

## **A Great Prophet Has Arisen Among Us**

*Proclaiming Christ today*

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### **Sequence**

- Contexts
- Table of the Faith
- Learning from Emmaus
- The shape of the new narrative
- Resources
- Conversation

### **1. Current Contexts**

- Our world
- Our churches
- Ourselves
- Our narratives

#### *Our world*

- We live in a time of great anxiety about the well-being of our planet – a time of anxiety about the next generation and how it will be for them.
- The political world is undergoing a time of destabilisation, unknown, at least in Europe, since the post-war consensus. Marked social divisions create contexts in which many will be unhappy with the final outcomes.
- The potential for manipulation by malign forces is greater than ever before and often the ordinary person feels paralysed, unable to grasp what is going on and, even more so, helpful to oppose it.
- The huge expansion (invasion?) of the social media means we are more aware of our world and of each other but not necessarily less on our own or less lonely.
- In the words of Plato, we need and long for truth and expertise in our leaders, both political and ecclesiastical. Often, such reasonable expectations are not met but rather set aside or even dismissed, sometimes blatantly and without apology.

#### *Our churches*

- The mainline churches are in decline. Something happened some four or five decades ago which effectively disabled the handing on of the faith. The cultural shell has remained (a surprise, really), but it is increasingly obvious that it is indeed a fragile shell.
- It is not evident to our contemporaries that the Christian tradition is equipped to respond to current spiritual needs.

#### *Ourselves*

- Coming generations are no longer born into a received and acknowledged system of meaning, with rituals and symbols, but each person, each human unit, has to create their own sense of what it means to be human. This can be seen as a liberation and as a burden. It is certainly not easy.
- In an age of (very) welcome tolerance, this lack of received meaning can lead to a sense that there is no general meaning at all, nothing is true in itself but only true for me or or us.
- At the same time, live in a time of great generosity of spirit, as can be seen when appeals go out for causes.
- The increased interest in such practices meditation, mindfulness, yoga, tells us that people are searching, looking for a "still point at the turning of the world" (TS Eliot).
- The hungers of the human heart have not been stilled by our culture of distraction, constant news and instant communication. St Augustine was right: our hearts are restless.
- It is vital to keep an eye on social rituals. When the fundamental rituals change – typically associated with birth, puberty, marriage and death – then some very deep

change is taking place. We may not be aware of this in the middle of it.

- It is vital to keep an eye on the poets and the musicians. These are the prophetic voices of our day and very often they express what is happening long before a conscious awareness or interpretation is possible.

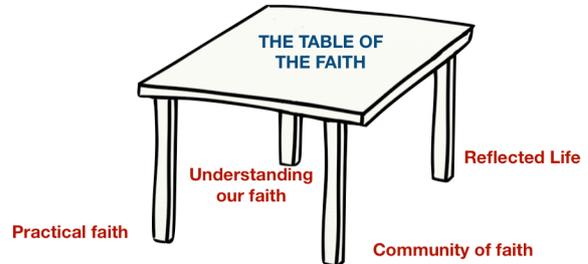
*Our narratives*

(two contrasting images)

## 2. Table of the Faith

- a) **The reflected life:** this takes in personal journey, spiritual quest, the attempt to make sense of and integrate our "self", Christian mediation and so forth.

- b) **Community of faith:** privatised faith independent of the community of believers is a contradiction. At Baptism, we become members of an intentional, missionary community. The community sends us out and we return to the community. This belonging finds true expression in the shared Eucharist.



- c) **Understanding our faith:** it is the task of us all to bring the faith into critical dialogue with the world around us. Exploring the faith as a grown-up takes time and effort, but the end result should be a more life-giving integration of faith and our real lives.
- d) **Practical faith in our world:** this dimension encompasses a wide range including personal conversion, ethical living and the struggle for justice in all its forms.
- e) It is evident that distinguishing these dimensions is a work of analysis and therefore somewhat artificial.
- f) Probably no one lives each dimension fully all of the time; at different stages in life, one or other aspect may achieve a greater prominence.
- g) If any one of these dimensions is substantially missing or totally absent, for whatever reason, the experience of the faith will likewise be diminished and partial.
- h) Initiating people into missionary / intentional discipleship must, by its very nature, take account of all four aspects, however this is to be achieved.

