

COMMENTARY ON
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

Lectio 13

24 καὶ ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν ἐκ τῶν φαρισαίων. 25 καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, τί οὖν βαπτίζεις εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς οὐδὲ ἡλίας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης; 26 ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰωάννης λέγων, ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι: μέσος ὑμῶν ἕστηκεν ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε, 27 ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, οὗ οὐκ εἰμι [ἐγὼ] ἄξιος ἵνα λύσω αὐτοῦ τὸν ἱμάντα τοῦ ὑποδήματος. 28 ταῦτα ἐν βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο πέραν τοῦ ἰορδάνου, ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων.

Supra Ioannes interrogatus perhibuit testimonium Christo de seipso quantum ad personam; hic vero quantum ad officium. Et circa hoc ponuntur quatuor. Primo interrogantes; secundo interrogatio, ibi *et interrogaverunt eum*; tertio responsio, in qua testimonium perhibuit, ibi *respondit eis Ioannes* et cetera. Quarto locus ubi haec facta sunt, ibi *haec in Bethania facta sunt*.

Interrogantes autem sunt Pharisei. Unde dicit *et qui missi fuerant, erant ex Pharisaeis*. Et quidem, secundum Origenem, quod dicitur ex hoc loco, ad aliud testimonium pertinet: et isti qui missi sunt ex Pharisaeis, non sunt iidem cum sacerdotibus et Levitis, qui missi sunt a Iudaeorum universitate, sed alii specialiter missi a Pharisaeis. Et secundum hoc dicitur: *et qui missi sunt*, non a Iudaeis scilicet, sicut fuerunt sacerdotes et Levitae, sed alii *erant ex Pharisaeis*. Et ideo dicit quod, quia sacerdotes et Levitae disciplinati erant et reverentes, humiliter et cum reverentia Ioannem interrogant de eius dignitate, utrum scilicet Christus esset, an Elias, an propheta; isti vero, qui ex Pharisaeis erant,

LECTURE 13

24 Now these men had been sent from the Pharisees, 25 and they put this further question to him: “Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” 26 John replied, “I baptize with water. But there is one standing in your midst whom you do not recognize—27 the one who is to come after me, who ranks ahead of me—the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten.” 28 This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

240 Above, we saw John bear witness to Christ as he was being questioned on matters concerning himself; here, on matters concerning his office. Four things are set forth: first, those who question him; secondly, their questions; thirdly, his answer, in which he bore witness; and fourthly, the place where all this happened.

241 His interrogators were Pharisees. Hence he says, **Now these men had been sent from the Pharisees**. According to Origen, what is being said from this point on describes a different testimony given by John; and further, those who were sent from the Pharisees are not the same as those priests and Levites sent by the generality of the Jews, but others who were specifically sent by the Pharisees. And according to this it says: **Now these men had been sent**, not by the Jews, as the priests and Levites had been, but were others, **from the Pharisees**. So he says about this that because the priests and Levites were educated and respectful, they ask John humbly and

secundum nomen suum divisi et importuni, contumeliosas voces praetendunt Baptistae, unde *dixerunt ei: quid ergo baptizas, si tu non es Christus, neque Elias, neque propheta?*

Secundum alios vero, Gregorium scilicet, Chrysostomum et Augustinum, isti qui ex Pharisaeis, sunt illi iidem qui missi fuerant a Iudaeis sacerdotes et Levitae. Quaedam enim secta erat inter Iudaeos, qui propter exteriorem cultum divisi erant ab aliis: unde et Pharisaei, idest divisi vocabantur; in qua quidem erant aliqui de sacerdotibus et Levitis, et aliqui de populo. Ut ergo nuntii maioris auctoritatis essent, miserunt sacerdotes et Levitas, qui erant ex Pharisaeis, ut eis nec sacerdotalis ordinis dignitas, nec religionis deesset auctoritas.

