To everyone reading these notes,

Phil has a regular habit of uploading his sermon notes to our website for people to review and possibly use in a small group setting. I want to provide you with the same, but unfortunately my method of sermon prep and notes is vastly different than Phil’s. Meaning, my notes may not be as useful to you.

The notes that I preached from the stage this last week were much closer to an annotated manuscript, simply due to the complex, content heavy nature of the sermon. So, I have done my best to format my notes into a real manuscript that you all can read. As well, in order to assist you, I have tried to highlight all of the scripture references in red. Forgive any grammatical errors and poor syntax, as I have not had the opportunity to do a thorough revision of this manuscript. But I hope it assists you for any purpose you may have.

As well, this sermon was based on a paper I wrote for a class in my Masters in Bible and Theology program called, “Perspectives on Spirit Baptism in the New Testament.” So, I have inserted that original paper below my manuscript, for anyone that may want to dig deeper into the academic side of the sermon.

# Lastly, if you would like some follow up reading, I would suggest John Mark Comer’s “Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human.” I read it this last week, along with “Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation” by [Michael J. Gorman](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/158474.Michael_J_Gorman), in preparation for this sermon. And although you won’t find many of the ideas I preached on present in these books, I believe they are great follow-ups to help us reflect on what it means to be a New Human.

# If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [austinr@wachurch.us](mailto:austinr@wachurch.us).

# Austin Rojan

A New Humanity: A New Creation | Manuscript

I love gardens. I think there’s something innately human about gardening. To plant something with the intention of caring for that thing patiently. The continual development of planting new things. Organizing and designing them in ways that create beauty and life in the world. There are few things in the world to me to represent what it means to be human as well as gardening does. This is probably because it’s the original human vocation. Don’t believe me? Let’s look at page one of the Bible.

Genesis 1, we’re introduced to the first character: God. And this God speaks, and creation comes into being; and he alone defines what is good, and what is not good. And the pinnacle of this creation is humans. Genesis tells that "God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) What does this mean, that we’re made in the image of God? Well if you lived in ancient Bible times, you would be familiar with this phrase because kings and nations and empires believed themselves to be Gods, and called themselves the Image of God. And it was a result of their being the image of God that gave them the right to rule. But Genesis makes a bold and incredible claim. God makes all of humanity “In His Image.”  Meaning that all men, and woman, were made to rule over creation.

This is why right afterward God tells them to “Rule the Earth, and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) But you may ask, “Ok, how are all humans supposed to rule?” Well, like I mentioned earlier, the picture we get in Genesis is gardening. Genesis 2:8 says, "Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made.” When God tells humanity to subdue the Earth, he is saying to take this powerful and beautiful creation that is bursting with raw uncut potential, and to do something with it. Considering that their immediate surrounding is a garden, we can assume one of their primary responsibilities was to care for and cultivate Eden.

Adam and Eve were gardeners.

And While Adam and Eve are individual people in the biblical story, they are also representative of all humanity. So, deep down in all our DNA, we are gardeners. We were made to image our God by cultivating the Earth and making something new and beautiful with it. The question in Genesis 2, though, is this: how are these humans going to go about ruling over the Earth? This is what the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is all about. It presents the humans a choice: are they going to rule over creation under God’s definition of good and evil, or will they define good and evil for themselves. And God says, “If you eat of this tree, you will surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

Then, enters a new character into the story: a talking serpent. This is where a lot of people get tripped up. Is this serpent literal or figurative? Really, and talking serpent? Why is this stupid thing in the garden in the first place? And all these questions miss the big point: this serpent is an animal! It is apart of the creation that Adam and Eve are supposed to rule over! And this serpents tells them to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

This is where things start to go downhill.

Adam and Eve are ashamed to be naked in front of one another, and there’s suddenly all of these trust issues between the two of them. God comes and expels them from the Garden, and God’s space and man’s space are separated from one another. Something in creation has changed. It’s not what it used to be. It’s fallen.

The rest of Genesis 3-11 traces the destruction that comes about when humans decide to define good and evil for themselves. Adam and Eve have children, and one of them, Cain, kills his brother Abel. And then we meet this guy named Lamech, who accumulates wives like property, and sings songs of how he is a more violent vengeful person than Cain ever was, and he’s proud of it. Things get so bad, that God, in his sorrow over the state of his creation, he decides to try to preserve the goodness of his creation by washing it clean in a global flood. But he saves one man and his family, Noah, who is supposedly the only righteous man on earth. But the issue is right when Noah gets off the boat, he plants a vineyard, which he uses to get totally plastered, and then something horrible happens in his tent with his son. And so Noah and his family begin to fill the earth, and things go right back to being as bad as they were before.

Then we get to the tower of Babel, where the people reject God’s command to fill the earth by staying all in one place, where they plan on using this new technology, called the brick, to build a tower into the heavens, which is an image for becoming their own God’s, which is exactly what happens in the Garden. So God, in his mercy, scatters them around the world. The thing that was the pinnacle of God’s creation, the things that were supposed to reflect his goodness and creativity, the things that were supposed to care for, tend to, and cultivate the earth, have become the thing that is slowly destroying God's wonderful creation.