## 3. Learning from Luke

**Luke 24:13** Now that very day two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and debating these things, Jesus himself approached and began to accompany them **16** (but their eyes were kept from recognising him). **17** Then he said to them, "What are these matters you are discussing so intently as you walk along?" And they stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?" **19** He said to them, "What things?" "The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene," they replied, "a man who, with his powerful deeds and words, proved to be a prophet before God and all the people; **20** and how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be condemned to death, and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. Not only this, but it is now the third day since these things happened. **22** Furthermore, some women of our group amazed us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body, they came back and said they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24** Then some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." **25**

So he said to them, "You foolish people—how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures.

**Luke 24:28** So they approached the village where they were going. He acted as though he wanted to go farther, **29** but they urged him, "Stay with us, because it is getting toward evening and the day is almost done." So he went in to stay with them.

**Luke 24:30** When he had taken his place at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** At this point their eyes were opened and they recognised him. Then he vanished out of their sight. **32** They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us while he was speaking with us on the road, while he was explaining the scriptures to us?" **33** So they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and those with them gathered together **34** and saying, "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon!" **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how they recognised him when he broke the bread.

### Background

- Reference to Moses (= the Pentateuch), the Prophets (meaning both historical books and prophets) and all the Scriptures (possibly meaning the last part of the OT, "the writings"). To find out which texts resonated with the early Christians, read Luke-Acts and see which texts are consistently referred to. E.g. Isaiah 53, Psalm 110, Psalm 118 etc.
- In the programmatic scene in Nazareth, Luke 4:16-30 refers to Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6 as well as to 1 Kings 17:1, 8-16; 18:1; 2 Kings 5:1-14.
- Perhaps the story nearest is that of Abraham's hospitality to his three guests, unaware that they are "angels" (= God really). The Graeco-Roman reader would be familiar with such stories about the gods disguised.

### Sources

Now (lit. and behold): 28-0-**26-8**

Two: 40-18-**29-13**

of them: 9-3-**9-7**

On the same day: 0-0-**2-0**

Going: 29-3-**51-37**

Village: 4-7-**12-1**

About 5-2-**4-2**

Jerusalem 2-0-**27-37** (there are two forms in Greek for Jerusalem; the occurrence of the other form