Ideo autem Evangelista addit hoc quod dicitur *et qui missi fuerant, erant ex Pharisaeis*, ut primo quidem rationem quaestionis Baptismi Ioannis, pro qua missi non fuerunt, assignet; quasi dicat: missi fuerunt, ut interrogarent a Ioanne quis esset. Sed quod quaerunt *quid ergo baptizas?* Fecerunt, quia erant ex Pharisaeis, quibus eorum religio ausum praebat. Secundo, ut dicit Gregorius, ut ostendat qua intentione quaesierunt a Ioanne *tu quis es?* Pharisaei enim inter omnes alios insidiose, et calumniose se habebant ad Christum. Unde ipsi dixerunt ei, Matth. XII, 24: *in Beelzebub principe Daemoniorum Daemonia eiicit*. Ipsi etiam inierunt cum Herodianis consilium, *ut caperent Iesum in sermone*. Matth. XXII, 15. Et ideo per hoc quod dicit *qui missi fuerant, erant ex Pharisaeis*, ostendit, quod calumniose se habebant, et ex invidia eum interrogaverunt.

Interrogatio autem est de officio baptizandi, unde dicitur *et interrogaverunt eum, et dixerunt ei: quid ergo baptizas?* et cetera. Unde notandum est, quod non quaerunt ut sciant, sed ut impediunt. Quia enim videbant multitudinem populi ad Ioannem currere, propter novum ritum baptizandi, et extraneum a ritu Pharisaeorum et legis, invidabant Ioanni, et conabantur pro posse impedire Baptismum eius; et ideo, se continere non valentes, suam manifestant invidiam, et dicunt *quid ergo baptizas, si tu non es Christus, neque Elias, neque propheta?* Quasi dicant: non debes baptizare, ex quo negas te esse aliquem

respectfully whether he is the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet. But these others, who were from the Pharisees, according to their name “separated” and importunate, used disdainful language. Thus they asked him, **Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?**

But according to others, such as Gregory, Chrysostom, and Augustine, these Pharisees are the same priests and Levites who had been sent by the Jews. For there was among the Jews a certain sect which was separated from the others by reason of its external cult; and for this reason its members were called Pharisees, i.e., “divided.” In this sect there were some priests and Levites, and some of the people. And so, in order that the delegates [to John] might possess a greater authority, they sent priests and Levites, who were Pharisees, thus furnishing them with the dignity of a priestly caste and with religious authority.

242 The Evangelist adds, **these men had been sent from the Pharisees**, to disclose, first, the reason why they asked about John’s baptizing, which was not why they were sent. It is as though he were saying: They were sent to ask John who he was. But they asked, **Why do you baptize?** because they were from the Pharisees, whose religion was being challenged. Secondly, as Gregory says, in order to show with what intention they asked John, “Who are you?” (1:19). For the Pharisees, more than all the others, showed themselves crafty and insulting to Christ. Thus they said of him: “He casts out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils” (Mt 12:24). Further, they consulted with the Herodians on how to trap Jesus in his speech (Mt 22:15). And so in saying that **these men had been sent from the Pharisees**, he shows that they were disrespectful and were questioning him out of envy.

243 Their questions concerned his office of baptizing. Hence he says that they asked him, **Why then do you baptize?** Here we should note that they are asking not to learn, but to obstruct. For since they saw many people coming to John because of the new rite of baptism, foreign both to the rite of the Pharisees and of the law, they became envious of John and tried all they could to hinder his baptism. But being unable to contain themselves any longer, they reveal their envy and say, **Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?** As if to say: You should

illorum trium in quibus praefiguratus est Baptismus, ut dictum est supra. Scilicet, *si tu non es Christus*, qui habiturus est fontem in ablutionem peccati; et si non es Elias, sive propheta, idest Eliseus, qui sicco vestigio Iordanem transiverunt, ut dicitur IV Reg. II, 8, quomodo audes baptizare? Similes istis sunt invidi, animarum profectum impediens, *qui dicunt videntibus: nolite videre* etc.: Is. XXX, 10.