And this is where we stand today.

See, like I said, we’re all gardeners. We all bear the image of God, and are called to rule over this creation. The question is, how have you gone about doing that? In what ways have you eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and defined good and evil for yourself, and rejected God definition of good and evil? How have you gone about using the resources and gifts God has given you? Have you used it for the benefit of the good of your fellow human? Or have you used it for your own good even at the expense of your fellow human? How have you used your life? How have you used your money?  How have you used your talents? How have you used your job? How have you loved and cared for your family? How have you used your ability to care for others? How have used your God given desire for sex and intimacy? This is the question that the Bible presents us from the very beginning: what kind of a gardener are you going to be?

Because if we all take an honest look at our lives, none of us have imaged God perfectly. None of us have used our lives, our money, our talents, our jobs, our family’s, our love and care perfectly. We’ve all sinned, we’ve all misused the resources we’ve been given. So what are we to do? If we all suffer from this disease that the Bible calls hardness of heart, and none of us, even the best of us, seem to be able to resist the promise of evil, how is God going to restore creation without destroying humanity all together?

This, I believe, is the question that the Gospels are addressing. And one Gospel in particular, the Gospel according to John, does so in a remarkable way. So get ready, because we’re going move through the entire Gospel of John today, and you’re going to see some stuff that you’ve likely never seen before.

Starting in v. 1, “In the beginning.” Phil has said this before, but these words would have been very familiar to and Jewish reader. They are the same words that open up Genesis in the Greek translation of the Old Testament: EN ARCHE. But that’s only the beginning… Pun Intended John describes Jesus as, “The Word” which evokes the image of God speaking creation into being. As well, vv. 4-5 describes Jesus as being *life* and *light,* both of which constitute creation imagery. It is clear, in the first five verses of John, that the author is spiking the attention of the reader to remain alert and aware of allusions to the creation narrative throughout the rest of the book. And get ready, because there’s a lot of them.

Then, we get to Jesus’ baptism, and three very important things need to be noted. First, is the image of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove. See in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God “hovers” over the chaotic waters of creation. That word hover, RACHAPH in Hebrew, is only used three times in the old testament, and literally translates to, “the quick, non-linear, back and forth motion, of an object." It first appears here in Genesis 1:2, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was ***hovering*** over the face of the waters.” Then in Deuteronomy 32:11, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that ***flutters*** over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions," And lastly in Jeremiah 23:9, "My heart is broken within me, all my bones ***shake***; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and because of his holy words.” As well, there are extra biblical uses of this word in Hebrew that are almost always used in the context of describing a bird hovering over something, like in Deut. 32:11 Meaning that the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2 is described with bird like characteristics, hovering over the waters of creation. So, when we get to Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, descends upon Jesus, who just so happens to be in the waters of the Jordan river. This, again, is extremely evocative of the creation narrative.

A second thing to note is that every Gospel presents this promise about Jesus, that he will be this one who will baptize, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. John 1:32-33 says, "And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” This promise being made, we can expect it’s fulfillment to be presented sometime by the end of book. But more on that later.

Third, immediately after this, Jesus begins his public ministry. Theologians such as Kostenberger, Swain, and Rainbow (for any theology nerds out there), agree that "The reader is left to deduce that Jesus speaks God’s words and does God’s works in the rest of the Gospel by virtue of this empowerment” Meaning that everyone that Jesus does for the rest of the Gospel will be a result of receiving this Holy Spirit. Here’s where things start to get interesting.

Let’s look at Jesus’ first week of ministry in John 1:19-2:11 Day 1: John’s testimony regarding Jesus (1:19-28) Day 2: Johns’ encounter with Jesus (1:29-34) Day 3: Johns’ referral of two disciples to Jesus (1:35-39) Day 4: Andrews’ introduction of his brother Peter to Jesus (1:40-42) Day 5: Philip follows Jesus (1:43-44) Day 6: Nathanael follows Jesus (1:45-51) Day 7: the wedding at Cana (2:1-11). Considering the ridiculous amount of creation imagery already presented in John, the fact that John delineates Jesus’ first week of ministry into 7 clear days should be another obvious allusion to seven structure of the creation narrative.

When I was talking to my good friend about this, he pointed out that if this were an allusion to the seven days of creation, a day of Sabbath should be presented, and it isn’t. This a good point, with a really good answer. Commentators link the lack of a Sabbath in the first week of Jesus’ ministry to Jesus’ statement to the Pharisee’s in chapter 5. The Jewish leaders get mad at Jesus for healing the sick man at Bethesda, and so Jesus responds in 5:17, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”  In light of all of this, we can conclude that John understands Jesus’ ministry as the beginning of God’s new creative work in this world, for “no one other than the Creator had the authority to determine whether engaging in a particular activity on the day of rest was appropriate.”

