God. The Passover imagery is the most prominent in pointing out how the crucifixion and death of Jesus is an event of victory and salvation, for the Passover lamb is "closely associated with deliverance from death."<sup>217</sup> Sin is that which alienates people from God, expressed in the refusal to believe in Jesus. For those who come to believe in Jesus, sin is taken away and the "power to become children of God" (John 1:12) is given instead, and, as children of God, they gain eternal life and therefore deliverance from death. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, therefore, is sacrificed on the cross to deliver "people from death precisely by delivering them from sin."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Koester, *The Word of Life*, 113.

<sup>215</sup> The directive that the bones of the Passover Lamb must not be broken is found in Exodus 12:46 "It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones" and Numbers 9:12 "They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it." Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 193.

<sup>216</sup> F. G. Beetham, and P. A. Beetham, "A Note on John 19:29," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (April 1993): 167.

<sup>217</sup> Koester, *The Word of Life*, 113.

<sup>218</sup> Koester, *The Word of Life*, 113.

## Blood and Water

The blood and water that flowed from Jesus' pierced side on the cross is rich in meaning, and its significance is particularly emphasized by the narrator, who extensively testify to the truth of the event. Firstly, the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side is symbolic of birth, for blood and water "are always present during the process when a woman's body gives birth to a baby."<sup>219</sup> The birth imagery points toward the ecclesial importance of Jesus' death on the cross, for it is through the climactic moment of his death that, everything having come to completion, the believers are reborn as children of God, and the church community is born. This fulfills Jesus' words to Nicodemus, that "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). The water that Jesus speaks of is the water that flowed forth from his side, and the Spirit he bestowed to the disciples at the moment of his death.<sup>220</sup>

In this way, the blood and water also represent the sacraments which Jesus gave to the church, the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Blood refers to Jesus' promise that "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life" (John 6:54). Water is a traditional symbol of cleansing and purification, and the narrative conveys the message that those who believe in Jesus will have their sins washed away through the water flowing from the side of Christ.<sup>221</sup> Water also symbolizes life, as all living creatures need water to survive. Jesus promised the Samaritan woman that "those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14). The two symbolic meanings of water both represent the sacrament of Baptism, as it is through baptism that the believer is freed from sin and therefore has the power

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<sup>219</sup> Sawyer, "Water and Blood," 301.

<sup>220</sup> Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel," 75.

<sup>221</sup> Frederick C. Klawiter, "'Living Water' and Sanguinary Witness: John 19:34 and Martyrs of the Second and Early Third Century," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (October 2015): 566.

to be born into new life. The sacraments are a gift that Jesus gave to the community of believers after his death, to remain with them and to strengthen them.

### **Spices and the New Tomb**

The narrator depicts in detail how Jesus was buried “according to the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:40), embalmed in spices, “a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (John 19:39), and wrapped in linen clothes. In particular, the narrator describes that Nicodemus brought “a hundred pounds” (John 19:39) of spices, which is an extravagant amount. This symbolizes how Jesus is the King, for the excess of spices represent a royal burial.<sup>222</sup> The new tomb is also important symbolically, for it was typical that crucified criminals were buried in a mass grave, without honour, but Jesus was buried in a brand new tomb which had never been used.<sup>223</sup> Both the fact that Jesus was buried individually and the fact that he was buried in a new tomb point toward the honour that he was given in burial. Furthermore, kings in the Old Testament were depicted to be buried in gardens, and it is not a coincidence for the author of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus’ tomb was also found in a garden.<sup>224</sup> Through Joseph and Nicodemus’ care for the body of Jesus and the honourable burial that he was given, the nature of Jesus’ kingship is revealed, in that even though Jesus’ human body is dead, his divinity remains undefeated by the Jews, and his Messianic kingship over the children of God cannot be taken away from him by human powers.