is: 11-10-**4-22**

Name: 23-15-**24-60**

Emmaus 0-0-**1-0**

Talking: 0-0-**2-2**

With each other: 0-4-**8-4**

Happened 0-1-**1-3**

Discussing: 0-6-**2-2**

Drew near: 7-3-**18-6**

Went with: 0-1-**3-0**

Eye: 24-7-**17-7**

Prevented: 12-15-**2-4**

Recognise: 6-4-**7-13**

Discussing: 0-0-**1-0**

Walk 7-9-**5-8**

Stand: 21-10-**26-35**

Sad: 1-0-**1-0**

Answer: 55-30-**46-20**

Only: 14-6-**10-8**

Stranger: 0-0-**1-0**

Know: 20-12-**28-16**

To happen: 75-55-**131-125**

In these days: 0-0-**3-1**

What?: 7-4-**8-4**

Jesus: 152-82-**88-69**

Nazarene: 0-4-**2-0**

Man 8-4-**27-100**

Prophet: 37-6-**29-30**

Powerful: 3-5-**4-6**

Word: 33-24-**32-65**

Deed: 6-2-**2-10**

Before: 0-0-**3-2**

Hand over: 31-20-**17-13**

High Priests: 25-22-**15-22**

Leaders: 5-1-**8-11**

To be condemned: 1-1-**3-1**

Death: 7-6-**7-8**

Crucify: 10-8-**6-2**

To hope: 1-0-**3-2**

To be about to do (mellō):  
9-2-**12-34**

To redeem: 0-0-**1-0**

Israel: 12-2-**12-15**

Third: 12-7-**10-14**

Since: 0-0-**5-0**

Woman: 29-17- <b>41-19</b>	To be nearly over: 1-0- <b>4-0</b>
Astound: 1-4- <b>3-8</b>	Already: 7-8- <b>10-3</b>
Morning: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>	Day: 45-27- <b>83-94</b>
Tomb: 7-8- <b>8-1</b>	To be at table: 0-0- <b>5-0</b>
Find: 27-11- <b>45-35</b>	To take: 53-20- <b>21-29</b>
Body: 14-4- <b>13-1</b>	Bread: 21-21- <b>15-5</b>
Vision: 0-0- <b>2-1</b>	To bless: 5-5- <b>13-1</b>
Alive: 6-3- <b>9-12</b>	To bread: 3-3- <b>2-4</b>
Foolish: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>	To give: 56-39- <b>60-35</b>
Slow: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>	To be opened: 0-1- <b>4-3</b>
Heart: 16-11- <b>22-20</b>	Vanished: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>
Believe 11-14- <b>9-37</b>	Not ( <i>ouchi</i> ) 9-0- <b>18-2</b>
To declare: 26-21- <b>31-59</b>	To burn: 1-0- <b>2-0</b>
Necessary: 8-6- <b>18-22</b>	Road (way): 22-16-20-20
To suffer: 4-3- <b>6-5</b>	To open: 0-1- <b>4-3</b>
Christ [messiah]: 16-7- <b>12-25</b>	To get up: 4-17- <b>27-45</b>
To enter: 36-30- <b>50-34</b>	Hour: 21-12- <b>17-11</b>
Glory: 7-3- <b>13-4</b>	To return: 0-0- <b>21-11</b>
To begin: 13-27- <b>31-10</b>	To be gathered: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>
Moses: 7-8- <b>10-19</b>	Eleven: 1-1- <b>2-2</b>
To interpret: 0-0- <b>1-1</b>	Rise: 36-19- <b>18-13</b>
Scripture: 4-3- <b>4-7</b>	Appeared: 1-1-3-5
To act as if: 0-0- <b>1-0</b>	Simon (meaning the apostle): 5-7- <b>12-4</b>
Further (comparative): 0-0- <b>1-0</b>	To tell (explain): 0-0- <b>1-4</b>
To urge: 0-0- <b>1-1</b>	Breading of the bread: 0-0- <b>1-1</b>
To stay: 3-2- <b>7-13</b>	
Evening: 0-0- <b>1-2</b>	

### Sources

- In the analysis of the vocabulary count, unique means that it occurs only in Luke or in Luke-Acts. Strongly Lucan vocabulary means any word which occurs in another Gospel but which occurs 50% more frequently in Luke. Non-Lucan means any word that does not occur elsewhere in Luke or Acts.
- Unique vocabulary: one the same day, Emmaus, talking, discussing, stranger, in these days, before, to redeem, since, morning, vision, foolish, slow, to interpret, to act as it, further, to urge, evening, to be at table, vanished, to return, to be gathered, to tell, the breaking of the bread.
- Strongly Lucan vocabulary: going, village Jerusalem, with each other, to draw near, to happen, man, leaders, to be condemned, to hope, to find, alive, necessary, to suffer, glory, to begin, to stay, to be nearly over, day, to bless, to be opened, not (*ouchi*), to burn, to open, to get up, eleven, appeared, Simon,
- Non-Lucan vocabulary: (none)

### Narrative

- It is a narrative, that is, a story with a plot
- Within the biblical tradition, it is a theophany
- A story unique to Luke (the story of Philip and the Eunuch in Acts mirrors it).
- Both belong to a type of folktale in which the welcome to the unrecognised stranger turns out to be the decisive event of your life.
- In the Jewish tradition, there are stories of Elijah, interestingly, exactly in this role.
- The Lucan version exhibits the typical features of resurrection appearance stories: doubt, lack of recognition, revelation and mission.

### Narrative – Elijah disguised

The young Eleazar, son of the great Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, was determined to make his own way in the world. He would not learn Torah and be a Rabbi and teacher. He would make a career in the Roman government, which his father hated. At one point, the Romans put Eleazar in charge of animals and labourers who could be rented for trucking and transportation.

Elijah, ever remembered for the good, disguised as an old man came to him one time and said to him: "Get a beast of burden ready for me." Eleazar asked: "And what do you have to load on the animal?" Elijah said: "I have this worn out water skin, my cloak, and myself, as rider." Eleazar said to himself: "Take a look at this old man whom I can pick up and carry to the end of the world; and he says to me, 'Get a beast of burden ready for me'?" So what did Eleazar do? He put Elijah on his back, took him up mountainsides, and brought him down into valleys, across fields of thorns and fields of thistles.

Along the way, Elijah began to bear down upon him, making himself heavier and heavier. Eleazar said: "Old man, old man! Lighten yourself. If not, I shall throw you off." Elijah asked: "Would you like to take a few breaths?" He replied: "Yes." So, what did Eleazar do? He took Elijah to a field where he set him down under a tree and gave him something to eat and drink. After Elijah ate and drank, he asked Eleazar: "What will all this wandering around get you? Would it not be better for you to settle down and take up the trade of your ancestors?" Eleazar asked: "Can you teach me their occupation?" Elijah replied: "Yes."

