

9.10

Symbolism in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John makes abundant use of symbolism. For instance, John states that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” (1:29, 36) and is the “bridegroom” (3:29).

Seven Metaphorical “I Am” Sayings

Jesus describes himself repeatedly with the words “I am,” which recall God’s self-designation in Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 48:12.

“I am the bread of life”; “I am the living bread” (6:35, 51)

“I am the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5)

“I am the gate” (10:7, 9)

“I am the good shepherd” (10:11, 14)

“I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6)

“I am the true vine” (15:1, 5)

See also 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:6—key verses that in the Greek text use the expression “I am” (*egō eimi*).

Sacramental Symbols?

There are no accounts in John's Gospel of Jesus being baptized or instituting the Eucharist, but the elements of water, bread, and wine are featured throughout the Gospel.

- water (3:5; 4:10–15; 5:2–7; 7:37–39; 9:7; 13:3–10; 19:34)
- bread (6:5–13, 28–58; 21:9–13)
- wine (2:1–10; 6:53–56)

Obscure Symbols

Are these matters symbolic, and if so, what do they symbolize?

- stone water jars (2:6)
- Lazarus's bandages (11:44)
- Jesus's towel (13:5)
- Jesus's seamless robe (19:23)
- hyssop branch (19:29)
- water and blood from Jesus's side (19:34–35)
- Jesus's grave clothes (20:5–7)
- 153 fish (21:11)
- untorn net (21:11)