The specific mention of the combination of myrrh and aloes makes reference to the Messianic promise, and points to the symbolism of union between Jesus and the children of God. For in the Old Testament, myrrh and aloes together were mentioned in Psalm 45:8, Proverbs 7:17, and Song of Solomon 4:14. Both the psalm and the Song of Solomon symbolize the

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<sup>222</sup> Moloney, *Glory Not Dishonor*, 149.

<sup>223</sup> Matthew Y. Emerson, “Land, Burial, and Temple: Deuteronomy 30:5, John 19–20, and the Burial of Jesus as a Land Claim,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 2 (2020): 189.

<sup>224</sup> Emerson, “Land, Burial, and Temple,” 189.

marriage between God and his beloved bride, pointing towards a Messianic promise of God to his chosen people, which has now been fulfilled in Jesus, whose death unites all who believe in him to God.<sup>225</sup> The text of Proverbs 7:17 represent its antithesis, telling the story of Lady Folly who rejects the love of God, yet the imagery is once again about the love that God has for his people and his desire that they should be united to him. The mention of myrrh and aloes by the narrator alerts the reader once again of the fulfillment of Messianic promises in the death of Jesus, for through his death the Spirit of God is poured upon those who believe in him, and through the Spirit they become united to God.

### Irony

The crucifixion narrative is also a dramatic irony. The irony is found in the juxtaposition of glory and humiliation, of Jesus' victory and the perceived victory of the Jews, of birth and death. The irony is that the actions in the narrative are perceived by the characters on the worldly level, while the narrator invites the reader, through symbolism, to perceive the deeper level of meaning that transforms the whole narrative. The irony is in that the climax of the narrative and of the whole Gospel, the hour of the glorification of Jesus, is also the most humiliating and devastating event of crucifixion. The moment of Jesus' death is also the moment of the church's birth, and also the moment of victory over sin and death. Those who oppose Jesus – the Jews, Pilate, and the soldiers – ironically fulfill God's will through their hostility.<sup>226</sup> The characters involved had been given many chances to see and believe in Jesus, yet they remain willfully blind to the irony playing out through their own actions. They believe that they have won against Jesus by putting him to death, but the reader knows that the ultimate victory is not theirs.

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<sup>225</sup> Emerson, "Land, Burial, and Temple," 190.

<sup>226</sup> Labahn, "The Soldiers Who Crucify," 602

Individual moments of irony can also be found throughout the narrative. When Pilate declares Jesus to be “the King of the Jews” (John 19:19), he creates an ironic scene in which the Jews, who hate Jesus and stand in opposition to him, are subjugated under him. The more that they hate Jesus, the more irony there is that he is exalted as king over them.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, while Pilate’s inscription emphasized Jesus’ humanity by stating that “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 19:19) is king, the reader understands that it is Jesus’ divine kingship that is being revealed on the cross. Furthermore, Jesus’ thirst can also be seen as irony, “as the giver and source of living water now thirsts at the cross.”<sup>228</sup> The soldiers who give him the sour wine to drink are unaware of the deeper meaning of Jesus’ thirst, while the narrator informs the reader that Jesus is thirsting for something other than physical wine.

### **Conclusion**

The message of the crucifixion narrative is expressed by the author of the Fourth Gospel through the setting and narration, plot, characters, and literary devices used in the narrative. The central theme of the narrative is twofold: that Jesus’ death on the cross is the completion of God’s salvific plan and the glorification of the Word incarnate, and that the community of discipleship is born at the foot of the cross. The shape of the plot outlines the central theme of the narrative, while the literary devices enrich the message and point towards the same theme. The setting and narration serve to alert the reader to the presence of symbolism and important moments in the narrative, and the characters other than Jesus present to the reader examples of the proper and improper response to the revelation of Jesus’ glory.

On the cross, therefore, Jesus is enthroned as the divine and universal king, whose kingdom encompasses all the world. Jesus is shown to be the fulfillment and fullness of all

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<sup>227</sup> Culpepper, “The Theology of the Johannine Passion Narrative,” 24.

<sup>228</sup> Tabb, “Jesus’ Thirst at the Cross,” 350.

