

04. Jesus' Miracles



‘In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning till the day he was taken up into heaven’(Acts 1:1-2)

The Evangelists want to take us more deeply into what they learned was really going on - learned by looking and listening but also by on-going reflection.

Often they chose to do this by echoing texts familiar to their readers from their sacred scriptures.

Iconic illustrations to express meaning

Baptism

Cana

Multiplication of Loaves/ Walking on the Sea

Transfiguration

Raising of Lazarus

Tearing of curtain; emptying of tombs

‘Miracle’

By ‘miracle’ we are not speaking of God intervening in history and setting aside the ‘laws of nature’.

So-called ‘laws of nature’ model and describe behaviour. They do not claim to exhaust the dynamism of nature or the relationships, processes, and causal interconnectedness of the natural world.

By 'miracle' we mean wonderful happenings that take place through natural causes that are beyond our present modelling: causes held in being and propelled by God's self-giving love, drawing the whole of creation into divine communion.



‘Whenever something new arises, whenever life is awakened and reality reaches ecstatically beyond itself, in all seeking and striving, in every ferment and birth, and even more in the beauty of creation, something of the being and activity of God’s **Spirit** is manifested’(Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, 227).

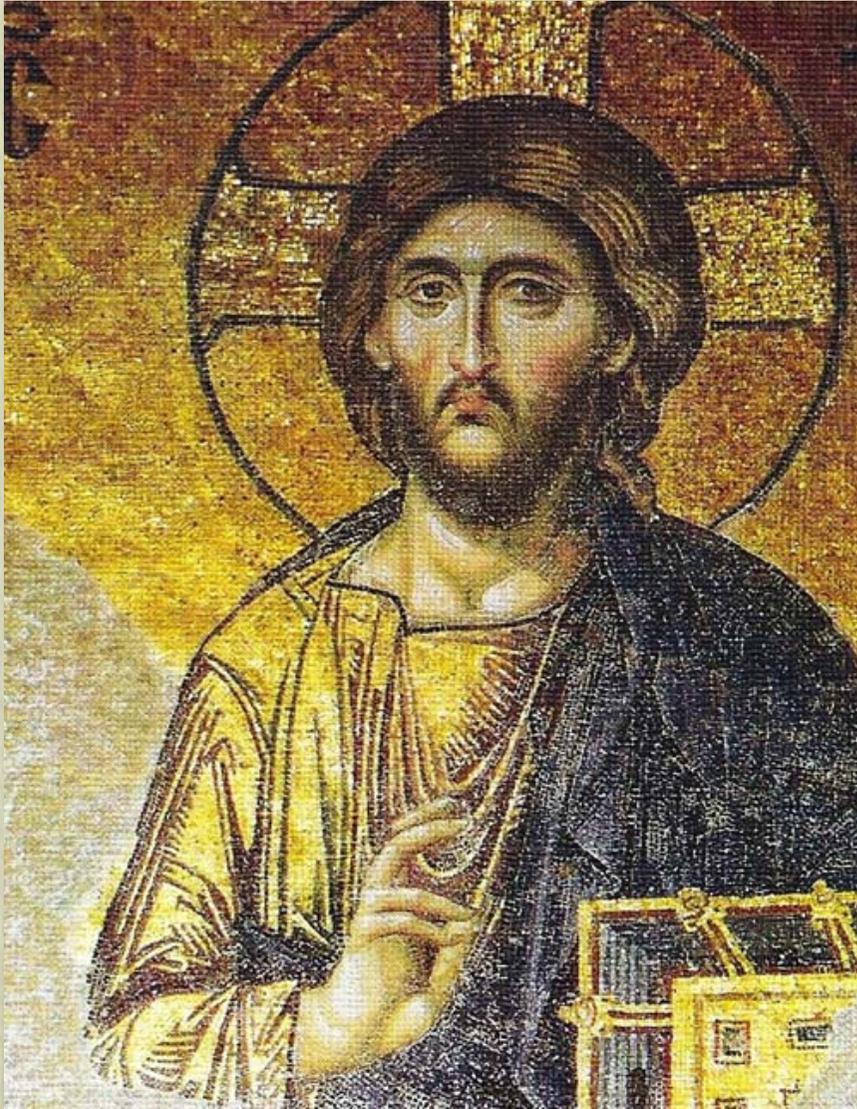
‘God gives to creatures themselves the capacity for the new. Because of God’s creative and redeeming presence to creatures, they can become something they were not. When matter comes to life on earth, when life becomes self-conscious and personal, this occurs through God enabling creation to transcend itself and become something new. Above all when one of us in the human and creaturely community, Jesus of Nazareth, is so radically open to God, so one with God, that we rightly see him as God-with-us, then we can say that in this person creation transcends itself into God’(Denis Edwards, *How God Acts*, 158).



Human beings have evolved through natural processes. We are still evolving. We, and with us the whole created universe, are being drawn into full communion with God.

Jesus revealed God as love = self-giving. Creation is an explosion of this self-giving. We become what we are called to be to the extent that we love = to the extent that we ‘participate in the divine nature’ (2Peter 1:4).

‘Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’(Romans 5:5).



Jesus was fully open to God's Spirit, God's creative action. 'God gives the Spirit to Jesus without measure'(John 3:34). Jesus loved perfectly.

'Miracles' show what perfect love can do when it is welcomed in 'faith'.

'If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you'(Luke 11:20).

δύναμις

‘miracle’ / ‘deed of power’

Mark 6:2

On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What **deeds of power** are being done by his hands!

Mark 9:39

‘Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.’

Matthew 11:21

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.’

