

# Engaging Encounters

# The Next Diptych(s)

- 3:1-21: Nicodemus by night in Jerusalem
  - 3:22-30: Jesus baptizes; John just the “friend of the groom”
  - 3:31-36: Reflection: heaven/earth; True witness; belief/unbelief
- 4:1-30: An anonymous woman by day in Samaria
  - 4:31-38: Dialogue with disciples
  - 4:39-42: Samaritans arrive and believe
- 4:43-54: Healing in Galilee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sign
  - Paired with Cana, an *inclusio* or frame for this segment

# A Word about Dualities Now and Then

- Contemporaries are shy of “binaries”
  - Esp. in conversations about gender
- Ancients delighted
  - Antithesis a common rhetorical trope
  - Heraclitus (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> BCE): Everything a unity of opposites; paradoxical wordplays
- Philo of Alexandria in *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*
  - The Logos or Divine Word, a two-edged sword
    - Like the tongue. Cf. Heb 4:12 (Logos); Rev 1:16 (Son of Man); 19:15 (White horse rider)
  - Divides all language and reality into pairs of opposites

# John 3: Jesus & Nicodemus

- 2:23-25: Setting in Jerusalem at Passover
- 3:1-2: Nicodemus, leading Pharisee, comes by night
  - Attracted by “signs”
  - Will return at 7:50-52 (“You too from Galilee”); 19:39-42 (w myrrh & aloes)
  - What kind of character? Flat, Round, Ambiguous?
- 3:3-8: Dialogue about being born “*anōthen*”
  - Can mean “again” or “from above”
  - Dramatic Irony: Nicodemus thinks literally; Audience gets the point (?)
    - Like Pentheus & Dionysus in Eurpides’ *Bacchae*?
  - But what’s with “water” and “spirit”: Baptism?? Belief?? Some combo??

# Imagining the Scene

- Henry Ossawa Tanner
- African American
- 1859–1937
- Lived in France



- Crijn Hendricksz
- Volmarijn
  
- Dutch
  
- 1604–1645



# Possible Parallels

- Synoptics:
  - A Rich Young Man (Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23)
    - Public exchange; Jesus straightforward
  - Or youth at night (Mk 14:52).
    - No exchange
- *Corpus Hermeticum*: Works set in Ancient Egypt, Diverse content
  - Greek Philosophy, eclectic popular piety
  - CH I: *Poimandres*, story of creation, echoes of Genesis
- Dialogues between Hermes “Trismegistos” and his pupil, Thoth.
- CH XIII: Discussion of Rebirth; Riddling instruction

# Possible history??

- Nicodemus, a prominent Jerusalemite in 1<sup>st</sup> BCE
  - Josephus, *Ant.* 14.37
- Nicodemus (or Nicomedes), father of a leader of revolt
  - Josephus *War* 4. 251.
- Rabbis mention Naqdimon ben Gurion
  - Wealthy Jerusalemits prior to destruction



# Further Questions

- 3:9: Nicodemus, “How does birth *anōthen* happen?”
  - 11-12: Jesus responds, Chides Nic and answers, “The Son of Man”
  - 13: He comes down from heaven. (So what he brings is *anōthen*.)
- [Implicit Q: But how does he deliver what he brings?]
  - 3:14: He is “lifted up” like the serpent of Num 21:8, “Seen,” he heals
  - 3:15-16: Belief in that son of Man brings eternal life. God so loved...
- [Implicit Q: But doesn’t the Son of Man serve as a judge?]
  - 3:19: Light is either accepted or rejected. People “judge” themselves!
  - 3:20: Who does the truth comes to the light.

# Other Images of “rebirth”

- Paul tells the Corinthians that he has “begotten” them 1 Cor 4:15
- Paul uses similar language of Onesimus Philemon 10
- Philo, Q. Exod. 2.46: Moses’ a prophet = second birth

# The Additional Diptych

- 3:22-30: Jesus baptized! Everyone comes to him (v 26)
  - Historical detail or emphasizing the “water” of the Nic encounter
  - 4:2 corrects: Jesus didn’t personally baptize!
- John’s reaction? It’s OK
  - 27: God, giving his gifts, is in charge
  - 28: I’m just the “friend of the groom” (Cf. Mk 2:19, best men don’t fast)
  - 30: It’s his time (Ah, but not quite yet: Jn 2:4?)
- 3:31-36: Reflection by Baptist? Narrator? Making connections
  - 31: The one from above (*another*) is tops, the true witness (vv 12-16)
  - 33: The one who accepts “seals” the claim (ironic baptismal allusion) (v 5)
  - 34: The one sent speaks God’s words, abundantly (vv 12-16, Prologue)
  - 35: Believe or face divine wrath. (vv 17-21)

Jesus and “Photina”

# An Encounter and Recognition in Samaria

- 4:1-2: Correction of 3:22-23 (editor? Or author, recognizing a trope?)
- 4:4-6: Setting: Jacob's well
- 4:7-15: Request for water -> Promise of "living" water
  - Like birth *anathen*, a physical and a metaphorical meaning
- 4:16-18: Call hubby! – Have none. Right, you have 5!
- 4:19-24: Worship at Samaria, Jerusalem, in Spirit and Truth
  - 22: Salvation from the Jews!
- 4:25-26: Recognition: Messiah will tell all. J. "That's me!" ("*I am*")
  - A classic "recognition" scene. More to come!
- 4:27-30: She goes and says, "Come and see" (>1:39, 46).
  - 29: Maybe he's the Christ? Robust belief??

# Intertexts: Strange women and Samaritans

- The Syro-Phonician (Mk) or Canaanite (Mt) woman
  - Mk 7:24-30 // Mt 15:21-28
  - Jesus disdainful
  - A woman spars, scores, and earns exorcism (Mk) and praise (Mt)
    - Mt 15:28: “Great is your faith”
- Samaritans
  - Jesus says, Avoid ‘em: Mt 10:5
  - Can be surprisingly good: Lk 10:30-37
  - Philip converts, when they *see signs*: Acts 8:4-8

# The Literary Model: Romance at a Well

- Guy meets gal at a well: a “pick-up” scene
  - 4:7: evokes Gen 24:13-14 (Abe); 29:9 (Jacob); Exod 2:16 (Moses)
- Here: Gal pursues; Guy coyly plays hard to get.
  - 4:10: Jesus, “If you only knew...”
- Gal attracted; shocked by his insight, she sees who he really is.
  - 4:16-18 The “fetch hubby” exchange. Jesus knows (> 1:48)
- Infatuation (Eros) turns to mission (Agape)
  - 4:29: Mission to Samaria

# Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna





# Annibale Carracci, 1560-1609



# Bernardo Strozzi, 1581-1604



# Giovanni Barbieri, Il Guercino 1591-1666



# Carlo Maratto 1625-1713



# At Notre Dame



He Qi, Nanjing, 20<sup>th</sup> Cent.



# An added Diptych

- 4:31-38: Disciples come
  - 33: Something to eat? -> ch. 6
  - 34: My “food” is to do the Father’s will (What will “bread of life” mean?)
  - 35-38: Harvest imagery: Your job!
    - Evokes tradition: Mk 4:3-9 (Sower); Jn: Distinguish Sower and Harvester
    - Perhaps a gesture toward what Acts reports?
- 4:39-42: Samaritans come
  - 40: They ask him to abide (*meno*). He does so for 2 days.
  - 41: Many believe through his word (-> 3:34), not signs as in Acts.
  - 42: They don’t need her testimony, They know he is Savior of the World.
    - Yet another title; outside Judaea, his universal significance seen.
    - What is the value of the woman’s testimony? Are the Samaritans right?