Messianic expectations, and to have emerged victorious over sin and darkness. In his death, he gives the Spirit to the disciples, as well as the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist through the water and blood flowing from his pierced side. The church is born through the crucifixion, having been freed from sin and death by the Lamb of God, and given power to be reborn into eternal life as children of God. Those who believe in Jesus are called to demonstrate faith and love, and to give witness to God's glory in the world. Mary, in particular, is given a place of primacy as the spiritual mother of the church, to guide and care for all disciples.

## CHAPTER 4: SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO NARRATIVES

The narrative of the wedding at Cana and the narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus form an inclusio for the seven signs in the Gospel of John, marking the beginning and end of Jesus' public, Messianic mission. The author of the Fourth Gospel highlights this relationship with several commonalities between the two narratives, which invite the reader to delve deeper into the meaning and connectedness of the two. At a glance, the character of the mother of Jesus appears in both narratives as an important character, and she is never named and always addressed by Jesus as 'woman'. The concept of the 'hour' of Jesus is present, as well as the symbolisms of water and wine. Through a closer reading of the two narratives together, the reader will get a richer understanding of the message of the Fourth Gospel.

In looking at the literary elements of the two narratives side by side, several common themes can be identified, which reflect the author's theological emphasis that the Gospel is for the salvation of those who come to believe in Jesus. Furthermore, a development in themes can also be seen. The narrator's presentation of the wedding at Cana foreshadows and presents ideas that are then fulfilled and enriched in the crucifixion narrative, while the themes of the crucifixion narrative are transformed when read in the light of the wedding at Cana.

### **Common Themes**

Several commonalities are found between the two narratives and the way the narrator presents the story. These include the centrality of the character of Jesus in the narrative, the description of the traits of the children of God, and Mary's identity and role in salvation history. The fact that these themes are developed by the author of the Fourth Gospel in both narratives point to their importance for the reader, and the repeated emphasis serves to consolidate these ideas in the minds and lives of the reader.

Firstly, the narrator highlights the centrality of Jesus in both narratives through a manipulation of perspective. In the narrative of the wedding at Cana, it can be seen that the narrator places Jesus at the center, and he remains stationary throughout the story while other characters approach and depart from him. His centrality in the narrative is what leads to the understanding of his role as the Messianic bridegroom, and of the importance of coming to believe in him. In the crucifixion narrative, Jesus' centrality is once again presented by the narrator, first in placing his cross at the center using a narrative redundancy, between the two others who were crucified with him, and second in shifting the perspective of each pericope closer and closer towards him, who is at the center of it all. With Jesus at the center of the narratives, the first point that the author of the Gospel makes is the necessity of always holding Jesus at the center of each believer's life.

Secondly, the narrator expounds upon the necessary traits that the children of God must exhibit in both narratives. Those who desire eternal life must have faith in the Word incarnate, love for Jesus and for one another, and obedience to God's word. They are then called to bear witness to God's presence in the world, and to become a new family connected by the Spirit rather than by biological relationships. At Cana, Mary acted as a model of the type of faith and trust believers are called to express, while the disciples who followed Jesus showed the proper response to the manifestation of God's power by beginning to believe in him. At the cross, the women's and the beloved disciple's faith in Jesus in the face of a tragic situation led them to persevere and remain at the foot of the cross, and thereby become the first recipients of the outpouring of the Spirit. Similarly, both narratives highlighted the call to love one another, through Mary's love and concern for the community at Cana, which drew her to petition Jesus for a miracle, and through her love for her son at the foot of the cross, which gave her strength to

witness his death and to accept his entrusting of the beloved disciple to her. Obedience to God is also expressed as a trait of believers in both narratives. At the wedding at Cana, Mary urged the servants to be obedient to the commands of Jesus, and indeed they followed his orders without any hesitation. At the foot of the cross, the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple displayed their complete obedience to Jesus when they accepted each other as their new family in Christ, and the beloved disciple took Mary into his home.

