

*Christ and the Woman of Samaria at the Well*, by Guercino

Art selection and commentary by [Heidi J. Hornik](#) and [Mikeal C. Parsons](#)

This artwork appears in the [March 1, 2017](#) issue.



Photo © Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza / Scala / Art Resource, NY

The Italian Baroque artist Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, better known as Guercino, painted the subject of Christ and the woman of Samaria at the well at least five times in his career. The story in John 4:1–30 tells of Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman and teaching her about the water that he could give that brings everlasting life. Not only was this message unexpected but so, too, was the conversation between a man and a woman and between a Jew and a Samaritan. Guercino has captured the moment when the two discuss the proper locale for worship, and Jesus says that “the hour is coming when neither on this Mountain [Mount Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21). The pronounced idealization, pictorial refinement, and a gestural exchange between Jesus and the woman are characteristic of the artist’s late period. The lighting is even and the color brilliant, unlike his earlier versions which utilize a darker palette and chiaroscuro for dramatic effect. The painting shows a physical and emotional separation between the Samaritan woman and Christ. The woman’s right arm pulls the rope from the well, and she draws herself away from Christ.