



The Eucharist in Scripture

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with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

The Eucharist in Scripture

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into five lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet five times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.


Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website (www.littlerockscripture.org).

Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gath-

erings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree how much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- Commentary by Clifford M. Yeary, which has also been published separately as *Welcome to the Feast: The Story of the Eucharist in Scripture* (Liturgical Press).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting relevant biblical information. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is:

Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.

- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–23) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 24–26.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 27 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

The Eucharist in Scripture

LESSON ONE

Some Old Testament Feasts with God

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as a sign of your love, you have given us the gift of yourself in the Eucharist. May your presence with us in both word and sacrament be a source of nourishment and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Read the Introduction and pages 13–23, Lesson One.

Respond to the questions on pages 24–26, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 27 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Among the more liturgically oriented Christian faith traditions, the Eucharist is central to faith and worship. As a Catholic, I am deeply appreciative of how Catholic teaching concerning the Eucharist continues to enrich my faith in untold ways. This commentary, however, was not undertaken in order to “prove” that Catholic doctrines on the Eucharist are to be explicitly found in the Bible. Rather, I hope to assist those without theological degrees to gain insight and appreciation for the deep biblical roots of the Eucharist. Those biblical roots are richly nourishing, and those who know what their faith teaches will recognize the vital relationship between their traditions and the scriptural accounts.

I have been engaged in serious study of Scripture for many years and have always called myself a student of Scripture while disclaiming the title of scholar. In this commentary my goal is to open up the Scriptures to the best of my ability while providing you, the reader, with the rich gleanings from many respected scholars. In discussions specifically dealing with the Eucharist in the New Testament, I have relied solely on Catholic Scripture scholars. I am grateful to all for helping me engage with the biblical accounts about encounters with God and the Son of God during the very human experience of eating a meal. As this commentary is directed toward general readers, I have avoided the use of footnotes, but in fairness to the scholars with whose ideas

I engage, I have tried to consistently inform you of the sources I used. At the back of the book you will find a list of the most pertinent names in a recommended reading list.

It may come as a surprise that in the opening chapter I begin with Abraham and Sarah and the hospitality they showed when three strangers who were imbued with a divine aura appeared at their tent. But that is how the story that builds up to the Eucharist in the New Testament begins, with the desire of both God and people to be in intimate fellowship with each other in the context of a meal. God gives us food for the nurturing of our lives, but the greatest nurture of all is God’s presence at a meal. Later, in the Old Testament, we learn that the blessings God promises the children of Israel are an invitation to a feast, a wedding feast, in which their God will be united with them as a loving, devoted spouse. When Jesus began to minister to the people of Israel, he consistently invited them to feast with him as their bridegroom. His ministry culminated in a meal in which he offered bread and wine as his own body and blood soon to be taken and shed in a violent execution on a cross.

He asked that his followers continue to offer this meal “in memory of me,” and this they remembered to do after he had risen from the dead, making that memory of him one of deep sorrow and yet of unsurpassable joy. And so we too are invited to eat with the Savior, to remember his passion and resurrection in the breaking of bread. Therefore let us faithfully respond to his call as we are bidden, *Welcome to the feast!*



SOME OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS WITH GOD

The Hospitality of Abraham

Genesis 18:1-15

Abraham's Visitors. ¹The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. ²Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, ³he said: "Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. ⁴Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. ⁵Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way." "Very well," they replied, "do as you have said."

⁶Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread." ⁷He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.

⁹"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There in the tent," he replied. ¹⁰One of them said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son." Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, just behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her menstrual periods. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself and said, "Now that I am worn out and my husband is old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?" ¹³But the LORD said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really bear a child, old as I am?' ¹⁴Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," because she was afraid. But he said, "Yes, you did."

At the time the three strangers approach Abraham at the oak of Mamre, this aging couple have left their original homeland in order to faithfully respond to a call from God (Gen 12:1). God has promised that the entire region of Canaan would be the inheritance of Abraham's offspring through Sarah (at least by implication), and yet they have grown old and have had no children together. There is no hint, however, that their hospitality toward these strangers is provided in expectation of any sort of gift or repayment.

In the New Testament, Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to these three strangers is most probably responsible for the exhortation in the Letter to the Hebrews urging Christians to be hospitable people, for through hospitality "some have unknowingly entertained angels" (13:2).