The call to discipleship is also characterized by bearing witness to the power of God in the world, which is not merely a passive act of seeing, but also an active act of leading and inspiring others to belief in the Word. At Cana, the disciples were silent witnesses to the miracle being performed, which was not simply a miracle, but also an occasion of the manifestation of the glory of God. They saw, took the events that happened before their eyes to heart, and as a result were changed from unbelief to belief. Their change acts as an example for the reader, and therefore their witness served a purpose. At the cross, the women and the beloved disciple bore witness to the events of Jesus' crucifixion and death, especially of the blood and water flowing from Jesus' pierced side. The emphasis that the narrator places on the testimony of truth speaks of the importance of the event, but also of the importance of bearing witness to the power of God expressed through the sign.

The importance of the spiritual family of God is also emphasized by both narratives through Jesus' interactions with his mother. At the wedding at Cana, Jesus distanced himself from her and from their relationship as mother and son by addressing her as 'woman'. In establishing the divine nature of his mission in the world and the lack of influence that Mary has on him as his biological mother, Jesus demonstrates that it is not worldly families or biological relationships that matter. Rather, it is the divine relationship with God the Father that he

emphasizes, demonstrating how all are called to be spiritual children of God. He fulfilled Mary's request with the understanding that he is acting in response to a spiritual need, and that Mary's influence is from the level of spiritual motherhood. Similarly, at the foot of the cross, Jesus once again addressed Mary as 'woman', pointing to her role as the mother of the church. Furthermore, in entrusting her to the beloved disciple as his mother, and him as her son, Jesus created a new type of family, one characterized not by blood but by the Spirit. The family born at the foot of the cross is the family of God, a divine, spiritual family that gathers all peoples of the earth. In all of these cases, what were exemplified at Cana were only an initial, shallow expression of the traits of the children of God, and they were made complete at the foot of the cross.

Thirdly, the characteristics of Mary are consistently expressed in both narratives, highlighting her unique role in God's salvation plan. Firstly, her love for the community and for the world is clearly demonstrated. At Cana, her awareness of the lack of wine at the banquet expresses her sensitivity to the needs of the world, both physically and spiritually, for the God-given joy and graces of the Messianic promise. At the cross, her love for the world represented by the beloved disciple allows her to obediently and wholeheartedly accept Jesus' entrusting of the disciple to her care, and in her love she represented a "maternal continuation of Jesus' love for his disciples."<sup>229</sup> Secondly, she is shown to have actively participated in the salvific plan of God, in a special role given to her by the grace and will of God. She is the first, and only, person to have believed in Jesus without seeing any display of his power, and her deep and unwavering faith is what led her to be proactive at Cana. In her faith and persistence, Mary became the person through whom the event of Jesus' first manifestation of glory was brought about, and her cooperation with the salvific plan of God extends to the foot of the cross.

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<sup>229</sup> Grassi, "The Role of Jesus' Mother in John's Gospel," 77.

At the foot of the cross, Mary's part is much more passive, as she is portrayed to have neither said nor done anything. Yet she retains her special role in the salvific plan of God, and God chose her to become the mother of the church. In her obedience and in accepting Jesus' words to her, she fulfilled her purpose in the Messianic mission, and through her motherhood the church was born. She is given the role of new Eve in the new creation, as God chose her to support Jesus' mission just as Eve was given to Adam by God to be his helper (Genesis 2:18). Lastly, Mary's motherhood was a consistent theme across both narratives. In being identified only as a woman and as a mother by the narrator, who does not introduce her name at any point, her identity as woman and mother is instead highlighted. At Cana, her love for the community and her faith in Jesus led her to the role of spiritual motherhood when Jesus addressed her as 'woman', which was reaffirmed at the foot of the cross and further confirmed in Jesus' entrusting of the beloved disciple to her. She extends her motherly love to all who come to be reborn as children of God, and fulfills the mission given to her by Jesus, to care for and watch over the church, and to mediate and "play a maternal role in the diffusion of spiritual blessings."<sup>230</sup>