Now something very important happens on Jesus’ seventh day of ministry: his first miracle. Jesus is at a wedding party, when suddenly they run out of wine. So Jesus’ mom comes to Jesus and says, “hey, you need to fix this. Like now” (I’m paraphrasing). And Jesus says, “Mom, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” But then Mary, been the boss mother of the Son of God that she was, just turns around to the servants and says, “Do whatever he says.” So Jesus has them fill up a bunch of jars with water, and then he miraculously turns them into wine. And this is what John says about this moment in 2:11: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

Now remember, this happens on the 7th day of Jesus’ first week of ministry, which we already decided was an allusion to the creation narrative. The fact that the first sign occurs on the 7th day, is like a literary baton pass. John is saying, “Ok, all this creation imagery, that’s now going to be picked up by these signs." And so this begins what scholars call, the Johannine Signs. The next sign is in John 4 when Jesus heals an Roman officials son, and John says, "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.” (John 4:54) After the second one, John stops keeping count, and just let’s you keep track. So after this is the healing the lame man (5:1-15), the feeding the multitude (6:1-15), the healing of the blind man (9:1-41), and the raising of Lazarus (11:1-57). So that’s six. But then it just stops as John goes into this long discourse on Jesus’ last night with his disciples that spans chapters 13-17. And the reader is left to wonder, “Is John going to finish these signs? Did I miss something?” We’ll come back to that in a bit. But first let’s jump to Chapter 18 and look at the passion narrative of Jesus.

John 18:1 says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, *where there was a* ***garden***, in which He entered with His disciples.” Hmmm… interesting. There may be a bit of a double entendra going on here. This word “Garden” is only used 5 times in the NT. Once in Luke 13:19, and four times in John (18:1; 26; and twice in 19:41). Such rare usage of this word indicates that John probably had a special purpose in using it. Considering John’s obsession with creation imagery, I think it’s safe to say what garden John is referring to here: Eden. It’s in this garden that Jesus is betrayed by Judas, and is turned over to the religious authorities. When Pilate introduces Jesus to the crowd in 19:5, he uses a very strange phrase. He says, "Behold, the Man!” “The Man” in its original language here, is HA ANTHROPOS, which just so happens to be the same words to introduce Adam in the Greek translation of Genesis 1:26. Now this is where it gets good.

If you checked out somewhere in the midst of all the nerdy stuff, come back now, because is doing something incredible. Remember back to Genesis 2:17 when God says, "but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Yet for some reason, when Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they continue to live. Sure, they are destined to die, but it sure sounds like God is talking about something a lot more immediate. In John 18, Judas reenacts Adams sin, he defines good and evil for himself and betrays his master, meaning Judas is the one deserving of death. But watch what happens. Instead of Judas, God himself will be the one to die. And when presented to the crowd, he is given then name of he who first sinned, Adam, The Man, HA ANTHROPOS. It’s just as Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” It’s at the cross that the punishment that Adam, and every human being who has followed in his footsteps in defining good and evil for themselves and sinning against the creator God, is finally poured out. And it’s poured out onto Jesus, the Son of God, God himself.

And after Jesus dies, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.” (John 19:34). Now wait, if you’ve been paying attention, this odd fact should ring a bell. Remember Jesus’ first sign? He turns water into wine (wine being a common metaphor for blood). And when Mary asks him to do this, what did Jesus say, “It is not yet *my hour.*” A common way Jesus referred to his coming death. And when Jesus cleared the temple out in John 2, the religious leaders ask him "What *sign* do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” To which John then notes that Jesus is talking about his body. This is likely what Jesus means, at least in part, when he says with his last breath, “It Is Finished!”

This is the 7th sign of Jesus

That’s why immediately after Jesus’ death, John makes it explicit that the Sabbath day is coming. John 19:31 says, "It was the day of preparation, and the Jewish leaders didn’t want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath, because it was Passover week)." The death of Jesus is the final sign of his ministry that *finishes* the creation process, and Jesus finally rests in the tomb on the seventh day just as God rested on the seventh day of creation in Genesis.

But the story doesn’t end there. John 20 begins with these words, "Now on the *first day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.” So Mary runs and gets Peter and John to tell them that Jesus’ body is missing. They all run back and Peter and John see that Jesus is gone, and they are confused and disheartened, thinking some one had taken him. John 20:11 then tells us,**"**Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in.She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying." Where have we seen two angels in a garden before? At the entrance of Eden, two Cherubim guard the way to the tree of life in Genesis 3:24. Except this time, they have a very different purpose.

John 20:13 continues, "'Dear woman, why are you crying?' the angels asked her.'Because they have taken away my Lord,' she replied, 'and I don’t know where they have put him.'She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him.**'**Dear woman, why are you crying?' Jesus asked her. 'Who are you looking for?’"Are you ready for it? This is my favorite moment in the whole Gospel of John. "Supposing him to be ***the gardener***, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” A Scholar by the name of Suggit says this, “Mary turns and sees one whom she thinks to be the gardener. Indeed he was! Adam was put in the garden of Eden to maintain it and care for it (Gen. 2:15). He failed to do so, but Jesus is the second Adam, the true human being, [see John 19:5 'Behold, The Man'].” If the death of Jesus is the seventh sign of Jesus, and is marked by the seventh day creation (the Sabbath), then the resurrection is the 8th sign of Jesus, it is the eighth day, or rather the “first day” of a New Creation. Jesus consummates his role as the first New Human, the one who will image God perfectly by tending to this garden of New Creation as Adam should have done in Eden.