While nothing is explicitly said about whether Abraham recognized the angelic or divine nature of his visitors, Abraham is someone who has been visited by God more than once (see Gen 12:7-9; 15:1-20; 17:1-22). We also have to consider that the appearance of God to Abraham by "the oak of Mamre" would not have happened coincidentally. In ancient times special trees of the region, some called oaks and others terebinths, were considered likely

places for religious encounters and would be the place markers for a variety of religious activities, including sacrifices to other gods that drew the ire of prophets long after the time of Abraham (see Isa 1:29 and Hos 4:13).

Many of God's appearances in Genesis are said to be anthropomorphic, that is to say, they depict God as having a human form and in many ways displaying human behavior (see Gen 3:8) and so God's appearing to Abraham in human form here should not surprise us. What is most curious about this particular appearance to Abraham, though, is that while it is said that it is the Lord who appears to Abraham, we learn that it is three men that Abraham sees standing near him.

Some scholars explain this by suggesting that we have two traditions being blended into one account. One tradition has the Lord appearing to Abraham while another tradition tells of three men, all of whom would be thought of as angels of the LORD. Richard J. Clifford, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, suggests that the singularity of God and the plurality of figures work together to express both God's nearness and elusiveness. In other words, God's appearance to Abraham was very real, but it is impossible to adequately describe the event, and the somewhat confusing issue of how many figures Abraham entertained is all part of the spiritual aura surrounding the encounter.

Christians have always read the Old Testament in light of faith's assurance that Jesus Christ is the center of God's revelation. After all, we read in Luke that it was the risen Christ himself who taught the apostles to seek Christ in reading the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people: " 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (24:44-45).

During the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, the Christian church declared that belief in the Holy Trinity was an essential aspect of authentic faith in Christ. Eventually, reading

the Old Testament as Christian revelation, and explicit belief in the triune nature of God, led the early-fifteenth-century Russian mystic Andrei Rublev to portray the three "men" who visited Abraham by the oak of Mamre as an encounter with the Holy Trinity. It is arguably the most famous icon of all time.

Catholic and Protestant biblical scholars alike are far more careful today to attempt to read and interpret the Old Testament texts within the historical and literary contexts from which they arose. At the time the narrative of the encounter between Abraham and the three figures was put into its present form, there was no awareness of or belief in a trinity of persons in God. This modern, scholarly approach also allows for a faithful reading of the Old Testament that leads us to Christ, however. It does so as it traces the growth and development of a burning desire among Abraham's offspring for a redeeming presence of God that would call all peoples into relationship with Israel's God (see Tob 13:11; Ps 87; Isa 42:6-7; Jer 3:14-17; Mic 4:2-3; Zech 2:14-15). This aspiration for communion with God in the Old Testament is one that early Jewish followers of Jesus believed God had granted them in Jesus, their Messiah, and that has remained the belief of Christians throughout time.



The principles that guide **modern Catholic biblical study** and interpretation are described in Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (*Inspired by the Holy Spirit*). In this document, interpreters of Scripture are encouraged to ground their study in knowledge of the ancient languages in which the texts were written, as well as familiarity with the historical, archaeological, and sociological contexts of Scripture. This knowledge allows the interpreter of sacred writ to gain a better understanding of the author's situation and therefore a better understanding of the author's original meaning.

So, while it is wise to be aware of the historical and literary contexts of biblical accounts when interpreting their theological thrust, it would also be foolish to ignore how biblical texts of earlier eras helped form and fashion later believers' understanding of their faith.

We can safely assert, therefore, that Rublev's icon of the Old Testament Trinity rightly continues to invite Christians into a deep contemplation of the mystery of God's self-revelation to Abraham and Sarah. In their depictions of the meeting between God and Abraham at the oak of Mamre, both the Genesis account and Rublev's icon open us to the journey of faith that leads Christians to eventually discover the triune nature of God and more: they also point us in the direction of the Eucharist. In Abraham and Sarah's gracious hospitality toward the divine visitors there is an early stirring of the pervasive biblical appetite for communion with this God who would dine at table with us in mutual hospitality.

Notice how the title "LORD" is printed in this verse (Gen 18:1): "The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre." Whenever we see the word "LORD" printed out in capital letters in the Old Testament, it is the translators' customary way of alerting us to the presence in the Hebrew text of the special name of God, *Yahweh*, a name that another tradition held was not made known until it was revealed to Moses from the burning bush (Exod 3:1-15). Because the name of God is to be held in the highest respect and in due deference to the commandment not to take the name of God in vain (Exod 20:7), most English translations of the Old Testament have honored the ancient Jewish tradition of reading "LORD" (*Adonai* in Hebrew) instead of "Yahweh" when the latter appears in the Hebrew text.