There are those who say that Elijah, ever remembered for the good, taught him for thirteen years until he knew all of Sifra, the ancient teachings on the book of Leviticus; once he was able to carry all of the Sifra he could not even carry his own cloak. (Pesikta d'Rav Kahanna 11:22)

### Narrative

- Plot structure
  - ✓ Exposition
  - ✓ Inciting moment
  - ✓ Complication
  - ✓ Climax
  - ✓ Dénouement
  
- Kinds of Plots
- Plots of Action "Reversal" (they return)
- Plots of Knowledge "Insight" (hearts burning)
- Plots of Character "Growth" ("had hoped")
- All three kinds of plot play a role and the climax varies accordingly
  
- Watch when the story "turns"
- Knowledge: "At this point their eyes were opened and they recognised him." (Luke 24:31)
- Character: "They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us while he was speaking with us on the road, while he was explaining the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)
- Action: "So they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem." (Luke 24:33)
  
- 3. Narrative of Jesus' condemnation and death
- 2. Narrative of Jesus' ministry
- 4. Narrative of the women at the tomb
- 5. Narrative of "some of us" at the tomb
- 1. Narrative of Old Testament hopes
- 7. Narrative of the appearance to Peter
- 6. Narrative of the pilgrims' moment of recognition
  
- 1. Narrative of Old Testament hopes
- 2. Narrative of Jesus' ministry
- 3. Narrative of Jesus' condemnation and death
- 4. Narrative of the women at the tomb
- 5. Narrative of "some of us" at the tomb

6. Narrative of the pilgrims' moment of recognition
7. Narrative of the appearance to Peter

### Concentric

- Chiastic patterns: ABB\*A\*
- Concentric patterns: ABCB\*A\*
- Q: is the physical centre the centre of meaning?

A 13 (in the same/Jerusalem/going)

B 14 (they were talking to each other)

C 15ab (Jesus himself drew near)

D 16 (something prevented them from recognising him)

E 17-19a (he makes a request which stops them)

F 19b-24 (ministry, death and tomb, no sight)

G 25 slowness of heart/ slow to believe

F' 26-27 (ministry, death and tomb, in the light of SS)

E' 28-30 (they make a request which stops him)

D' 31a (their eyes were opened, they recognised him)

C' 31b (He disappears from them)

B' 32 (they speak to each other)

A' 33a (in the same/ Jerusalem/returning) + Coda: 33-35

- vv.13f This sets up the story, the characters and the situation. The reader knows it is Jesus and becomes an observer of the birth of faith.
- v.17 He makes them stop.
- vv. 18f Highly ironic that they should tell him, of all people, the story of his own death and resurrection!
- vv. 5f Luke makes Jesus do what the early Christians did: look to the scriptures to understand their astounding experiences.
- vv. 8f They make him stop. The scene does echo the Eucharist, but that is not the chief point: the Risen Lord comes in to us to stay with us when we desire it (cf. they urged him strongly).
- vv. 33f Mutual confirmation of faith stories

- So, the centre is overcoming "slowness of heart to believe"
- Cf. "Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29)
- I.e. the needs of a much later generation are being met

### Coming to Easter faith

- Awareness of longing ("We had hoped")
- Familiarity with the Jesus story
- Jesus' story read in light of Scripture (continuity / faithfulness)
- The witness of the early church (the women etc.)
- The sovereign self-presentation of the Risen Lord
- The fleeting character of our elusive "epiphanies"
- The key role of our desire ("Stay with us...")
- The celebration of the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread
- The confirmation of the faith through the experience of the community
- The power of retrospective reflection

## New Narrative

- The new cosmology as *our* narrative
- Awareness of God's disclosure in created reality
- Awareness of God's disclosure in other faith systems
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- Concrete: why Israel, then?
- Concrete: "the scandalous particularity of the incarnation"
- Concrete: classical Christian creeds about Jesus, Son of God
- 
- The historical Jesus in critical biblical studies
- Challenge: the traditional narrative of redemption
- Imagining a new, comprehensive vision of the Christian project

## Resources

- I. Delio, *The Emergent Christ*.
- I. Delio (ed.), *Personal Transformation and a New Creation*
- R. Williams, *Christ, the Heart of Creation*.
- J. Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*.
- R. Rohr, *The Universal Christ*.
  
- C. Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It seems*.
  
- J. Pagola, *Jesus. An Historical Approximation*.
- E. Boring and F. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary*.
- J. Martin, *Jesus. A Pilgrimage*.

## Prayer

O God of mystery,  
out of death you delivered Christ Jesus,  
and he walked in hidden glory with his disciples.

Stir up our faith,  
that our hearts may burn within us  
at the sound of his word,  
and our eyes be opened to recognise him  
in the breaking of the bread.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
the first-born from the dead  
who lives with you now and always  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever. Amen.

## Conversation