

**A Recommended Reading**

**John 2:1 – 2:25**

**B Read Carefully**

John 2:1-12

The Wedding at Cana

John 2: 13- 22

The cleansing of the Temple

**Prayer**

O God, who through the blessed apostle John  
have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word,  
grant, we pray,  
that we might grasp with proper understanding  
what he so marvellously brought to our ears,  
Through Christ our Lord Amen.  
(From the Feast of St. John)

PFP v2/2026

**Sacred Heart Catholic Church**

Henley on Thames



**The First Week**

**2**

John 1: 19-51

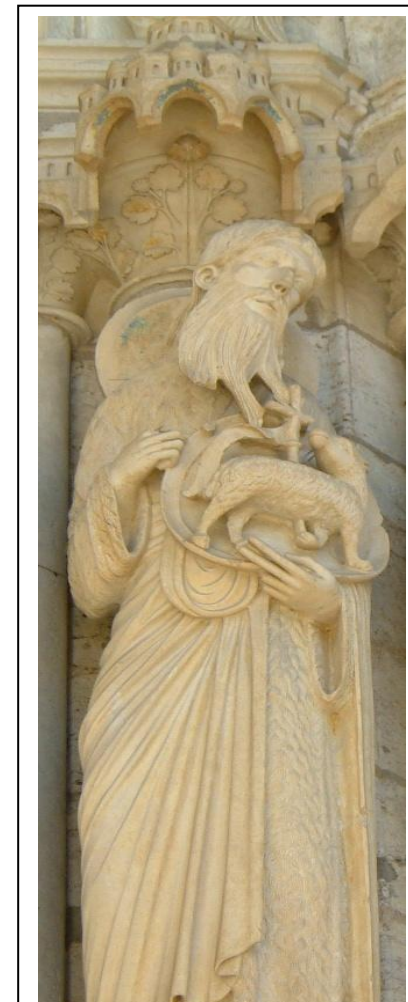
John Chapter One has been entitled '*the first week of a new creation*' because of a reference to seven days – [1+1+1+1+3]. It is another reference to the Book of Genesis. Another is the reference to the ladder – the experience of the patriarch Jacob.

The chapter is in two parts:

Firstly, the role of John (the Baptist). Who is he? Or perhaps, more accurately, who is he not? It is he who points towards Jesus. How are his words used in the Communion Rite at Mass?

Secondly, the call of the first disciples, and the revelation of Jesus through a series of titles: Lamb of God, Messiah, the one of whom the prophets wrote, the King of Israel, the Son of Man.

*John the Baptist and the Lamb of God  
(the North Portal of Chartres Cathedral)  
John 1,29.*



## The Seven Days of Creation.

We will notice that verse 29 begins “the next day”, then verse 35 states “the next day”, then verse 43 “the next day”. These will provide a way of structuring this section: 1:19-51 tells a story about a succession of events that took place over a period of four days. 2,1 begins “On the third day”; which forms a week of ‘narrative time’.

- *Verses 19-28: Day One.* The witness of the Baptist, who points away from himself as the expected Messiah or toward another standing among them, whom they do not know.
- *Verses 29-34: Day Two.* The Baptist, enlightened by the events of Jesus’ baptism, witnesses to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God.
- *Verses 35-42: Day Three.* Same disciples of the Baptist “follow” Jesus, a rabbi, the Messiah whom *they have found*. Simon, led to Jesus, is told that he will become “Cephas”.
- *Verses 43-51: Day Four.* Jesus takes the initiative. He calls Philip. Summoned by Philip, a doubting Nathanael is led to the expected Messiah whom *they have found*. Nathanael’s confession leads to a promise from Jesus.
- In addition to the “days” outlined above, the first words of the next scene, the wedding at Cana, are marked by a reference to a “day”: “On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee” (2:1).

Hence [1+1+1+1+3=7] The first week of a new creation.

## The Testimony of John the Baptist (1:29-34)

John was introduced in the prologue as one sent by God to be a witness to the light. Here he begins to fulfil that function. “The Jews from Jerusalem” sent emissaries to John. The wording reminds us that John too had been sent (cf. 1:6). The question is, “Who are you?” The expected answer is a

## Next Week

## The Wedding at Cana.

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We shall study two passages from Chapter Two:

The Wedding at Cana

The Cleansing of the Temple.

Both of these events have a particular Johannine emphasis:

The Wedding at Cana is only found in John’s Gospel. It is the first sign (or miracle) in the ministry of Jesus.

The cleansing of the Temple takes place at the beginning of John’s Gospel and not at the end, like the Synoptic Gospels.

We shall study the characteristics of John’s Gospel., which shape these episodes.

### Recruitment not Volunteering

Although this model is found only in 1,35-50, it appears throughout the Gospel in condensed and fragmentary form. e.g., the Samaritan woman speaks of Jesus to her villagers, inviting them to “come and see” (4,28-29). Martha informs Mary that Jesus is outside (11,28).

The dynamic of recruitment remains the same: disciples talk to neighbours, siblings talk to siblings, and group member’s talk to group members. In each case, Jesus is named and heralded in an increasingly sophisticated manner; and Jesus himself continues his own progressive revelation to those who “come and see”. (1,50)

The new translation of the Roman Missal makes the references to 1,29 explicit: particularly at the Communion Rite, “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*”. There is a rich artistic tradition which draws upon the Apocalypse of John as its inspiration. In the Apocalypse the usual title for Jesus is ‘the Lamb’, or the ‘Lamb who was slain’. Many images of the Lamb abound, of which the most popular is that of the Lamb seated upon the Book with seven seals.