Along with questions about when the name "Yahweh" was revealed (does its presence in the Abraham narratives contradict the narrative of its revelation to Moses in the burning bush? [see Gen 12:8]), the meaning of this name has also been a subject of great interest. While it is often translated into English as "I AM" or

cryptically as "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14), the enduring inference surrounding this name is what God tells Moses in Exodus 3:12: "I will be with you." Regardless of when the name was revealed, the God who appears to Abraham at the oak of Mamre is deliberately identified with the God who is revealed to Moses at the burning bush. This is a God who makes promises and keeps them, by being with us throughout our journeys through life. The God who was revealed to Abraham and Moses is a God who will always be with his people.

For Christians, this revelation reaches its climax in the person of Jesus Christ, who is revealed to us as "Emmanuel," which literally means "God with us" (see Matt 1:23).

In this account of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality toward the three strangers we discover that true hospitality comes from God, who seeks to be with us and binds himself to us in a covenant filled with promise. In this account, the promise is that Sarah will bear a son in a year's time, a son who will be the essential link between Abraham and Sarah and the generations to come who will form the body of God's covenant people.

What is it about food that a meal can both be the instrument of a vital communion with God and provide the occasion for receiving the most important of God's promises to us?

Today, many are unaware of the great theological and anthropological significance of food in our lives. Perhaps that is because it is so easy to take food for granted in our consumer culture. In fact, for many, food has become a threat to well-being, as the abundance of food within our reach can place us at risk for obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. That is not to say we don't love food—just the opposite—but we are in danger, as a culture, of forgetting some of the most important values that should surround our eating and drinking.

Eating and drinking, at the most basic level, are what keep us alive. Only breathing is more important to us, and if we don't eat and drink enough, we will, in a matter of a few weeks or less, quit breathing. Hunger and malnutrition

are serious problems not only in impoverished areas of the world, but a surprising percentage of Americans, many of them children, face daily challenges in obtaining their nutritional needs. Ironically, it is the poor who are most likely to suffer from both obesity and malnutrition in America: the cheaper the food, the less nutritious it is.

While we eat to stay alive, it is eating for pleasure that powers the business engine behind our food. Marketing mavens know how to tickle our taste buds, tempting us to eat any time of day. We eat in our cars, at our desks, while watching television, when we are excited and when we are bored. We may even eat to compensate for other unfulfilled needs in our life.

Today, many of us eat alone even when eating in public. Eating in a fast-food restaurant can place us side by side any number of strangers without it becoming a social event.

Today, many families can go days without sitting down at a table and sharing a common meal. Our schedules are crammed with important activities and eating simply becomes a necessity. A pleasurable necessity, but one that can be accommodated with such ease that it needn't engage us socially with anyone, even our families. Now, with the advent of smartphones and other mini-sized computers, it is not uncommon to deliberately or unconsciously avoid personal contact with family members on those occasions when we do eat at the same table with each other.

There are still those special occasions when eating does become a celebration of life shared with others. Thanksgiving and the holy days of Christmas and Easter still have that importance for many. A meal celebrating a wedding anniversary might not only renew the bond between a couple, but silver and golden anniversaries are often feasts for extended families and friends across many generations. There are also special occasions without fixed annual dates, such as weddings and funerals, baptisms and confirmations, all key moments in life and death for which meals are shared.

These special occasions, when food is both the sign and nurturer of our social and familial

bonds with loved ones, are vital to this study of Eucharist in Scripture. When we bring our own experiences of being drawn into deeper communion with others in our lives through food, we have "tasted" an appetizer for that ultimate meal of communion between God and ourselves.

As a culture, it may seem that we have come a long way from the day of Abraham and Sarah, when the hospitality of offering food to strangers on a journey meant the sharing of life itself, and brought with it the divine promise of new life. There are many among us who continue this practice of hospitality to strangers, however. They serve strangers in soup kitchens, feed families through food banks, and deliver nutrition to the starving around the world through charitable organizations.