Now for the grand finale. Jesus goes back to his disciples and does the weirdest, and the most profound thing in the entire book. John 20:21 says, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”  Which is a reference back to Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, where the Father speaks over Jesus, and then sends him to begin his public ministry. John 20:22, "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Remember how I said that the promise of Jesus being the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit will find fulfillment by the end of the book? Well here it is. If you were paying extra close attention, you’ll remember that Jesus’ baptism is loaded with creation imagery, with the Holy Spirit descending like a dove just like the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of creation in Genesis 1.  Well here’s the last allusion to the creation story in John.

The word “breathed” in John 20:22 in it’s original language is “EMPHUSAO.” This is the same word used in the greek translation of Genesis 2:7 when God breathes into the nostrils of Adam, and gives him life. John is saying that just as God created Adam in Genesis 2, so Jesus is re-creating humanity in John 20:22. This spirit of New Creation, the Holy Spirit, is given to the disciples in order that they too would become New Humans, just as Jesus had through his death and resurrection. As well, remember that Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, when he receives the Holy Spirit, is supposed to be paradigmatic for his followers. Which means this: the Spirit now empowers Christians to continue the work of bringing New Creation into the present world, just as Jesus started in his own ministry.

And so we return to us. The question we started this journey with was this: "If we all suffer from this disease that the Bible calls hardness of heart, and none of us, even the best of us, seem to be able to resist the promise of evil, how is God going to restore creation without destroying humanity all together?” The answer John gives us is this, “Through Jesus, God is going to make a New Creation. A New Humanity."

Which means this for us here today: everyone here who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior is a New Creation, a new kind of Human. You are now truly human. You are made in the image of Christ, not in the image of Adam.  And to use the language of Genesis: you are gardener. You have been given the ability to reign over this creation properly. To steward and cultivate it under God’s definition of good and evil, and not your own. That’s what Paul means when he says we have “Died with Christ.” The old you, the you that was a distortion of God’s image, is now dead. Buried with Christ in the grave. You have received the Spirit of God, and he has made you a New Human. But that new you hasn’t been fully consummated, that day will come when Jesus returns. But the purpose of this life now is this: to learn how to be good stewards of God’s creation, to learn how to garden well. It’s what Dallas Willard calls, “trainin’ for reignin’”.

Because here’s the big picture, Jesus inaugurating the New Creation through his resurrection implicitly looks forward to the resurrection of his followers. When the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, they begin the journey that Jesus began at his own baptism. That journey ended in resurrection for Jesus, and it will end in resurrection for all who receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only empowerment for carrying out the mission of God, He is the promise of resurrection.

In the book of Revelation, in chapters 21-22, it describes what this world will look like when Jesus returns, and his followers are resurrected. It describes this beautiful city called the New Jerusalem, and in the center of the city is the Temple. And if you know the story of Israel, you know the Temple is where the Presence of God rested among the Israelites. It’s the place where Heaven and Earth overlapped. It was the cross section of God’s space and our space. But then John says something very interesting in 21:22, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”

In the New Jerusalem, there is no longer any need for a physical Temple to contain and protect the people from the powerful presence of God, because the people are the Temple. That’s why Paul says in Ephesians 2:19-22, "So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family.Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.” And why Peter says in 1 Peter 2:4-5 "You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.” God is forming his people together in unity, in such a way that they become the Temple, the place where the presence of the living God with rest and remain. The place where those outside the community are to come to learn about YHWH the creator God.

That place is now you, and me, and all of us individually and together. We are the overlap between Heaven and Earth. The cross section between God’s space and man’s space. We are to continue the work of Jesus of bringing Heaven to Earth, ushering in the New Creation, preparing for the day that the Christ returns, Heaven and Earth are reunited, the presence of God is manifest on Earth, and we live face to face with our Creator for all of eternity.

How do we do that? We look to Jesus and follow in his example in every way. Showing love to the poor and outcast. Bringing healing to the sick. Being generous with our time and money. Obeying the Law as it was intended. I can’t give everyone here a direct application from today’s teaching. We must all do the hard work of understanding what it means to be a New Creation made in the image of Christ, in our own setting and context.

So may we all go today, having the breath of Jesus in our lungs, and learn what it means to be gardeners. To care and cultivate this beautiful creation. To become a New Humanity.

CREATION IMAGERY IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

AND ITS RELATION TO SPIRIT BAPTISM

Austin Rojan

BIBL/THEO 5843: New Testament Perspectives on Baptism in the Holy Spirit

April 21st, 2017

The thesis of this paper is that Spirit Baptism in John’s Gospel is the inaugural experience of New Creation in the life of the believer, which John calls being “born from above." In defense, this essay will briefly survey John’s pneumatology broadly, analyze the use of creation imagery throughout the gospel, and discuss how Spirit Baptism functions in relationship to this theme of New Creation in John.