Responsio autem est vera: unde dicit *respondit eis Ioannes, dicens: ego baptizo in aqua*. Quasi dicat: non debetis mirari, si ego, qui non sum Christus, nec Elias, nec propheta, baptizo: quia Baptismus meus non est completivus, sed imperfectus. Nam ad perfectionem Baptismi exigitur lotio corporis et animae; et corpus quidem secundum naturam lavatur aqua, anima vero non nisi spiritu. Unde *ego baptizo in aqua*, idest, corpore lavo corpus; veniet autem alius, qui perfecte baptizabit, scilicet in aqua et spiritu sancto; Deus et homo, qui et corpus aqua et spiritum spiritu lavabit, ita quod sanctificatio spiritus derivabitur ad corpus. Act. I, 5: *Ioannes quidem baptizavit aqua, vos autem baptizabimini spiritu sancto non post multos hos dies*.

Testimonium autem perhibet de Christo, cum dicit *medius autem vestrum stetit* etc., et primo per comparationem ad Iudaeos; secundo per comparationem ad seipsum, ibi *ipse est qui post me venturus est*.

Ad Iudaeos autem comparat eum, dicens *medius autem vestrum stetit*; quasi dicat: ego imperfectum opus feci; sed est alius qui perficiet opus meum, qui *medius vestrum stetit*.

Quod quidem exponitur multipliciter. Uno siquidem modo, secundum Gregorium, Chrysostomum et Augustinum, ut referatur ad communem Christi conversationem inter homines, quia, secundum naturam humanam, aliis hominibus similis apparuit; Phil. II, 6: *qui cum in forma Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem Deo; sed semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus, et habitu inventus ut homo*. Et

not baptize, since you deny that you are any of those three persons in whom baptism was prefigured, as was said above. In other words, **if you are not the Messiah, who will possess the fountain by which sins are washed away, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet**, i.e., Elisha, who made a dry passageway through the Jordan (2 Kgs 2:8), how do you dare baptize? They are like envious persons who hinder the progress of souls, “who say to the seers, ‘See no visions’” (Is 30:10).

244 His answer is true: and so he says that John answered, **I baptize with water**. As if to say: You should not be disturbed, if I, who am not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet, baptize; because my baptism is not complete but imperfect. For the perfection of baptism requires the washing of the body and of the soul; and the body, by its nature, is indeed washed by water, but the soul is washed by the Spirit alone. So, **I baptize with water**, i.e., I wash the body with something bodily; but another will come who will baptize perfectly, namely, with water and with the Holy Spirit; God and man, who will wash the body with water and the spirit with the Spirit, in such a way that the sanctification of the spirit will be distributed throughout the body. “For John indeed baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5).

245 Then he bears witness to Christ. First, in relation to the Jews. Secondly, in relation to himself (v 27).

246 He relates him to the Jews when he says, **But there is one standing in your midst**. As if to say: I have done an incomplete work, but there is another who will complete my work, and he is **standing in your midst**.

This is explained in a number of ways. First, according to Gregory, Chrysostom and Augustine, it refers to the ordinary way Christ lived among men, because according to his human nature he appeared to be like other men: “He, being in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6). And according to this he says, **there is one standing in your midst**, i.e., in many ways he lived as one of you: “I am in your

secundum hoc dicit *medius vestrum stetit*, idest multoties conversatus est quasi unus ex vobis; Lc. XXII, v. 27: *ego in medio vestrum sum. Quem vos nescitis*, idest, hoc quod Deus factus est homo, capere non potestis. Item, *nescitis* quam magnus sit secundum naturam divinam, quae in eo latebat; Iob XXXVI, 26: *ecce dominus magnus vincens scientiam vestram*. Et ideo, ut Augustinus dicit, *accensa est lucerna*, scilicet Ioannes, *ut inveniatur Christus*. Ps. CXXXI, 17: *paravi lucernam Christo meo*.

Alio modo exponitur, secundum Origenem, et hoc dupliciter. Primo ut referatur ad Christi divinitatem; et secundum hoc *medius vestrum*, idest in medio omnium rerum, *stetit*, scilicet Christus: quia ipse secundum quod verbum a principio creaturae implevit universam creaturam. Ier. XXIII, 24: *caelum et terram ego impleo. Quem tamen vos nescitis*, quia, ut dicitur supra, *in mundo erat (...) et mundus eum non cognovit*.