Hospitality in the ancient Middle East was a custom made necessary by the harsh reality of the desert environment. Many people followed a nomadic way of life and had to travel long distances without the benefit of public inns where they could find shelter and refreshment. Such conditions encouraged a sense of mutual dependency and obligation throughout the region. Every host realized that at some future time he or she might be in need of hospitality, while every guest, recalling the aid that he or she had once received, was willing to act as host when required. Abraham's hospitality to his heavenly visitors is undoubtedly the best-known example of this practice in the Old Testament. The care he shows for his guests is often cited as a model for Christians to imitate by church fathers such as Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.

Abraham and Sarah are unique, though, in that their hospitality welcomed God into the world in a way that initiates the story of our salvation. In the context of the book of Genesis,

until Abraham and Sarah's faithful reception of God into their lives, the Almighty had seemed almost powerless to repair the damage humans had wrought in their relationship with the Creator. The narratives that precede the accounts of Abraham and Sarah—those of Adam and Eve (Gen 3), Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16), and the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)—all tell the story of humanity's failures. In the account of Noah and the Flood we learn that God utterly gave up on humankind except for Noah and his family, but the flood no sooner dries up than Noah and his family launch the return of evil into the world (Gen 6:5-9:27).

Up until Abraham, God seems to deal with humanity as a whole and little good seems to come of it. With Abraham and Sarah, however, God becomes far more personal and the attempts to repair humanity's relationship with God begin in earnest. Although humans now cover the face of the earth, it is just this one man and one woman through whom God will now begin to unveil the plan to restore all humanity into harmony with himself.

That Abraham recognizes the divine nature of his visitors is hinted at in the contrast between his invitation to dine with him and the course that he has prepared for them. "[L]et me bring you *a little food*" (emphasis mine), he tells them, but then we read, "Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread.' He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate" (Gen 18:5-8).

Apparently it is Abraham, and not his servant, who waits on the trio who dine under the tree.

For Christians, the entire sweep of salvation history seems symbolically captured in one brief detail found in 18:4. Abraham's hospitality includes having his guests' feet washed, the cultural refreshment provided to weary journeyers of the region throughout history. We

will note this custom again when we ponder the Eucharist in the Gospel of John. Suffice it to note now that Abraham directs that water be brought to them so that their feet can be washed. As hospitable as he is, the washing of their feet is not something that Abraham will personally undertake. It will take a far humbler person than Abraham to undertake this demeaning role (see John 13:1-17).

Modern readers bring modern sensibilities to ancient texts such as this one, and so are likely to notice that while Abraham is very hospitable and does indeed humble himself to serve his guests, his wife, all the while, is confined to the tent. In the culture of the time (which has not changed that much in many parts of the world), Sarah, for all her labors in preparing the food for these guests, would probably be thought of as merely extending Abraham's hospitality. But her importance to the narrative is nevertheless critical. Without Sarah, the promise to Abraham found in Genesis 12:3 that "All the families of the earth will find blessing in you" will not be fulfilled. Abraham already has a son, Ishmael, but only a son through Sarah will fulfill God's promise (Gen 17:18-19). And so, it is in the course of this meal, which Sarah has helped prepare, that the imminent fulfillment of this promise is announced.

Nothing tells us that the three visitors, in their altogether human guise, are recognized by Abraham as familiar guests. They are strangers, but strangers in whom Abraham senses the presence of the divine and who, therefore, receive the finest hospitality he can provide. These guests—or one of them at least—know(s) Abraham very well, however (we read plainly of the close-knit relationship of the divine visitor to Abraham in Genesis 18:16-33), and so the reader is not taken by surprise when one of them asks Abraham where his wife, Sarah, is. Since Sarah's "place," especially during a visit of male strangers, is in the tent, asking about her whereabouts is partly rhetorical, but that the stranger knows the name of his wife is a sign of his divine nature. Nothing in the narrative tells us that Abraham has named his wife to his visitors.

While Sarah, for her part, does not break out of the prevailing culture's sensibilities by leaving the tent, that does not mean she intends to remain aloof from this visitation. She keeps an ear, it would seem, to the flap of the tent in close proximity to the visitors, so that she will miss nothing of what is going on. And so she hears the promise as it is announced. When the key stranger returns to visit in a year's time, the male heir promised to Abraham through his wife Sarah will have arrived. It is this announcement by a certain "one" of the visitors that removes all doubt that Abraham is being visited by Yahweh.

When Sarah hears it, she laughs and her laughter is overheard. Sarah is not just disbelieving in this all-important moment when the divine nature of the visitor has been revealed. Her laughter scoffs at God's promise. The Lord asks why Sarah has laughed, and knowing that she has been heard, she denies it, which seems a very foolish thing to do, given who has overheard it. But Sarah has her own human predicament to anchor her disbelief: she has gone through menopause and no longer expects to have sexual relations with her husband.