**John’s Pneumatology**

Before delving into the theme of creation imagery as it relates to Spirit Baptism, some observations need to be made about how the Spirit functions throughout the book as a whole. Doing so will give the rest of our study a larger context to be understood within, and create a foundation to draw conclusions from.

To begin, Köstenberger and Swain make six observations on John’s pneumatology: 1) “The Spirit is sovereign in his activity (3:8)”; 2) “The Spirit rules from ‘above,’ not from below (3:3, 12)”; 3) “The Spirit gives life (6:63)”; 4) “The Spirit comes to dwell in the midst of God’s people (14:17)”; 5) “The Spirit reveals the future (16:13)”; 6) “The Spirit ushers in the new creation (20:22).”[[1]](#footnote-1) Of these, the points relevant to our discussion are 2, 3, and 6.

Summarizing John’s pneumatology, Köstenberger and Swain state, “the Spirit descends from the Father to rest and remain upon the Son, so that, through the Son, he may come to rest and remain upon Jesus’ disciples as well.”[[2]](#footnote-2) He later notes, “the role the Spirit plays in relation to the disciples is analogous to the role he played in relation to Jesus during his earthly ministry.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Rainbow echoes this in his own study of *Johannine Theology*:

“A Spirit-dove comes down out of the sky and remains on Jesus. This is the sign that Jesus is the Son of God and will baptize others not with water but with the Holy Spirit (1:33). From that moment, Jesus commences his public ministry. *The reader is left to deduce that Jesus speaks God’s words and does God’s works in the rest of the Gospel by virtue of this empowerment*”[[4]](#footnote-4) (italics added).

If Köstenberger, Swain, and Rainbow are correct in their understanding of the Holy Spirit in John, then one can conclude that the activity of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus is paradigmatic for his followers*.* The rest of this essay will discuss the theme of New Creation in John, and explore how the ushering in of this New Creation is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit through the person of Jesus.

**Creation Imagery in John’s Gospel**

All throughout John’s Gospel are allusions to the creation narrative. This section will address five moments within John that clearly utilize creation imagery in order to develop a theology of New Creation: John’s introduction, Jesus’ baptism, Jesus’ first week of ministry, the seven signs of Jesus, and the passion narrative. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all the creation imagery used throughout John, rather a collection of those that are pertinent to our discussion of Spirit Baptism.

John’s Introduction

One of the clearest, and most obvious allusions John makes to the creation story is the first two words of his Gospel, ἐν ἀρχή “In the beginning” (1:1). These are the same words that open up the LXX translation of Genesis. John continues this theme by describing Jesus as “the Word,” which evokes images of God speaking creation into existence. As well, vv. 4-5 make reference to Jesus being *light* and *life*. On this, Köstenberger comments, “it is highly probable that John espoused a ‘new creation theology.’ This is most apparent in the introduction to the gospel which casts the Word coming into the world in terms reminiscent of creation, most notably by way of references to ‘life’ and ‘light,’ both of which constitute creation terminology.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Within the first five verses of the Gospel, John has made four overt references to the creation story. It is apparent that he is spiking the attention of his reader to remain aware of this theme, that will permeate the rest of the work.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Jesus’ Baptism

The account of Jesus’ baptism in John is not as detailed as it is in the synoptic accounts, but it remains an integral moment in the story. Two observations need to be made in our discussion of creation imagery. First is the importance of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove, while Jesus is in the waters of the Jordan. In Gen. 1:2, the Spirit of God רָחַף “hovers” over the chaotic waters of creation. This word רָחַף is only used three times in the OT: Gen. 1:2, Duet. 32:11; Jer. 23:9. The only other time it translates to “hover” is in Duet. 32:11, which describes an eagle hovering over its’ nest of young. Then, Jer. 23:9 uses רָחַף to describe the trembling or shaking of a man’s bones. The basic idea of the word connotes the fluttering, or “the quick, non-linear, back and forth motion of an object.”[[7]](#footnote-7) All of this suggests that רָחַף was attributed with bird like characteristics. Meaning, the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form a bird while he is in a body of water, is imagery extremely reflective of the Spirit of God hovering over the chaotic waters of creation in Gen. 1:2.