Alio modo ut referatur ad causalitatem humanae sapientiae, et dicatur *medius vestrum stetit*; idest, in intellectu omnium relucet: quia quicquid lucis et sapientiae est in hominibus, provenit eis ex participatione verbi. Et dicit *in medio*, quia in medio hominis corporaliter est cor, cui attribuitur quaedam sapientia et intellectus: unde, licet intellectus non habeat organum corporale, tamen quia cor est principale organum, consuevit accipi pro intellectu; unde in medio stare dicitur secundum hanc similitudinem, in quantum *illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum. Quem tamen vos nescitis*; quia, ut dicitur supra, *lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt*.

Quarto modo exponitur ut referatur ad prophetiam Christi praenuntiationem, ut sic respondeatur principaliter Pharisaeis, qui continue Scripturas veteris testamenti, in quibus praenuntiabatur Christus, inquirebant, et tamen eum non cognoscebant. Et secundum hoc dicitur *medius vestrum stetit*; idest, in sacra Scriptura, quam vos semper revolvitis; infra V, 39: *scrutamini Scripturas. Quem tamen vos nescitis*, quia cor vestrum induratum est propter infidelitatem et oculi vestri excaecati sunt, ut non agnoscatis praesentem, quem creditis futurum.

midst” (Lk 22:27), **whom you do not recognize**, i.e., you cannot grasp the fact that God was made man. Likewise, you do not recognize how great he is according to the divine nature which is concealed in him: “God is great, and exceeds our knowledge” (Jb 36:26). And so, as Augustine says, “The lantern was lighted,” namely, John, “so that Christ might be found.” “I have prepared a lamp for my anointed” (Ps 131:17).

It is explained differently by Origen; and in two ways. First, as referring to the divinity of Christ: and according to this, **there is one standing**, namely, Christ, **in your midst**, that is, in the midst of all things; because he, as Word, has filled all from the beginning of creation: “I fill heaven and earth” (Jer 23:24). **Whom you do not recognize**, because, as was said above (1:10), “He was in the world ... and the world did not know him.”

It is explained another way as referring to his causality of human wisdom. **But there is one standing in your midst**, i.e., he shines in everyone’s understanding; because whatever light and whatever wisdom exists in men has come to them from participating in the Word. And he says, **in your midst**, because in the midst of man’s body lies the heart, to which is attributed a certain wisdom and understanding; hence, although the intellect has no bodily organ, yet because the heart is our chief organ, it is the custom to take it for the intellect. So he is said to stand among men because of this likeness, insofar as he “enlightens every man coming into this world” (1:9). **Whom you do not recognize**, because, as was said above (1:5), “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

In a fourth way, it is explained as referring to the prophetic foretelling of the Messiah. In this sense the answer is directed chiefly to the Pharisees, who continually searched the writings of the Old Testament in which the Messiah was foretold; and yet they did not recognize him. And according to this it says, **there is one standing in your midst**, i.e., in the Sacred Scriptures which you are always considering: “Search the Scriptures” (below 5:39); **whom you do not recognize**, because your heart is hardened by unbelief, and your eyes blinded, so that you do not recognize as present the person you believe is to come.

Comparat autem Christum ad se Ioannes, cum dicit *ipse est qui post me venturus est*. Ubi primo ponit excellentiam Christi ad seipsum; secundo vero excellentiae immensitatem ostendit, ibi *cuius non sum dignus ut solvam corrigiam calceamenti*.

