

**Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent, Year A, 24.ii.2008, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania**  
**Holy Eucharist, *ELW* Setting 5**  
**Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42**

# J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

**Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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 truly the Savior of the world."**

**-- John 4:28-30, 39-42**

Like Moses in the wilderness, appropriately named ‘Sin’—  
though just a homonym in English—the woman in today’s  
Gospel finds herself in an odd sort of wilderness, a double

wilderness, partly, but not entirely of her own making.  
And just there she finds refreshment.

This life may seem a wilderness, a wasteland to us at times, a vale of tears both now and at the hour of our death. But it is nowhere else than right here, in *your* life and in *mine*, that Christ the LORD comes to meet us, to be with us, to see us through whatever life brings.

There was the wilderness of being a Samaritan and of living in Samaria. The Samaritans were, and some still are, those stubborn hill folk whose shrines to the LORD King David kept tearing down so that they would worship not on Mount Gerizim, the site of Jacob's well, the very well mentioned in today's Gospel, but on Mount Zion alone, in Jeruslaem, the capital of what David wanted to be a united kingdom, the city built on the mountain on which David wanted to build a Temple to the LORD. The

Samaritans just rebuilt the poles of their hill shrines every time the Judæans, or ‘Jews’ tore them down. Samaria was a backwater in the land of Israel, a backwater and proud of it, and there she was, this woman of Samaria, stuck in Samaria whether she liked it or not. And, as to their Scripture, they accepted only the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, not the Psalms or other Wisdom Books, and not the Prophets. The woman in today’s Gospel was of this people, a people she knew was at odds with the Jews. And yet, here was a *Jew*, and a learned *Rabbi*, no less, who was speaking to *her*, a Samaritan. That was something she never thought would happen. Men did not mind talking to her, nor she to them, but *this* was a strange one, indeed!



And then there was her

own, personal wilderness.

She had come to Jacob’s

Well *alone*. She had not  
come there with her  
sisters from the town, not  
come to the well as women of her time  
and place did, singing songs to make the time spent  
walking and carrying the heavy jars pass. She had come up  
to the well alone, alone because no other woman would  
come with her. The practice of ‘shunning’ was not  
invented in Central Pennsylvania. It is at least as old as the  
Bible. The Samaritan woman at that well on that day when  
Jesus passed there, asking her for a drink, knew what it was  
to be shunned, *but not by this wonderful Stranger*. She was  
shunned because of both her past and her present. She had  
been married and either widowed or divorced five times.  
Not content with widowhood—or perhaps not able to  
survive as a widow—she was now living with another man,

not her own husband, perhaps someone else's. He knew even that secret about her—no secret back down the hill in Sychar—and yet He still spoke with her.

Neither you nor I have any secrets from Him, yet He still comes to us to speak with us in His Word and to be with us in His Blessed Sacrament.

She tries to keep the conversation going, chatting away about the differences between Samaritans and Jews, even throwing in some information she picked up from somewhere about the Jewish hope for the Messiah. And yet, she does not have to try to keep that conversation going, because this Rabbi has something to say to her. Jesus proclaims a coming time of 'spirit and truth' which will transcend all religious arguments, a time when 'true worshippers' will relate to God just as Jesus does, as 'Father.' She is so overwhelmed with this experience and

with this message that she races back into town. The Holy Fourth Evangelist lets us know this by including one small detail: she took off in such a hurry that she left her water jar behind at Jacob's Well.

That was an *important* detail, as was the response of the townspeople. They are *astonished* and they are moved to *faith* in this hope Jesus has taught. They are *astonished*, first of all, that *this* woman, this one who has been shunned, is now calling out to the whole town, crying out in the marketplace. They are *astonished* at what she is telling them about this Jew, this Rabbi, Who is preaching about a time when both Jews and Samaritans will worship God *together*. They are *astonished* that they themselves want to believe this message, and that their hearts are open to it even more when they hear Jesus just as she did. And they must have been *totally* astonished when they begged Jesus

(and His Disciples) to stay with them, and when He *stayed*—not one but *two* whole days! Perhaps to thank her, or perhaps to put her back in her place, the townspeople inform her at the end of this lesson that it is not just because *she* taught them that they believe that Jesus is the Anointed One of God among them, but because they have heard *Him*, they have had the same experience of the Rabbi Who did not shun them, of the Messiah Who stayed with them in their homes and in their hearts.

