

John's gospel is sometimes described as being like a pool in which a child may paddle and an elephant swim. It is accessible enough for anyone to enjoy it straight away; its complexity and symbolism also invites serious wallowing.

The feeding of the 5000 is an extraordinary story and for a lot of people it is very hard to believe that something of that kind has happened. It is one of the best historically attested stories, present in all four Gospels and witnessed by possibly more than 10000 people (if we include women and children not mentioned in the count)!

The story was circulating at a time when people present at the event would have still been alive. It would have been easy to discredit the story and the many other miracles Jesus had performed.

For John, this "miracle" is a sign (the Greek word is *Semeion*): a miracle that has a meaning. The signs are intended to convey truth that would not otherwise be known.

What truth is revealed through this particular sign?

Think of Moses in the desert. Read on and think about the differences between physical need and spiritual need.

The Jews at the time of Jesus believed that the Messiah would have many of Moses' qualities and characteristics.

Moses provided food for an entire nation for forty years! If Jesus really is the Messiah, then he will at least have to equal that. But Jesus corrected their misunderstanding and pointed to the true meaning of his **identity** and **work**.

The manna was a means of meeting their material needs, but there is bread that is able to do far more than that, bread that really is heavenly:

- "I am the bread of life," says Jesus. He's not only the giver of this bread – he *is* the bread! (some see in the wording an allusion to the Lord's Supper)
- "Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." The life that Jesus promises is a life of deep fulfilment and lasting satisfaction.

1. Share how that life has taken hold of you?
2. What difference does Jesus makes when life feels empty (hungry) and dry (thirsty)?

For John the 'signs' (*semeia*) 'reveal his glory' (2.11) and lead people to believe in him (2.23, 7.31, 10.41).

1. Can you name another sign in John's Gospel (there are 7 in total)?
2. The 7 signs are often linked with the 7 "I am" sayings. Can you name some of those sayings?
3. How do the "signs" and the sayings reveal Jesus's identity (glory) and lead people to believe in him?