Excellentiam autem Christi ad seipsum ostendit et quantum ad ordinem praedicationis, et quantum ad ordinem dignitatis. Quantum quidem ad ordinem praedicationis, Ioannes primo innotuit. Et ideo dicit *ipse est qui post me venit, ad praedicandum, baptizandum et moriendum; quia, ut dicitur Lc. I, 76, praeibis ante faciem domini, parare vias eius*. Sed Ioannes quidem praecessit Christum, sicut imperfectum perfectum, et sicut dispositio formam; sicut dicitur I Cor. c. XV, 46: *non prius quod spirituale, sed quod animale*. Nam tota vita Ioannis fuit quoddam praeparatorium ad Christum; unde dixit supra *ego vox clamantis in deserto*.

Sed Christus praecessit Ioannem et nos omnes, sicut perfectum imperfectum, et sicut exemplar exemplatum. Matth. XVI, 24: *si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me*; I Pet. c. II, 21: *Christus passus est pro nobis, vobis relinquens exemplum*.

Quantum vero ad ordinem dignitatis, cum dicit *qui ante me factus est*, idest, mihi praelatus est, et dignitate praepositus; quia, ut dicit infra III, 30, *me oportet minui, illum autem crescere*.

Immensitatem autem excellentiae assignat cum dicit *cuius ego non sum dignus ut solvam eius corrigiam calceamenti*. Quasi dicat: non intelligatis ipsum mihi in dignitate praepositum sicut unus homo praefertur alteri, sed tam excellenter, quod nihil sum in comparatione ad ipsum. Et hoc patet, quia *non sum dignus ut solvam corrigiam calceamenti eius*: quod est minimum obsequium quod hominibus fieri potest. Ex quo patet quod Ioannes multum accesserat ad Dei cognitionem, in quantum ex consideratione infinitae magnitudinis Dei se totaliter vilipendebat, et nihil se esse dicebat. Sicut Abraham, cum Deum cognovisset, dicebat, Gen. XVIII, 27: *loquar ad dominum meum, cum sim pulvis et cinis*. Sic Iob c. XLII, 5, cum dominum vidisset, dixit: *nunc oculus meus videt te; idcirco ipse me reprehendo, et ago poenitentiam in favilla et*

247 Then John compares Christ to himself. First, he states the superiority of Christ as compared to himself. Secondly, he shows the greatness of this superiority.

248 He shows the superiority of Christ in comparison to himself both in preaching and in dignity. Now, as to the order of preaching, John was the first to become known. Thus he says, the one who is to come after me, to preach, to baptize and to die; because as was said in Luke (1:76): “You will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way.” John preceded Christ as the imperfect the perfect, and as the disposition the form; for as is said, “The spiritual is not first, but the animal” (1 Cor 15:46). For the entire life of John was a preparation for Christ; so he said above, that he was “a voice that cries in the wilderness.”

But Christ preceded John and all of us as the perfect precedes the imperfect and the exemplar precedes the copy: “If any one wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24); “Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example” (1 Pt 2:21).

Then he compares Christ to himself as to dignity, saying, **who ranks ahead of me**, i.e., he has been placed above me and is above me in dignity, because as he says (below 3:30), “he must increase, and I must decrease.”

249 He touches on the greatness of his superiority when he says, **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten**. As if to say: You must not suppose that he ranks ahead of me in dignity in the way that one man is placed ahead of another, rather he is ranked so far above me that I am nothing in comparison to him. And this is clear from the fact that it is he **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten**, which is the least service that can be done for men. It is clear from this that John had made great progress in the knowledge of God, so far that from the consideration of God’s infinite greatness, he completely lowered himself and said that he himself was nothing. So did Abraham, when he recognized God, and said (Gn 18:27), “I will speak to my Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.”

cinere. Sic Is. XL, 17, postquam vidit gloriam Dei dixit: *omnes gentes quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo*. Et haec quidem expositio est litteralis.

Exponitur autem et mystice. Uno modo secundum Gregorium, ut per calceamentum, quod fit de pellibus mortuorum animalium, intelligatur humana natura mortalis, quam Christus assumpsit; Ps. LIX, 10: *in Idumaea extendam calceamentum meum* et cetera. Corrigia autem calceamenti eius, est ipsa unio divinitatis et humanitatis, quam nec Ioannes, nec aliquis, potest solvere nec potuit plene investigare, cum talis esset quod hominem faceret Deum, et Deum hominem. Et ideo dicit *cuius non sum dignus ut solvam corrigiam calceamenti*; idest, ut explicem mysterium incarnationis et cetera. Intelligendum est plene et perfecte: nam quoquo modo et Ioannes et alii praedicatores, licet imperfecte, solvunt corrigiam calceamenti.