You and I have had preached and taught to us from the time we could listen and learn the Good News that God is our gracious, Heavenly Father, that Jesus, *His* only Son, is also Our Brother, Our Lord and Our Savior, that the Father's Holy Spirit is God moving in our lives and in our world. Is this precious message not *astonishing*? Is it not

also *astonishing* that the Holy Spirit opens *your* eyes and ears and spirit, and *mine* as well, to this Gospel?

The Holy Fourth Evangelist left out other details in today's Gospel which were not so important at the time, but which are important in and of themselves. These include some names, the names of the Disciples of Jesus (who were about to correct Jesus for talking with a woman alone, and a *Samaritan*, but who wisely thought better of that plan), the names of the townspeople, and, of course, the name of this Samaritan woman who has, in this Gospel, more speaking lines than the Blessed Mother of Our Lord in all four Canonical Gospels and almost as many as Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Peter combined. But the community of Disciples that would become the Church that was established at Sychar in Samaria that day, the community on whom also the Holy Spirit would be outpoured on

Pentecost, did and does remember and cherish her name. Her Greek name was 'Photina,' and in the Greek, Ethiopian, Egyptian, Syrian, Chaldaean and Armenian Orthodox Churches, that is the name by which she is remembered. The name 'Photina' means 'resplendent' or 'shining with light.' In early Church commemorations, 'Photina' is said to be the name the Lord Jesus Himself gave her, just as He renamed Saul of Tarsus 'Paulus' (meaning 'small'). In the Russian and other Slavonic Orthodox Churches she is remembered by the Slavic form of her name, 'Svetlana.' 'Photina' is probably easier for us English-speakers to pronounce and to remember. It is a beautiful and a profoundly Christian name, one which parents expecting a daughter ought to consider giving their child at Holy Baptism.

At your Baptism and at mine, we received, in addition to the Holy Name of the Triune God, the name our parents gave us, sometimes after some discussion with the grandparents. So many of our inherited Baptismal names come from our Christian tradition, more than we may realize, names that express the hope for our eternal destiny in Christ. Brandon Bahn, who is preparing for Holy Baptism and Confirmation, will have the opportunity to choose a Baptismal name to add to his given name, a name which he may choose to have legally added to his name.

Saint Photina is remembered by the Church as an *Evangelist*, as a *Martyr*, and as a '*Peer of the Apostles*,' but also as one of six sisters and as the mother of two sons. With those five sisters and one of her sons, Josiah, Photina left Samaria and helped to establish the Church at Carthage, the second most important port city in the Roman Empire.

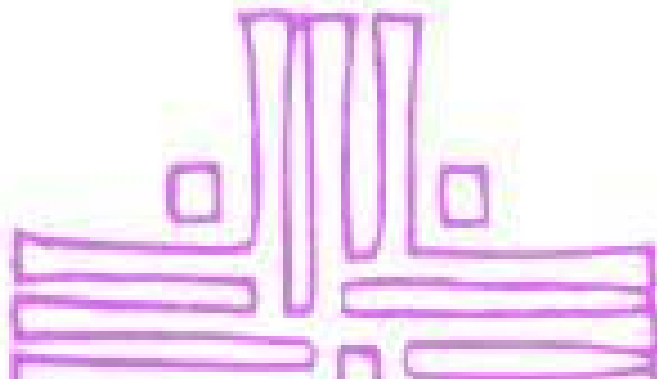
Her other son, Victor, was a Roman soldier stationed in the City of Rome. Victor was denounced as a Christian to the Emperor, Nero. Curious, Emperor Nero had Victor arrested and summoned the soldier's entire family to face trial in the Imperial Court over which he, Divine Nero, would personally preside. Early Christian witnesses attest that the Emperor's daughter, Domnina, was so moved by coming into contact with Photina that she herself became a convert to Christianity. This sealed the fate of the entire family of accused Christians. Nero had all but Photina executed by beheading, considered a merciful privilege and an indication that they were Roman citizens, probably on account of Victor's service in the army. Like many tyrants after him, Nero punished the chief object of his wrath with a lengthy imprisonment, decreeing that she finally be executed in a manner befitting the tiresome, silly story she

kept telling about that day she met the crucified criminal, Jesus of Nazareth, at some sacred well in Samaria: The Emperor ordered her to be thrown down a deep well. The feast of Saint Photina's birth into eternal life is March 20<sup>th</sup>, and the story of her surprise encounter at Jacob's Well and the birth of a fearless and resplendent faith will be told until the end of time, when the Church on earth will be no more, but only the Church in Heaven, in spirit and in truth.

✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠ Amen.



**S. D. G.!**