To be sure, Sarah is not alone in her laughter. In Genesis 17:15-17, when God promises Abraham that he will have an heir and that Sarah is the one who will bear him, it is Abraham who laughs because of the ridiculousness of his and Sarah's ages. While we may understand the Lord's response to Sarah's laughter as a rebuke ("Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do?" [18:14]), it is also a reassurance that the birth of the heir will come about. The laughter of both Abraham and Sarah is also far more than disbelief in the promise. Their laughter is a harbinger of the joy they will have in the birth of their son, Isaac, whose name means "laughter."

This hospitable banquet shared between Abraham and the three visitors is foundational for the entire sweep of salvation history found in both the Old Testament and New. It is through Abraham and Sarah's offspring that the one who will fulfill all God's promises will eventually be born. In anticipating the pro-

phetic role of John the Baptist—another child conceived through divine promise to elderly parents—Zechariah prays in remembrance of Abraham's all important role:

- ⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption to
his people.
⁶⁹He has raised up a horn for our salvation
within the house of David his servant,
⁷⁰even as he promised through the mouth of his
holy prophets from of old:
⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the
hand of all who hate us,
⁷²to show mercy to our fathers
and to be mindful of his holy covenant
⁷³and of the oath he swore to Abraham our
father,
and to grant us that,
⁷⁴rescued from the hand of enemies,
without fear we might worship him
⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days. (Luke 1:68-75)



The church uses the **Canticle of Zechariah** at Morning Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. It expresses God's awesome power to save all through Jesus Christ and is appropriate to beginning the day.

The Passover

Exodus 12:1-30

The Passover Ritual Prescribed. ¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month will stand at the head of your calendar; you will reckon it the first month of the year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every family must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a lamb, it along with its nearest neighbor will procure one, and apportion the

EXPLORING LESSON ONE

1. How have scholars explained the significance of the appearance of God to Abraham by the oak of Mamre (Gen 18:1-15)? Which of these possible explanations makes the most sense to you? Why?

2. a) Reverence for the name of God has led to certain conventions concerning how that name is recorded in Scripture. What is the customary way, in both Jewish and Christian traditions, to represent the name of God?

- b) What is the promise that is imbedded in God's name? How is this promise fulfilled in the person of Jesus?

3. a) Eating and drinking together can be a rich bonding experience for families, friends, and communities, but the pace of modern life often makes such sharing difficult. What are some of the challenges you have faced in sharing meals with loved ones? How have these challenges interfered with the benefits of eating together?

- b) Have there been special occasions in your life when meals have taken on added significance? In what way might such meals prepare you to better understand the "ultimate meal" of the Eucharist?

4. What is unique about the hospitality Abraham and Sarah extend to their heavenly visitors? In what way does their hospitality herald a new era in humanity's relationship with God?

5. While Abraham is serving his trio of guests, his wife remains hidden in the tent (Gen 18:9). What role does Sarah play in extending hospitality to the three visitors? How is Sarah intimately connected with the drama unfolding *outside* the tent?

6. How is the celebration of Passover more than just a memorial of a past historical event?

7. How would you describe the relationship between the slaughter of the paschal lambs (Exod 12:3-6) and the sacrifice of Jesus, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36)?

8. In what way is the feast described in Isaiah 25:6-10b and the promise it contains apocalyptic?

Lesson One

9. What is the “metaphorical aspect” present in the feast described in Isaiah 55:1-5? How is this metaphor taken up by Jesus in John’s gospel?

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer

Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and procure lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover victims. Then take a bunch of hyssop, and dipping it in the blood that is in the basin, apply some of this blood to the lintel and the two doorposts. And none of you shall go outdoors until morning. For when the LORD goes by to strike down the Egyptians, seeing the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and not let the destroyer come into your houses to strike you down." (Exod 12:21-23)

Heavenly Father, you spread the mantle of your divine protection over your chosen people, shielding them from destruction through the blood of the first Passover sacrifice. Help us to be mindful of the gift of salvation you have given us through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. As we benefit from the freedom your Son has won for us, may we never forget those who remain enslaved throughout the world: the poor, the anxious, the sick, and all those who struggle to escape oppression of every kind. Today we pray especially for those who most need your help to overcome . . .