### **Thematic Developments**

In many ways, the narrative of Cana foreshadows and prepares the reader to better perceive the depth of meaning in the narrative of the cross. The themes that were incomplete at the wedding at Cana are made complete at the cross, and the symbolisms within the Cana narrative are, in many ways, shallower expressions of the symbolisms of the crucifixion narrative. As a whole, the meaning and purpose of the sign of the changing of water into wine is never described by the narrator, leaving a sense of incompleteness that calls the reader to search for meaning elsewhere, that is, in its counterpart, the sign of Jesus' crucifixion. In looking at the

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<sup>230</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel*, 187.

chiastic structure of the signs, that there is a relationship between the two signs is evident, but the meaning of the relationship is not clear, in contrast to the two signs of the restoration to life, or the two signs of healing on the Sabbath, where the connections are much more evident. Whereas the other pairs of signs are parallels to each other, the sign at Cana and the sign at the cross express a relationship of development and fulfillment.

Firstly, Jesus spoke of his hour of glorification at Cana, but expressed that it was not yet the proper time. The ‘hour’ pointed towards the revelation of God’s glory in the world and the time of God’s work of salvation, which were initiated at Cana, but not yet fully realized.<sup>231</sup> Jesus’ power and glory were revealed in the miracle of the transformation of water into wine, but it was not the full extent or purpose of his incarnation in the world. Jesus did not come merely to perform miracles, nor was his purpose merely to provide physical and spiritual goods, but rather to give the ultimate gift, the power to become the children of God, and to reveal God’s love and mercy by taking away the sin of the world. Standing alone, therefore, the narrative of Cana finds that the theme of the hour is incomplete, and its images and symbols point only to a portion of Jesus’ Messianic mission. At Cana, the hour, though already present, pointed towards a later moment, the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. It was at the crucifixion when the ‘hour’ of Jesus was fulfilled, the glory of God fully revealed, and the salvific plan of God was fully completed through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. When the narrative of the wedding at Cana is read in the light of the crucifixion narrative, subsequent symbolisms found in the narrative take on a new meaning, pointing towards the things that will happen and the gifts which will be bestowed.

Moreover, the theme of incompleteness can be found in the six stone water jars for the rites of purification in the narrative of Cana, which represent imperfection, as well as the water,

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<sup>231</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 138.

which represents the Jewish laws and traditions that no longer give life to the people. The Jewish concerns of purification, rituals, and appearances are shown to be lacking in the life-giving forces of the Spirit of God, and the narrative foreshadows how Jesus will replace these Jewish traditions and bring perfection in the transformation of the water in those jars into wine. In the narrative of Cana, the reader is given a hint of this mission of Jesus, but does not know how it will be accomplished. At the cross, the incompleteness of Jewish tradition is replaced by Jesus, demonstrated through the symbolism of Jesus as the Passover Lamb, whose death on the cross brings about a complete salvation and replaces the necessity of the yearly sacrifice. Furthermore, the Jewish concerns with cleaning and purification, an imperfect ritual that must be constantly repeated, is replaced by the sacrament of baptism with the water that flowed from Jesus' pierced side, a cleansing that removes sin once and for all. The Jews are demonstrated to be foolishly holding on to these imperfect traditions and rejecting him who gives life, even to the very end, where they were still concerned with "the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath" (John 19:31). But the reader recognizes, in making the connection between the incomplete Jewish traditions of Cana and the perfection of Jesus' sacrifice at the cross, that what the Fourth Gospel wishes to convey is that salvation and true life are given to those who believe in Jesus.

As it has been established, the symbolism of the Cana narrative finds its completion in the narrative of the cross. Primary among these is the symbol of the wine. In the Cana narrative, the wine symbolized joy, happiness, love, and the "grace upon grace" (John 1:16) that the children of God were promised. The wine was described to be abundant and of the finest quality, a divine gift that is perfect and being poured out into the world. The wine, however, was only a glimpse of the promise that was to come, and not the moment of fulfillment itself. In looking at the narrative of the cross, the reader comes to understand that the wine given at Cana pointed to

the gift of the Spirit to the church, as it is the Spirit of God dwelling within each believer that leads to life, and therefore to happiness and joy, as well as love of God and others. Everything that was represented in the wine at Cana only finally came to be fulfilled at the cross.