Alio modo exponitur, quia in veteri lege praeceptum erat, Deut. XXV, 5-10 quod quando aliquis moriebatur sine liberis, frater defuncti uxorem defuncti recipere tenebatur, et ex ea semen fratri suo suscitare; quod si nollet eam in uxorem recipere, tunc aliquis propinquus defuncti eam recipere volens, debebat eum discalceare in signum huius cessionis, et illam in uxorem recipere, et domus eius debebat vocari domus discalceati. Secundum hoc ergo dicit *cuius non sum dignus corrigiam calceamenti solvere*; idest, non sum dignus habere sponsam, quae sibi debetur, Ecclesiam. Quasi dicat: non sum dignus ut vocer sponsus Ecclesiae, quae consecratur Christo in Baptismo spiritus; ego autem baptizo in aqua tantum. Infra III, 29: *qui habet sponsam, sponsus est* et cetera.

Locus autem, ubi praedicta facta sunt, subditur consequenter, cum dicit *haec in Bethania facta sunt trans Iordanem*. Sed circa hoc primo consurgit quaestio. Cum Bethania sit in monte oliveti quod est iuxta Ierusalem, sicut dicitur Io. XI, 1 et Matth. XXVI, 6 quomodo dicit quod facta sunt trans Iordanem, qui multum distabat ab Ierusalem? Sed dicendum, secundum Origenem et Chrysostomum, quod non debet dici Bethania, sed Bethabara, quae est quaedam villa ultra Iordanem: et hoc quod dicit Bethania, corruptum est vitio scriptorum. Sed quia

And so also did Job, saying, “Now I see you, and so I reprove myself, and do penance in dust and ashes” (Jb 42:5). Isaiah also said, after he had seen the glory of God, “Before him all the nations are as if they are not” (Is 40:17). And this is the literal explanation.

250 This is also explained mystically. Gregory explains it so that the sandal, made from the hides of dead animals, indicates our mortal human nature, which Christ assumed: “I will stretch out my sandal to Edom” (Ps 59:10). The strap of Christ’s sandal is the union of his divinity and humanity, which neither John nor anyone can unfasten or fully investigate, since it is this which made God man and made man God. And so he says, **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten**, i.e., to explain the mystery of the incarnation perfectly and fully. For John and other preachers unfasten the strap of Christ’s sandal in some way, although imperfectly.

It is explained in another way by recalling that it was ordered in the Old Law that when a man died without children, his brother was obligated to marry the wife of the dead man and raise up children from her as his brother’s. And if he refused to marry her, then a close relative of the dead man, if willing to marry her, was to remove the sandals of the dead man as a sign of this willingness and marry her; and his home was then to be called the home of the man whose sandals were removed (Dt 25:5). And so according to this he says, **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to unfasten**, i.e., I am not worthy to have the bride, that is, the Church, to which Christ has a right. As if to say: I am not worthy to be called the bridegroom of the Church, which is consecrated to Christ in the baptism of the Spirit; but I baptize only in water. As it says below (3:29): “It is the groom who has the bride.”

251 The place where these events happened is mentioned when he says, **This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan**. A question arises on this: Since Bethany is on the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem, as is said in John (11:1) and also in Matthew (26:6), how can he say that these things happened beyond the Jordan, which is quite far from Jerusalem? Origen and Chrysostom answer that it should be called Bethabara, not Bethany, which is a village on the far side of the Jordan; and

tam libri Graeci quam Latini habent Bethania, ideo dicendum est aliter, quod est duplex Bethania: una quae est prope Ierusalem in latere montis oliveti, alia trans Iordanem, ubi erat Ioannes baptizans.

