

Meet the Master

Weird Day!

- Talk about a weird day! Don't come much stranger than that! Doves coming out of heaven, a hairy nutter baptising folk in the Jordan, the Lamb of God and claims about the Son of God!! Whew! Makes me tired just thinking about it. Wonder what will come of it all....
- Oh, by the way, my name's Simon - big Simon, they call me, son of John, fisherman, from up Capernaum way. My brother - that's Andrew - has become a disciple of the hairy nutter, and I've come down to see what all the fuss is about. John they call him - the hairy nutter, that is. John the Baptist. Strange guy - though sure draws a crowd! His dad was a priest named Zechariah - pretty old, they say, when he had John. Someone said something about a vision in the Temple and being struck dumb for months on end, but I couldn't make head nor tail of that bit. Anyway, John is a seriously weird guy. I call him the hairy nutter - he dresses in clothes made from camel hair, and only eats locusts and wild honey, apparently.
- Anyway, Andrew has gotten in tow with this guy, and I wanted to come and find out what all the fuss was about. Andrew is hardly your scatty brained fanatic - pretty sensible, mostly. He's become one of John's disciples, following him around, listening to his teaching, keeping the queues of folk wanting to be baptised in line, that kind of stuff. John's hardly one for mincing his words, that's for sure! Called us a brood of vipers today! Calling people to follow God - not just talk about it, not just to live off the back of being Abraham's people.
- Boy, that caused a ripple - not least amongst the Pharisees. Mind you, not everyone who gasped as he spoke was all that upset... Things just ain't as they should be. Take me, for instance - the more I try and obey all those nitty-picky rules, the clearer it becomes that I can't keep it up - and the less happy I become. So if Andrew has found a better way, then I'm all ears (makes a change from being all mouth, which is what most folk think of me!).

What Happened

- So there we were - I'd found Andrew, and he'd got me down near the front, so I could see and hear pretty well. John was talking and baptising, baptising and talking, when some of the priests and Levites from Jerusalem turned up. Can't keep their noses out of other folk's business, that bunch. Anyway, there they were, and they started asking John questions - "[are you the Messiah, the Christ, the promised one? Have you come to save the people? Are you the promised Prophet?](#)" To each question John just said "[No - no I'm not the Christ, no I'm not the Prophet, no I'm not Elijah...](#)" till the priests finally asked him, "[then who are you?](#)"
- So John, bold as ever, quoted Isaiah, right out of the Prophets, quoting the holy writings right back at them! "[I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'](#)" I'd heard it before, of course, read in synagogue on a Sabbath many a time... but somehow it had a different impact out there on the banks of the Jordan, with the desert wilderness looming above either side of the valley.
- Now if there was ever a place that defeated that funny Roman fascination with straight roads, it was out here! Can't get anywhere in a straight line, too many hills, too many steep dry river beds cutting right across where you want to go! A voice in the desert... make straight roads... A straight road out here really would make it easier for someone to come. Make straight the way for the Lord... for the Lord, for His coming, for the coming of the Promised One, the Messiah - wow!

- Now **HIS** coming will be something else - big white horse and leading an army to chuck the Romans out, or so they say. So John is getting things ready for his coming...! What's the big deal with repentance, then? I'd have thought a recruiting booth for the Messiah's army would be more helpful!
- The Pharisees were next to jump in: "justify your baptising - that's for Gentiles who turn to God, away from their uncleanness - not for good Jews..." While John was replying he said something strange: "among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." Near everyone started looking around at that point - who was amongst us that we didn't know? Could it possibly be the one John was just after talking about? And who here was so good that John wasn't worthy to untie his sandals... Oh, maybe the Pharisees fancies themselves that way, but really! No one in that crowd was perfect - just a normal bunch, fishermen and farmers, labourers, some folk from the city, most from the country-side round about.
- What was John on about - repent, he said, and mark that repentance by being baptised... there is someone here who is so good it sounds like he doesn't need to repent... weird stuff! I couldn't make head nor tail of it, though Andrew was impressed. Stayed up late that night talking with Andrew and a couple of his mates, but it didn't become much clearer.

Lamb of God / Son of God

- I was in no rush to get back to the boat on Galilee - the others could run it well enough for a couple of days. So I decided to hang around and see what would happen next. John was back in the same place, baptising even more folk. More of the same, mainly, except for one incident. Half way through the morning, John looks up to see who is coming to be baptised next. Just an ordinary looking bloke, about John's age - a few years older than me, probably. But John gives him the strangest look! Not quite like he'd seen a ghost, but sure as heck he was shaken!
- Then he shouts out to everybody: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Said this bloke was the one he'd been talking about yesterday, the one who we wouldn't know.....
- Have to confess he didn't look much - pretty ordinary, you know. Not in a bad way, just normal - like he could be a good friend. Really odd thing for John to call him, though: "Lamb of God". Like he was a sacrifice, or something. He certainly didn't look much like a lamb! How could he take away sins? Of the whole world? Sounds like John's been out in the sun for too long... apparently this Jesus (that's the bloke's name) is John's cousin, so its not as if they haven't met before. Lamb of God... takes away the sins of the world...
- It got even better after that! Next thing John says is that this Jesus has surpassed him, because he was before him! Can't see how Jesus can have surpassed him - John's the one drawing the crowds, John's the one with the, er, distinctive dress code and eating habits! John's the one the authorities are keeping an eye on. Can't see how Jesus can be before John, either - he was born six months after him, or so Andrew says. Their mums even met while they were both pregnant!
- Sometime around then John baptised Jesus, though it seemed like he didn't want to do it - he was baptising everyone else, so I don't know what can have been different about his cousin.
- Finally John proved beyond all reasonable doubt my assessment of him as a hairy nutter: he said that he'd seen God's Spirit come down like a dove on Jesus! Locusts and wild honey he may be eating, but I'm not at all sure what he's been drinking! Even called him the Son of God!

Tomorrow...

- Andrew says he wants to find out more about this "Son of God", this bloke John baptised today. Says he'll try and meet him tomorrow. Maybe even introduce me to him! Now there'd be a thing - meeting God's chosen one! That'd be worth getting up for, I suppose... He'd be someone worth following... someone worth getting to know... someone to commit yourself to... maybe even someone worth dying for!
- *Wonder what he'll have to say for himself...? And what might he think of me?*