Second, the promise of Jesus being this one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33) occurs in John, just as it does in the other gospel accounts. This promise will be addressed in greater detail in our discussion of garden imagery in the passion narrative, and Spirit Baptism as a function of New Creation. For now, what is important is the connection made between creation and Spirit Baptism through the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

Jesus’ First Week of Ministry

John 1:19-2:11 describes the first week of Jesus’ ministry, and clearly delineates each of the seven days: Day 1: John’s testimony regarding Jesus (1:19-28), Day 2: Johns’ encounter with Jesus (1:29-34: “the next day”), Day 3: Johns’ referral of two disciples to Jesus (1:35-39), “the next day”), Day 4: Andrews’ introduction of his brother Peter to Jesus (1:40-42), Day 5: Philip follows Jesus (1:43-44; “the next day”), Day 6: Nathanael follows Jesus (1:45-51), Day 7: the wedding at Cana (2:1-11: “on the third day”).[[8]](#footnote-8) This is important because, “If this seven-day pattern is intended to invoke the memory of the first week of creation in Genesis 1, this would continue the ‘creation’ motif struck in the introduction to the gospel and provide a bridge to the possible instance of “Creation” theology in John 5.” [[9]](#footnote-9) The instance in John 5 that Köstenberger refers to here is the Sabbath controversy, where the Jewish leaders became angry at Jesus for healing the sick man at Bethesda. Jesus’ response in 5:17 is, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” In light of Jesus’ first week of ministry reflecting the seven days of creation, and considering that no day of Sabbath is clearly represented in those seven days, it is reasonable to conclude that John understands Jesus’ ministry as the beginning of God’s new creative work in this world, as “none other than the Creator had the authority to determine whether engaging in a particular activity of the day of rest was appropriate.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Considering the inordinate amount of allusions to creation already made in the Gospel, it is not a stretch to understand Jesus’ statement in 5:17 this way.

The Seven Signs of Jesus

The seven signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John are debated whether or not to be seen as a part of John’s creation motif. Sosa Siliezar, in his comprehensive work on *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John*, argues that there is insufficient evidence to connect the seven signs of Jesus to the theme of creation.[[11]](#footnote-11) Other scholars have argued that there is sufficient evidence, stating “The signs of Jesus are miracles, new acts of creation,”[[12]](#footnote-12) and “The seven Johannine signs point ahead in the narrative toward that final and greatest of signs, the resurrection of the Messiah–the first moment of re-creation.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Considering the first sign of Jesus occurs on the seventh day of Jesus’ first week of ministry, which has already been shown to be linked with this theme of creation, it seems likely that John intended on continuing this theme of creation through the signs of Jesus; akin to a literary baton pass, which passes the use of a certain theme from one section to the next by having the two overlap.

Much debate has been written on what constitutes the seven signs of Jesus. There are six commonly acknowledged signs, and nine other suggested signs. The six commonly accepted signs of Jesus are: changing water into wine (2:1-11); healing the official’s son (4:46-54); healing the lame man (5:1-15); feeding the multitude (6:1-15); healing the blind man (9:1-41); and raising Lazarus (11:1-57).[[14]](#footnote-14) The other suggested signs of Jesus are: Jesus clearing the temple (2:14-17); Jesus’s word regarding the serpent in the wilderness (3:14-15); Jesus walking on water (6:16-21); the anointing of Jesus (12:12-16); the triumphal entry (12:1-8); the foot washing (13:1-11); Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection (18:1-19:42); Jesus’ resurrection appearances (20:1-21:25); and he miraculous catch of fish (21:1-14).[[15]](#footnote-15)

Köstenberger has developed three points of criteria that are consistent throughout the six commonly accepted signs, to determine the seventh: 1) “Is the given work performed by Jesus as part of his public ministry?”; 2) “Is the event explicitly identified as a ‘sign’ in John’s gospel?”; 3) “Does the event with its concomitant symbolism, point to God’s glory displayed in Jesus, thus revealing Jesus as God’s true representative?”[[16]](#footnote-16) He concludes that the only alternative sign that meets this criteria is the clearing of the temple (2:14-17). But, Köstenberger overlooks one vital piece of information: Jesus clearly states the sign he will give to show his authority when he says, “‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’…He was speaking of the temple of His body. So, when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this,” (2:19-22). This makes Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, not the clearing of the temple, the only alternative sign to be explicitly identified as a sign in John’s Gospel. Köstenberger argues that the seventh sign cannot be the crucifixion and resurrection because it does not “occur during the course of Jesus’ public ministry (chapters 1-12).”[[17]](#footnote-17) As well, “Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection are the reality to which the signs point,”[[18]](#footnote-18) meaning it cannot itself be a sign. Neither of these arguments are necessarily true. First, if one understands “Jesus’ public ministry,” in the broader sense of all the work of Jesus done in public, and not so narrowly as the section of John’s gospel which describes the public ministry of Jesus in chapters 1-12, then the crucifixion of Jesus would indeed meet this first criteria. Second, just because the crucifixion and resurrection are the reality to which all the other signs were pointing toward, does not negate the possibility of they themselves being signs. In fact, it could be argued that it makes more sense for the final sign to be the reality which all the others were pointing, as the culmination of the work of Jesus’ ministry.