Another symbolism of the Cana narrative is that of the Messianic banquet. Jesus was portrayed to be the true bridegroom of the wedding banquet in a variety of ways, through his centrality in the narrative, through his actions in providing the wine, and through the irony that the bride and bridegroom are conspicuously absent. The wedding, as a symbol of the Messianic promise of the time when God will unite to himself all his people, “is a sign that the eschatological messianic time has already arrived.”<sup>232</sup> Yet there is no sign of the Messianic bride in the wedding symbolism at Cana, even though the reader can understand that the bride of the marriage points towards the people of God through references to the Old Testament. This missing character is portrayed in a hidden manner in the crucifixion narrative, in the presence of the myrrh and aloes used to embalm Jesus. Although these spices were used for burial, they are also replete with imagery of marriage and love, especially in relation to the bride. The Messianic wedding is shown to be finally consummated in the spices being intimately wrapped with Jesus who is laid down in the tomb.<sup>233</sup>

Along with the wedding comes symbolism for birth, as children are a fruit of marriage, and in the birth symbolism in the two narratives a trend of fulfillment can also be seen. The reader is prepared by the prologue of the Gospel to recognize the connection between the act of believing and the rebirth as children of God (John 1:12). It can be understood, therefore, that the process of the birth of the church had begun at the end of the Cana narrative, when the disciples who followed Jesus had begun to believe in him. Their birth, however, was not completed until

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<sup>232</sup> Jojko, “The Hour of Jesus and the Wedding Feast at Cana,” 130.

<sup>233</sup> Emerson, “Land, Burial, and Temple,” 190.

the narrative of the cross, which depicted, in several different symbolisms, the birth of the disciples as true children of God, through the Spirit given to them from the cross.

Finally, the symbolism of new creation and the image of the new Adam and new Eve is also only made clear when the two narratives are read together. The reader is given a hint in the Cana narrative that the Gospel is telling a story of new creation, through the temporal setting, in which the wedding at Cana occurred on the seventh day since the initial public appearance of Jesus, and through the character of Mary, who, in being addressed as woman, is presented as the figure of new Eve. In the crucifixion narrative, Mary is once again called ‘woman’, reaffirming her identity and drawing connections to the creation symbolism in the Cana narrative. In being given as the mother of the beloved disciple, who represents all believers, she has become the spiritual “mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20) who are part of the new creation, and her participation in the Messianic mission marked her as the helper to Jesus, the new Adam.<sup>234</sup>

In the setting and the events of the crucifixion, Jesus is presented as the new Adam, yet the symbolism is not evident without the ties to the wedding at Cana pointing to the theme of new creation, as it is more dependent “on thematic resonance than on verbal equivalence.”<sup>235</sup> The author of the Fourth Gospel reverses the events of Genesis 1-3 in the crucifixion narrative, beginning with the removal of Jesus’ tunic, which was woven “from the top” (John 19:23), an inversion of the event of God making garments for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21. Then, Jesus’ body is pierced in the side, the location from which God removed a rib from Adam to create Eve, and blood and water flowed forth, symbols of life that parallels the meaning of ‘Eve’.<sup>236</sup> Finally, Jesus’ body was placed in a garden, for “there was a garden in the place where he was crucified,

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<sup>234</sup> Navidad, “Jesus’ Mother at the Foot of the Cross,” 66.

<sup>235</sup> Nicholas J. Schaser, “Inverting Eden: The Reversal of Genesis 1-3 in John’s Passion,” *Word & World* 40, no. 3 (2020): 264.

