



# THE VOICE OF SAINT MARK

*Podcast of the Coptic Orthodox Tradition*

Parish of Saint John the Theologian – Dijon

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Episode:

## The Woman of Samaria

*Gospel of John 4:1–42 | 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Great Lent*

*Coptic Orthodox Tradition*

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### Episode Presentation

Welcome to **The Voice of Saint Mark**.

At the edge of a well, at the hottest hour of the day, a woman seeks to avoid all eyes. She does not yet know that she is about to encounter the one who knows her whole life — and loves her all the same.

In this Lenten homily, we meditate on the Gospel of the Samaritan Woman through the lens of conversion — not the kind we impose on ourselves, but the kind God initiates. For it is he who takes the first step, he who crosses boundaries, he who gently touches the wound at the heart of our lives.

Through the progression of the dialogue between Jesus and this woman — from hostility to the recognition of the Messiah — we discover the stages of an inner journey that concerns us all. Who are these five husbands? What does the water jar left behind at the edge of the well represent? And how does the woman who was hiding become an apostle?

A meditation nourished by the Fathers of the Church — Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Augustine, Saint Macarius of Egypt — to accompany us in this season of Lent, with a simple invitation: to come to the well as we are, and let Christ place his spring within us.

*An invitation to leave our water jars behind — and go away, ourselves transformed.*

Let us now hear the Holy Gospel:

## Gospel of John 4:1–42

*In those days:*

1 When the Lord learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John

2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples),

3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.

4 And he had to pass through Samaria.

5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';

18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

20 Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"

28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people,

29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.  
31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”  
32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”  
33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?”  
34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.  
35 Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.  
36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.  
37 For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’  
38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.”  
39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”  
40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.  
41 And many more believed because of his word.  
42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.”

## Homily:

✠ *In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.* ✠

The Gospels of these Sundays of Lent set before us different types, different figures of repentance. What, then, is the particular character of this Gospel of the Woman of Samaria? Here, it is Christ who goes out to meet the Samaritan woman — and we can glimpse, in the background, the great mystery of the Incarnation. He goes to meet her despite the weariness of a long journey from Judea to Samaria, and despite the heat of the sixth hour — noon, which is also the hour of the Cross.

The Samaritan woman comes to draw water at this unusually hot hour so that no one will encounter her. She hides herself because of her ill reputation. But where man hides, God comes to find him. The encounter begins with resistance: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?” Jesus crosses these boundaries and raises her up gradually, as Saint John Chrysostom teaches us, toward a deeper understanding.

First step: Jesus offers her living water. The water of the well only quenches biological, mortal life. Saint Cyril of Alexandria tells us that living water is the life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit, which purifies those who receive it and makes of them a source for others. In our Coptic Orthodox tradition, this word is often understood in the light of Baptism: the water of Christ becomes within us an interior spring, the new life according to the Spirit.

Second step: the heart begins to open. She had refused dialogue; now she asks for help and addresses Christ with respect. It is then that Jesus touches the deep wound: “Go, call your husband.” He does not condemn her, but gently leads her to the truth about her life. The five husbands represent, according to the Fathers, the pleasures of the five senses to which humanity is subject; and the sixth — the man with

whom she lives without being married — figures the disordered relationship with the world, the dominion of sin. The only true Bridegroom, the seventh, the one of fulfilment, is Christ.

Third step: “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.” Motivated by shame, she seeks to change the subject by transposing the question onto a theological plane. But in doing so, she is led to confess that she awaits the Messiah. Fourth step: Jesus clearly reveals that he is that Messiah. Note the progression: at first, the Samaritan woman regards Jesus as someone unworthy of association. Then as Lord. Then as prophet. And finally as Messiah. The process of conversion is set in motion.

Then she leaves her water jar — her former life — and, penetrated by the living waters of divine grace, she who had been hiding rushes into the town and proclaims the good news to the Samaritans. She came to the well, says Augustine of Hippo, as an ordinary woman. She goes away from it an apostle.

This Gospel reveals three essential things for Lent. First, Christ always comes to meet us, even when we hide. Second, conversion begins with the truth about ourselves — and the sacrament of Confession is most precious for this. Third, the grace of God becomes within us a spring welling up for eternal life. The heart that receives the Spirit, says Saint Macarius of Egypt, becomes a spring that never ceases to flow.

We all come with our water jar — with our weariness, our sins, our thirst. But if we truly encounter Christ, our jar can remain at the edge of the well, for God places within us another source: the life of the Holy Spirit. Christ awaits us in prayer, in repentance, in fasting, in the sacraments of the Church. And he speaks to us the same words: “Give me to drink” — for God is thirsty. He thirsts for our heart, for our love, for our conversion. He thirsts, says Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, for the faith of mankind.

Let us therefore draw near to him and ask him for the living water of his grace. For whoever drinks of this water will never again remain, says Saint Macarius, in the dryness of his heart, but will himself become a spring welling up to eternal life.

✠ *To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* ✠