Not only is it probable that the seventh sign of Jesus is his crucifixion and resurrection, but it is reasonable to understand these as two distinct signs; making his crucifixion the seventh sign, and the resurrection an eighth sign. The reasoning for this is three-fold. First, Jesus’ lasts words are, “It is finished,” (19:30) likely referring, at least in part, to the signs of Jesus. Second, John makes it explicit that Jesus dies just before Sabbath (19:31).[[19]](#footnote-19) As already stated, the seven signs of Jesus are the continuation of John’s theme of creation in his Gospel, and the first sign occurs on the seventh day of Jesus’ first week of ministry (which mirror the seven days of creation). This final day of Jesus’ first week would have been seen as the Sabbath day in light of the creation narrative. As well, the miracle Jesus performs on this symbolic seventh day makes multiple allusions to his crucifixion. The turning of water into wine is clearly an allusion to the water and blood that pours out of Jesus’ side (19:34). Also, when Mary asks Jesus to perform the miracle, he states it is not yet his “hour” (2:4), a common way of Jesus referring to his crucifixion. Taking all of this into consideration, it is feasible to understand John making the claim that the death of Jesus is the final sign of his ministry that *finishes* the creation process, and Jesus finally rests in the tomb on the seventh day just as God rested on the seventh day of creation in Genesis. If this is in fact the case, it would suggest that the death of Jesus is its own independent sign. Third, all of Jesus’ signs occur in a single act or moment. It would be strange if the last sign was suddenly broken into two distinct acts that took place over three days. In addition to all of this, John then makes an explicit statement that Mary went to go see Jesus’ tomb on the “first day” (20:1). If the signs truly do correlate to days of creation, the resurrection then is the 8th sign, and 8th day. It is the “first day” of the New Creation, inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus, which implicitly looks forward to the final day of the New Creation: the resurrection of Christ’s followers.[[20]](#footnote-20) Due to John’s very intentional placement of both the crucifixion and the resurrection on meaningful days in the creation narrative, it is likely John intended for these two moments to be considered independent signs.

Garden Imagery in the Passion Narrative

From the beginning of the Passion narrative, all the way through the end of the book, John’s Gospel is filled with imagery alluding to the garden of Eden. Throughout the entire NT, κῆπος “garden” is only used five times: once in Luke 13:19, and four times in John (18:1; 26; and twice in 19:41). Such rare use of this word indicates John likely had a special purpose in using it.

The first piece of garden imagery is at the arrest of Jesus, which takes place in a garden (18:1; 26). Some have argued that this cannot be an allusion to Eden, because the word for garden in 18:1 is κῆπος, whereas the LXX translates garden as παράδεισος “paradise” in Gen. 2:8.[[21]](#footnote-21) But, Suggit rightly observes,

“In the Genesis narrative the Hebrew *gan* is rendered in the Septuagint by *paradeisos* (Gen. 2:8), but elsewhere in the Old Testament *gan* is translated by *Kepos*. In Ezekiel 36:35 *gan-eden* is rendered as k*epos truphes,* and Sanders and Mastin (1968) note that Auila and Theodotion rendered *gan* by *Kepos* in Genesis. Since *paradeisos* in the New Testament signified the future state in the presence of God (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7) it was an unsatisfactory word to use to refer to an earthly garden.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

This being the case, Judas’ betrayal of Jesus is likely reflective of Adam’s sin against God. If this is true, it sets up the next piece of garden imagery to hold even more significance.

The next allusion we see to the garden of Eden is Pilate’s reference to Jesus as the ὁ ἄνθρωπος “the man” (19:5); the same word used in Gen. 1:26 (LXX) for the creation of Adam.[[23]](#footnote-23) Remembering that Judas’ betrayal of Jesus is reflective of Adam’s disobedience to God, John is flipping the story of the fall on its’ head. God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” Yet, when Adam eats from the tree, he continues to live. Now Judas reenacts the sin of Adam, meaning Judas is the one who is deserving of death. But instead of Judas, God himself will be the one to die. It is as Paul describes in 2 Cor. 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

After the resurrection, Mary goes to visit Jesus’ tomb and she encounters two angels (20:12), reminiscent of the two cherubim placed at the garden of Eden, whose task was to guard “the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24).[[24]](#footnote-24) Mary then looks and sees Jesus, but mistakes him to be a gardener (20:15). Suggit suggest, “Mary turns and sees one whom she thinks to be the gardener. Indeed he was! Adam was put in the garden of Eden to maintain it and care for it (Gen. 2:15). He failed to do so, but Jesus is the second Adam, the true human being, [c.f. 19:5].”[[25]](#footnote-25) Jesus consummates his role as the first New Human, the one who will image God perfectly by tending to this garden of New Creation as Adam should have done in Eden.

Last, John makes possibly the most surprising and weighty allusion to Eden in 20:22, when Jesus breathes on his disciples. The word “breathed” here is ἐμφυσάω, and is the same verb used in Gen 2:7 (LXX) for when God breathes into the nostrils of Adam. As well, ἐμφυσάω recalls the prophecy of re-creating the people of God by his Spirit in Ezekiel 37:9 (LXX). John is clearly making the statement that just as God created Adam in Genesis 2, so Jesus is re-creating humanity in John 20:22. This spirit of New Creation is given to the disciples in order that they too would become New Humans, just as Jesus had through his death and resurrection. It is this moment, often referred to as the Johannine Pentecost, that we will focus on for the remainder of the essay.