<sup>236</sup> Schaser, “Inverting Eden,” 269.

and in the garden there was a new tomb” (John 19:41), echoing the Garden of Eden in which Adam was placed by God. This series of events in the narrative brings the reader to “a time before transgression, and in a place prior to expulsion,” and the author of the Fourth Gospel demonstrates how “Christ has taken away the sin of the world,” creating the world anew and giving life to the people.<sup>237</sup> When the crucifixion narrative is seen in the light of the new creation evoked by the symbolism in the wedding at Cana, its meaning is transformed, and the reader finds a new creation story that inverts the sin of Adam and brings new life.

### **Conclusion**

While both narratives are rich in meaning drawn from all aspects of literature, certain common themes can be found across the two narratives, which highlights the important themes that the author of the Gospel of John wished to convey. Through the narration, the necessity of holding Jesus as the center of believers’ lives is revealed by the narrator, as he is the source of life and light. Through the various type characters, the characteristics of a child of God are described, which are true faith in Jesus, love for Jesus and for the world, and obedience to God’s word. The calling of the children of God is to bear witness to the glory of God, bringing others to faith and eternal life through their testimony, and to be as family to one another, united as a spiritual community. Similarly, the characteristics of Mary is also portrayed in both narratives, and she is demonstrated to have exceptional love for the world and faith in Jesus, so that she became a participant in the salvific plan of God, and in doing so became the spiritual mother of all believers and the new Eve in the new creation of God.

Furthermore, as the first and last signs in the chiasmic structure of the Fourth Gospel’s signs, the two narratives are connected through their symbols, which are developed and enriched

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<sup>237</sup> Schaser, “Inverting Eden,” 269.

when read in the light of each other. The themes of incompleteness, both the hour of Jesus' glorification and the imperfection of the Jewish traditions, so prominent in the narrative of the wedding at Cana, were fulfilled in the crucifixion narrative. The wine at the wedding banquet pointed to the Spirit and the blood poured out from Jesus' pierced side on the cross, while the wedding itself foreshadowed the promised union between God and the people whom he loves, and the birth of the community of believers begun at Cana and was fulfilled at the foot of the cross. The theme of new creation was brought forth in the narration of the wedding at Cana, which helped shed light on the aspects of the creation narrative of Genesis 1-3 present within the narrative of the cross. Jesus underwent an inversion of the events of the creation of Adam and Eve, in the seamless garment, in the piercing of Jesus' side, and in his burial in the garden, thereby inverting the sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world, and restoring the world to God through his sacrifice.

The many connections between the two narratives make for a more enriching reading of the two narratives, highlighting theological themes that help the reader understand the life-giving message of the Fourth Gospel and presenting the fulfillment of Jesus' Messianic mission. Without reading the two narratives together, the narrative of the wedding at Cana lacks a completion to its symbolisms, while the crucifixion narrative cannot fully express its message of new creation and new life for the believers.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis brought together the narrative methodology with research on individual aspects of the literary elements of the Gospel of John to look closely at the narratives of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) and the crucifixion of Jesus (John 19:16b-42). It takes the strengths of narrative criticism in looking at the texts as a holistic unity, and contributes to the analysis of the narrative of the wedding at Cana, which is sometimes overlooked in larger narrative studies. It also contains the depth contributed by analysis of individual literary elements, and makes coherent the theological themes to which individual elements contribute. In studying the narratives of the wedding at Cana and the crucifixion together, the relationship between the first and last signs of Jesus in the Gospel, a fact that is remarked upon by scholars yet mostly analyzed by those with a focus on the character of Mary, can bring about a better understanding of the key messages of the Gospel of John. In reading the narratives as a holistic unity and bringing individual literary elements together, therefore, it can be seen that the narrator manipulates the setting and narration, plot, character, and literary devices to work together to convey the central message of the Fourth Gospel, a story of salvation, victory, and new creation.

### Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 first presented an overview of the existing scholarship on the analysis of the Gospel of John, ranging from more generalized approaches to specific aspects of the Gospel, followed by an outline of the importance of the topic, and a description of the elements of narrative methodology.