Luke 4:14

‘Jesus, filled with the **power** of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.’

Luke 5:17

‘The **power** of the Lord was with Jesus to heal.’

Luke 19:37

‘As Jesus was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the **deeds of power** that they had seen.’

Luke 24:49

‘I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with **power** from on high.’”

Acts 1:8

‘You will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

Miracle (Deed of power) δύναμις

Wonder τέρας

Sign σημεῖον

Acts 2:22

‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know.’

Mark 6:5

‘Jesus could do no deed of power there (in Nazareth), except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. He was amazed at their unbelief.’

Acts 2:43

‘Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.’

Acts 6:8

‘Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.’

Acts 8:13

‘Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.’

Acts 10:38

‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with **power**; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.’

Acts 19:11

‘God did extraordinary **miracles** through Paul.’

Galatians 3:5

‘Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?’

1Corinthians 12:7, 10, 29

‘To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good ... to another the working of miracles ...
Do all work miracles?’

2Corinthians 4:7

‘We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary **power** belongs to God and does not come from us.’

2Corinthians 12:9

‘The Lord said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for **power** is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the **power** of Christ may dwell in me.’

Miracle (Deed of power) δύναμις

Wonder τέρας

Sign σημεῖον

2Corinthians 12:12

‘The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works.’

Romans 15:13

‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the **power** of the Holy Spirit.’

Romans 15:18-19

‘I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the **power** of signs and wonders, by the **power** of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.’

Hebrews 1:3

‘God’s Son is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.’

Hebrews 2:4

‘God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.’

The ‘deeds of power’ that we see in Jesus’ ministry flow from his complete openness to the power of God.

Luke 4:14

‘Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.’

Luke 5:17

‘The power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal.’

Since God is LOVE, the ‘deeds of power’ are expressions of the powerful love that binds Jesus to the Father.

Not magic

1. Mark 5:40-42

‘Jesus took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” Immediately the girl got up and began to walk about. At this they were overcome with amazement.’

2. Mark 7:32-35

‘They brought to Jesus a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.’

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching — with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

Jesus the Teacher

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee,

proclaiming the good news of God,

and saying, “The time [kairos] is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God has come near.

Repent.

Believe in the good news.”

Mark 1:29-31 Liberating for Ministry

‘As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and raised her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to minister to them.’

Jairus’s daughter, 5:41

Tormented Boy 9:27

Jesus resurrected 16:6

Mark 1:32-39 Instrument of God's Healing

‘That evening, at sundown, they were bringing to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he was praying. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” He says to them, “Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” He went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.’

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you want to, you can make me clean.”

Leviticus 13:45-46

‘The person who has the scaly skin disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.’

Mark 1:41-45

Liberating the Outsider and
welcoming him into the community

Deeply moved (compassion? anger?), Jesus stretched out his hand and held him, and said to him, “Of course I want to. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” (see Leviticus 14)

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in places where nobody dwelt. People, however, came to him from every quarter.

Mark 2:1-5 Liberating from paralysis of sin

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Mark 2:6-12 Liberating from paralysis of sin

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

At once Jesus ... said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he said to the paralytic – “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Mark 3:1-6

‘Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he says to the man who had the withered hand, “Come forward.” Then he says to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and says to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.’

Mark 6:4-6

Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”

And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.

HE WAS AMAZED AT THEIR UNBELIEF.

Mark 6:53-56

‘They came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Jesus, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 8:22-25

They come to Bethsaida. Some people bring a blind man to him and beg him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he was asking him, “Can you see anything?” The man looked up and was saying, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.”

Mark 9:20-24

‘They brought the boy to Jesus. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Mark 9:25-29

‘When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples were asking him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”’

Mark 9:38-40 (compare Numbers 11:24-30)

‘John was saying to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.

Mark 10:46-52

‘They come to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they call the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well (‘saved you’).” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.’

Miracles

In the early 18th century David Hume defined a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."

In New Testament terms, there is no reference to so-called 'laws of nature'.

A miracle is anything that arouses **wonder**, and is a **sign** of the presence and action of a loving God.

faith!

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord I*, 454.1

Danger that we fail to recognise the dramatic nature of accounts of the 'miraculous', and feel forsaken because such 'miracles' do not happen in our time.

1. God is constantly creating and holding creation in being. God is love, constantly giving God's Self to creation.

2. Miracle = action deriving from God's free choice and not as result of the action of creatures.

3. Everything is initiated by God's free choice.

We are always being drawn beyond ourselves to a higher state of communion with the Infinite [Evolution]. The infinite will always be beyond our comprehension, and so there will always be a supernatural in relation to us.

When we speak of "nature" we are referring to the parameters that we have put in place and come to understand as normal and predictable. We do not know what we can become because of the divine initiative and will for our response.

4. A miracle, therefore, is not necessarily something that is beyond “nature”. It is something that happens outside the expected, outside what is predictable because of our achieved understanding of created nature.

Augustine On John 24,1

‘In his mercy God has reserved it for himself to bring about, when the time is ripe, certain things which lie outside the usual course and order of nature, so that people who are insensitive to the miracles of everyday events will be impressed by seeing what is not greater, but is less usual.’

The surprise of a 'miracle' alerts us to something that is ever present but which our achieved knowledge can obscure: namely, that it is the initiative of God of the ultimately mysterious and the supernatural to which we are responding in everything we do and seek to do. It is our longing for communion with God that is the mainspring of our desire to know and love.

When we come to some understanding we may fall into the temptation of forgetting this and thinking we are the organisers and initiators. A miracle surprises us into recognising that we are wrong.