**Spirit Baptism as a Function of New Creation**

John’s Gospel, just as the synoptics do, opens up with the promise that Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33). This promise finds its fulfillment in 20:22 when Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, “receive the Holy Spirit.” The evidence being that the phrase ἅγιος πνεῦμα “Holy Spirit” only occurs three times in John: "I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the *Holy Spirit*.’” (1:33); "But the Helper, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (14:26); "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the *Holy Spirit*.’” (20:22). The first instance is the promise of Spirit Baptism, the second looks forward the effect of the Spirit post-reception, and the third is the actual reception of the Spirit. It is clear that there is no other place in John’s Gospel that sufficiently fulfills the promise of Jesus being the Spirit Baptizer. Meaning, John’s theology of Spirit Baptism is integrally tied to his theology of New Creation.

Additionally, this Johannine Pentecost is the fulfillment of Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus in 3:3; 5, “Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’… “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” No matter how one interprets “water and Spirit” here, the point is that one must be born of the Spirit of God. Weissenrieder recently published a very thorough study of ἐμφυσάω,[[26]](#footnote-26) and found that the word’s primary use in most ancient sources, is in the context of embryology. In her analysis of the treatise *De Natura Pueri*, she states,

"It is πνεῦμ which is responsible for growth and articulation, but it is ἐμφυσάω that initiates the growth, the movement of the sperm and the fetus. The author’s theory of embryology is based on the idea commonly known as pangenesis, although with several variations. The seed that forms the nucleus of the embryo comes from every part of the body of both parents. Because the sperm is in a warm place, the sperm attracts πνεῦμa and is increasingly filled with it….  ἐμφυσάω comes into play only when the sperm has become completely saturated with πνεῦμa. The sperm receives πνεῦμa from the breathing mother but also emits it.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

But, the *De Natura Pueri* dates back to the 4th century, and therefore is justifiably suspect in supporting the relationship between ancient embryology and John 20:22. Despite this, due to the numerous other ancient works Weissenrieder cites as documenting similar ideas,[[28]](#footnote-28) as well as her discussion of ἐμφυσάω in Gen. 2:7 (LXX), Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo,[[29]](#footnote-29) and her analysis of the translation from נְשָׁמָה into πνοή and πνεῦμa,[[30]](#footnote-30) this essay agrees with her conclusion that “It is not only possible but almost unavoidable to derive the meaning of ἐμφυσάω in John 20:22 from the context of ancient medical texts.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Spirit Baptism, for John then, is to become a child of God by being “born from above,” and this new birth is the entrance of the New Creation into the life of the believer.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Spirit Baptism in John’s Gospel is the inaugural experience of New Creation in the life of the believer, which John calls being “born from above." It is clear from the extraordinary number of allusions to the creation story throughout John’s Gospel, that New Creation is an integral aspect of John’s theology. In light of the creation imagery used in the baptism of Jesus, as well as the Johannine Pentecost, Spirit Baptism is inseparably tied to this theme of New Creation. Additionally, understanding the ancient medical context of ἐμφυσάω, Spirit Baptism is the moment of new birth in the life of the Christian, in which they begin their journey toward the death of the old self, and the final consummation of the New Creation at the resurrection.

Remembering that the activity of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus is paradigmatic for his followers, one can conclude that Spirit Baptism is then analogous to Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan. Meaning, the Spirit now empowers Christians to continue the work of bringing New Creation into the world presently, just as Jesus did in his own ministry. The call of the Spirit Baptized believer, then, is to usher in New Creation by exercising signs and wonders, the teaching of Scripture, and compassion toward the poor.

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1. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008),135. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Köstenberger and Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit*, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John,* 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jeannine K. Brown, "Creation's renewal in the Gospel of John" (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 72, no. 2, 2010), 276-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John*, 349; Thomas Barrosse, "The seven days of the new creation in St John's Gospel" (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 21, no. 4, 1959), 507-516. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John*, 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John*, 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Carlos Raúl Sosa Siliezar, *Creation Imagery in the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 130-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. John Painter, “Earth Made Whole: John’s Rereading of Genesis” in *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 287; see also N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004),2:131. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John*, 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid.*,* 329-333. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John*, 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid.*,* 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 286. She states, “It is important in this regard that immediately after Jesus’ words from eh cross, “It is finished, “John mentions that the Sabbath is about to begin (19:31). This connection may once again echo Genesis, where the completion of God’s creative work culminates in the seventh day of God’s rest (Gen. 2:2-3).” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 283-284. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 2:1077. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. John N. Suggit, "Jesus the gardener: The atonement in the Fourth Gospel as re-creation" (Neotestamentica 33, no. 1, 1991), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Brown, “Creation’s Renewal,” 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Suggit, “Jesus the Gardener,” 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Annette Weissenrieder, "Spirit and Rebirth in the Gospel of John" (Religion & Theology 21, no. 1/2, 2014), 58-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Weissenrieder, “Spirit and Rebirth,” 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 62-65; [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 70-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)