

St. John

I take as my text today, from the twenty-first chapter of St. John's Gospel:

This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be alway acceptable in thy sight O' Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.

It is quite fitting that we celebrate and commemorate the Apostle John during Christmastide as he, perhaps more than any other, lived the Gospel to which he was a witness.

John, the Beloved Disciple: beloved of our Lord and beloved of all who knew him; beloved of the Church at Ephesus and of succeeding generations.

John: a man of fiery temper; a man of ambition; of undoubted courage; and of gentle love.

We have three great figures to rise out of the early Church: St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John. Each had a function: St. Paul was the pioneer of the Church, taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth; St. Peter was the shepherd of Christ's sheep; and St. John was the witness to the story of Christ. None greater than the other and each servants of Christ.

By all accounts, John lived into the second century dying in Ephesus just after the turn of the century, perhaps around the year 105. And it was in those last years that it is believed he wrote his Gospel account of Jesus Christ.

Piecing together what information is available, going back to the earliest accounts, in particular from Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in 130, a disciple of St. John, and a companion of St. Polycarp — you may recall that St. Polycarp was a disciple of St. John. We have accounts from St. Irenaeus who was bishop of Lyons in 177, also a pupil of St. Polycarp; and from Theophilus, bishop of Antioch in 180.

There are many references to John's Gospel, as early as 110 by St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp and in 130 by Aristedes.

So, when it comes to authorship of the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, one can thus conclude that it was John who wrote the Gospel attributed to him, and he most likely wrote it about the year 100. We say wrote but it might be more correct to say that he dictated his Gospel.

The actual penman, or scribe, of the Gospel is, with good certainty, a bishop called John the Elder. He lived from about the year 70 to 145. John the Elder was bishop of Hierapolis, located near Ephesus, and was quite well-loved in the area. Indeed, early Church writers refer to the two Johns of Ephesus: the Apostle John and John the Elder; reference has also been made to their tombs.

The Apostle John had been urged by the local Church to record recollections of Jesus. Perhaps prodded by various friends and members of the Church, John recounted to them what he remembered. John the Elder fastidiously transcribed what the Apostle said adding a few editorial notes such as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

In dictating his Gospel, John gave the Church something more than a record of the ministry of Jesus: he gave us what the Holy Spirit had revealed to him over the years, those 70 years going back to when Jesus called him to be His disciple.

Of all the Gospels, this one from John stands out as the Holy Spirit speaking through the mind and memory of the Apostle, bringing meaning to the words and actions of Jesus Christ; it is an interpretation of the Life of Christ in the form of allegory.

While the Fourth Gospel is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it is, at the same time, the story of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. It is at once the story of God’s offer and man’s refusal; God’s Love and man’s sin. In this Gospel, we can see, uniquely combined, both love and a warning.

The most profound ideas, deeper than those of St. Paul, are presented in language of childlike simplicity.

Moreover, God’s Love as revealed through His Son and recounted in the Fourth Gospel is reflected in the life and mind of St. John.

St. John endured much; survived where others would have not; and lived to bridge the first and second centuries. He was a first century Apostle and a second century Christian.

His witness to the Church, to the world, is to God’s Love.

Recollections of the elderly Apostle depict John being carried on a stretcher through the streets of Ephesus calling out to those he passed to love one another. Indeed, those were his dying words.

St. Jerome told the story of John's last words. He wrote that when the Apostle was dying, his disciples asked if he had any last message for them. He is said to have replied: ***Little children love one another.*** When they pressed him for more, he replied again and again, ***Little children love one another.***

Finally, they asked him if that was all. He said, ***It is enough, for it is the Lord's command.***

Interestingly, the quote from John's Gospel,

This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

This quote was most likely inserted by John the Elder in transcribing the Apostle's Gospel.

Lastly, if we had but one Gospel to read, it would suffice to read the Gospel of St. John. If we had to choose only one book from the Bible, it would suffice to choose the **Gospel According to St. John.**

As we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord, it is in the Gospel of John that we find, in the fullest, the doctrine of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God, our Lord's true Nature as God and Man; the Word made Flesh.

St. John assures us, in his Gospel, of eternal life; gives us hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and affirms God's Love for all his Creation.

The Nativity of our Lord is beautifully and vividly told by St. Luke; yet it is in the Gospel of St. John that the true meaning of that moment in time sounds so clearly as did the Angel Choir that first introduced the world to our Lord and Saviour.