### **The Son of Man**

Each of the Gospels implies that ‘the Son of Man’ is the title which Jesus applied to himself. Perhaps this is because of its ambiguity: it might mean – a human being. However, it could also be a reference to the heavenly figure, the one like a son of man and the Ancient of Days in *Dan 7:14*. Such authority to judge is clearly associated with the title Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel.

The idea of the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man may seem very strange at first glance. It is important to realise that the image which forms this vision, is that of Jacob’s ladder: “He (Jacob) dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” (Gen 28:12ff) In the Johannine vision, the ladder has been replaced by the figure of the Son of Man. This title serves as a climax in a narrative (John 1:29-51) where Jesus is progressively revealed. The author is not content to have Jesus revealed by Nathanael as Son of God and King of Israel but offers a greater vision: the Son of Man who is the mediator between heaven and earth.

#### **Recruitment not Volunteering**

No volunteers ever succeed in becoming disciples. The usual path to discipleship in the Fourth Gospel is by recruitment. Disciples who are already attached to Jesus recruit their siblings or neighbours to “come and see”. Jesus might then confirm this recruitment with a change of name, or an affirmative revelation.

claim to be one of the expected messianic figures, but John denies each one, thereby leaving the fulfilment of these figures to Jesus.

Having denied that he was a messianic figure, John identifies himself positively as a witness to Jesus (fulfilling what is said about John in the prologue, 1:6-8, 15). The clear implication is that anyone who claimed to be a disciple of John should heed his witness and accept Jesus as the one greater than John.

John’s title for Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The title can be interpreted as the servant lamb of Isaiah (Isa 53:7), or the Passover lamb. The paragraph ends with a second confession: Jesus is the Son of God (v. 34).

### **The first disciples (1: 35-51)**

The first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel are addressed to the two disciples. Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” This is a natural question to ask if two people are following you. At a deeper level, of course, it is one of the great questions of life: What are you searching for? The two disciples respond, apparently naively, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Again, a natural question in the context of this story. Jesus issues the invitation, “Come and see.” Already we note that Jesus typically does not answer questions directly. Instead, he pushes his conversation partners to a deeper level of understanding or response: “Come and see.” Again, the response can be understood on two levels. On the surface, it means come and see where I am staying, but the reader suspects that this is an invitation to discipleship. This conversation makes us aware that in John things often mean more than surface appearance suggests, and words often have double meanings.

One of the first two disciples, Andrew, brings his brother Simon to Jesus, and Jesus gives Simon a new name: *Cephas* (which is translated Peter). Andrew finds Simon and tells him, “*We have found the Messiah*” (1:41).

“The next day” (cf. 1:29, 35), Jesus calls Philip. We are not told what Philip’s relationship to Nathanael was. Philip’s describes Jesus as *“we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth”* (1:45). This is the fifth of seven titles attributed to Jesus in this narrative introduction to the Gospel (1:19-51).

Nathanael’s response, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” provides our first clue to his character, aside from his name. Since so much attention has been given to Jesus’ origin from God in the prologue, the reader cannot miss the contrast. We know who Jesus is because we know where he is from; Nathanael does not have the information given in the prologue. All he knows is what Philip told him: “Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.” The gap between the reader’s knowledge and the information available to the character allows the narrator to exploit the ironic potential of the narrative situation. The real point, however, is that Jesus comes from above (3:31). With disarming simplicity, Philip repeats the invitation Jesus gave a few verses earlier: “Come and see” (v. 46; cf. v. 39).

Nathanael’s confession culminates the series of titles applied to Jesus in John 1: *“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”* (1:48) Like John the Baptist, Nathanael serves as an early and exemplary response.

The scene concludes with Jesus’ promise: *“Amen, amen, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”* (1:51). This is the first of twenty-five sayings in John that begin with the use of the formula, *“Amen, amen, I say to you.”* This saying evokes another scene from the story of Jacob: his dream at Bethel of the ladder from heaven to earth and the angels descending and ascending (Gen 28:12). However, there is neither a ladder nor a reference to the meeting place between heaven and earth, because Jesus has taken these onto himself.

## The Titles of Jesus

One of the motifs that progresses through the first chapter of John is the continuing revelation and manifestation of Jesus. This is achieved through a series of titles that are applied to him.

|                                                               |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| “Lamb of God”                                                 | (1:29, 36) |
| “Son of God”                                                  | (1:34, 49) |
| “Rabbi”                                                       | (1:38)     |
| “Messiah (which means Christ)”                                | (1:41)     |
| “Him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote” | (1:45)     |
| “King of Israel”                                              | (1:49)     |
| “Son of man”                                                  | (1:51)     |

All of these titles are found within the Synoptic Gospels, but often as the climax or heavenly revelation. The structure of Mark’s Gospel is defined by Peter’s declaration of faith *‘you are the messiah’* (Mk 8:30) and the Centurion, *‘in truth this man was Son of God’* (Mk 15:39). The titles of Jesus in the Gospel of John also reveal who Jesus is, but this begins from the outset, rather than the end.

Throughout the Synoptics, it is clear that the title that Jesus applied to himself was “Son of Man”. In the Fourth Gospel, this title is used in a similar manner. All of the other titles are applied to Jesus by others. It is Jesus, himself, who refers to the Son of Man (1,51).

## The Lamb of God

The title ‘Lamb of God’ has a rich heritage; it is used extensively in the liturgy and throughout Christian art. However, it is not found in the Synoptics, and therefore every use of this title can be traced to its two-fold use in the Gospel (1,29 and 1,36) and widespread use in the Book of the Apocalypse. Therefore, every time we evoke this popular image, we draw on the rich legacy left to us from Johannine literature.