Chapter 2 analyzed the narrative of the wedding at Cana from the perspective of setting and narration, plot, character, and literary devices. Through the narrative, Jesus' mission have begun to be revealed to the world. The reader learns about Jesus' divinity and power, rooted in

the mysterious provision of wine for the wedding banquet, and about his human identity, through his relationship to his mother and relatives, but also that his divine mission cannot be waylaid by any human relations. His Messianic mission in the world is to reveal the glory of God so as to draw all people to believe in him, so that through faith, they gain eternal life. In the transformation of the water into wine, Jesus promised the gift of abundant, life-giving graces, replacing Jewish traditions and laws. The eschatological banquet, marking the kingdom of God and the union between God and his people, is both foreshadowed and revealed as already present in the world by the wedding banquet. The kingdom of God is depicted to be a new creation and a fulfillment of all Messianic hopes and promises, which will be brought to fulfillment at the hour of the glorification of Jesus. The characters act as examples of the life-giving response to the revelation of Jesus' glory: the steadfast faith of Jesus' mother, her love for the community, and her proactive participation in God's salvific plan, the obedience of the servants, and the belief and witness of Jesus' disciples. Mary is also presented as the new Eve in her characterization as woman and mother, and she is elevated to hold the role of spiritual motherhood.

Chapter 3 analyzed the narrative of the crucifixion, which tells the story of the fulfillment of all that was promised and foreshadowed at Cana. Being crucified on the cross, Jesus' willing humiliation and death serves as the means through which the world is redeemed and the glory of Jesus revealed. Jesus is shown to be the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world and emerges victorious over darkness and death. With his sacrifice, the world is created anew, reversing the sinful nature brought about by the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In his victory over sin, he is enthroned as king over all the earth, whose kingdom is undivided and cannot be taken away from him. The people who believe in him are called to become one family of discipleship and love, united by the Spirit of God poured out from the cross with Jesus'

dying breath and with the sacramental blood and water that flowed from his pierced side. In being given God's Spirit, humanity is called to rebirth as children of God through faith in Jesus, fulfilling the eschatological promise of the union between God and his people. The various characters present positive examples of faith in Jesus, who are called to love, obedience, community, and testimony, as well as negative examples of the rejection of Jesus' power and glory, and the stubborn unwillingness to let go of external traditions of purification that no longer give life. The mother of Jesus is firmly established as the spiritual mother of the church, and given the mission to care for the children of God.

Chapter 4 draws the two narratives together, to show how the themes of the glorification of Jesus, the eschatological banquet, the outpouring of the Spirit, the kingdom of God, the new creation, and the birth of the church were all foreshadowed at the wedding at Cana and were fulfilled in the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Through the two narratives, Mary is also presented as the loving spiritual mother of all disciples, who actively participated in the salvific plan of God and was given the mission to care for the church.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

An idea that is worth exploring is the connection between the narratives of the wedding at Cana, the multiplication of loaves (John 6:1-71), and the crucifixion. In analyzing the symbolisms of the two narratives in the present thesis, connections could also be made to the narrative of the fourth sign of the Gospel, the multiplication of loaves, particularly on the topic of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The symbolism of wine and the banquet in the narrative of the wedding at Cana, the loaves and discourse on the body and blood of Jesus as the food of life in the fourth sign, and the blood flowing from Jesus' pierced side in the crucifixion narrative mark the commonality between the three narratives, which is open to a deeper analysis. Furthermore,

the chiasmic structure of the signs means that the fourth sign is the central, linked to the very first and very last signs and creating a logical beginning, middle, and end.

Another aspect of interest would be the relevance of the traits of a believer in the modern world. As the narratives present a series of traits that the children of God should have, modeled by the mother of Jesus and by the disciples, it is necessary that the narratives in the Gospel are relevant to readers throughout history, and in particular that the traits are applicable to the lives of believers today. A contextual approach can be used to investigate how faith, love, and obedience to the Word can be expressed in the modern context, and what community and testimony should look like.

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