Quod autem mentionem facit de loco, habet rationem litteralem et mysticam. Litteralem quidem secundum Chrysostomum, quia Ioannes scribebat Evangelium istud viventibus forte aliquibus qui et tempus quo ista facta sunt, et locum viderunt, et ideo quasi ad maiorem certitudinem illos testes facit illorum quae viderant.

Mysticam vero, quia haec loca conveniunt Baptismo. Nam, si dicatur Bethania, quae domus obedientiae interpretatur, significat quod necesse est per obedientiam fidei ad Baptismum pervenire; Rom. I, 5: *ad obediendum fidei in omnibus gentibus*. Si vero dicatur Bethabara, quae interpretatur domus praeparationis, significat quod per Baptismum praeparatur homo ad vitam aeternam.

Nec vacat mysterio quod trans Iordanem sit. Iordanis enim interpretatur descensus eorum; et, secundum Origenem, significat Christum, qui descendit de caelis, ut dicit ipse: *descendi de caelo, ut facerem voluntatem patris mei*. Unde dicitur Eccli. XXIV, 41: *ego quasi fluvius Dorix*. Per ipsum autem omnes ingredienti in hunc mundum, mundari convenit, secundum illud Apoc. I, 5: *lavit nos a peccatis nostris in sanguine suo*.

Convenienter etiam Iordanis Baptismum significat. Ipse enim confinium est inter illos qui acceperunt sortes hereditatis a Moyse ex una parte Iordanis, et illos qui acceperunt a Iosue ex alia; et ita Baptismus quasi quoddam confinium est inter Iudaeos et gentiles, qui proficiscuntur illuc, ut se lavent ad Christum venientes, ut opprobrium peccati deponant. Sicut enim filios Israel terram promissionis intrantes oportuit transire Iordanem, ita et per Baptismum oportet patriam caelestem intrare. Dicit autem *trans Iordanem*, ut insinuet quod etiam

that the reading “Bethany” is due to a copyist’s error. However, since both the Greek and Latin versions have Bethany, one should rather say that there are two places called Bethany: one is near Jerusalem on the side of the Mount of Olives, and the other is on the far side of the Jordan where John was baptizing.

252 The fact that he mentions the place has both a literal and a mystical reason. The literal reason, according to Chrysostom, is that John wrote this Gospel for certain ones, perhaps still alive, who would recall the time and who saw the place where these things happened. And so, to lead us to a greater certitude, he makes them witnesses of the things they had seen.

The mystical reason is that these places are appropriate for baptism. For in saying “Bethany,” which is interpreted as “house of obedience,” he indicates that one must come to be baptized through obedience to the faith. “To bring all the nations to have obedience to the faith” (Rom 1:5). But if the name of the place is “Bethabara,” which is interpreted as “house of preparation,” it signifies that a man is prepared for eternal life through baptism.

There is also a mystery in the fact that this happened on the far side of the Jordan. For “Jordan” is interpreted as “the descent of them”; and according to Origen it signifies Christ, who descended from heaven, as he himself says that he descended from heaven to do the will of his Father (below 6:38), [thus Sirach 24:41 says *I, like the river Dorix*. Through him, all who come into this world should be cleansed, as Rev 1:5 says, *He washes us from our sins in his blood*.

Further, the river Jordan aptly signifies baptism. For it is the border line between those who received their inheritance from Moses on one side of the Jordan, and those who received it from Josue on the other side. Thus baptism is a kind of border between Jews and Gentiles, who journey to this place to wash themselves by coming to Christ so that they might put off the debasement of sin. For just as the Jews had to cross the Jordan to enter the promised land, so one must pass through baptism to enter into the heavenly land. And he says, **on the far side of the Jordan**, to show that John preached

transgressoribus et peccatoribus Baptismum poenitentiae praedicabat Ioannes;
unde et dominus, Matth. c. IX, 13: *non veni vocare iustos, sed peccatores.*

the baptism of repentance even to those who transgressed the law and sinners;
and so the Lord also says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners"
(Mt 9:13).
