

During the season of Epiphany, we celebrate the signs, we celebrate the events the point to the reality of who Jesus really is. The word "Epiphany" means to manifest, to display, to show, to shine forth. The theme of Epiphany is about the ways that Jesus' true nature are displayed. Epiphany reminds us that while Jesus is fully human, he is not just an ordinary man. Epiphany invites us to look at the signs, to see who Jesus truly is, to see Jesus' true nature shining forth.

Today our Gospel lesson is one of the classic Epiphany stories. The early church focused during Epiphany on three important Epiphanies, three manifestations of who Jesus is. The first classic story was the visit of the Magi which is always commemorated January 6. These mysterious visitors from the east come to pay homage to a humble baby, yet worship him as a newborn king. The second classic story was observed last Sunday, the Baptism of Jesus, where God proclaims that Jesus is his son, the beloved. The third classic Epiphany story is our theme for today, the Wedding at Cana, as recorded in the 2nd chapter of John.

Earlier in ch1, in the introduction to his Gospel, John told us that "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."¹ Now, in ch2, John begins to tell us the first way that Jesus' glory was revealed. And John does so in his typical way. His account is bursting with symbolism. As he is telling the story, he is also telling us much about living the Christian life.

John begins the second chapter: "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding."

Cana was just down the hill from Nazareth just 9 miles away. Apparently, Jesus and his mother had some kind of connection with a family there. Maybe they're friends. Maybe they're relatives. But for whatever reason, Mary and Jesus go to the wedding, and his disciples tag along.

Now I've said it before, but I'll repeat it, when you think of a wedding in scripture, don't think of a modern American wedding, with a service that lasts somewhere between 15 minutes and an hour, followed by a 3 hour reception. Instead, a 1st century Jewish wedding was a week long party, a seven day feast.

The groom's family would scrimp and save for years to be able to buy enough food and wine so that the party would last the whole week. Sometimes guests would bring wine and food as wedding gifts.

But at this wedding, John says, "the wine gave out." Major faux pas. Humiliating. A wedding that runs out of wine. It would have been a major social embarrassment.

So, Jesus' mother pulls him aside and says, "They have no wine." Jesus tells her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?"

¹ John 1:14

It's actually a little bit of a slap on the wrist. Jesus is saying, 'You're bringing this problem to me, but it's not my problem. Besides, it's not the right time yet.'

Yet Mary says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

There are a couple of wonderful things here. They're very instructive for us.

First, Mary comes to Jesus with a problem. But she doesn't propose a solution. She says simply, 'They've run out of wine.'

Second, she just trusts him to handle it. She says to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

I can't help but think, how different my prayer life would be if I could do those two things. To take my problems straight to God. And then to move forward trusting that God will do the right thing.

Mary presents the problem. Then she stops. I present the problem. Then I proceed to inform God as to exactly how he should proceed in solving my problem. I basically swagger into God's presence and say, "This is the way it needs to play out. A. B. C. God. Make it so." Lord I want you to help. And I want you to do it my way.

Sometimes, thankfully, God doesn't do things the way I want. And sometimes, I get what I want, but then I find out it's not really what I want. It's as if God is saying, "Okay. We've done it your way. Now let's try it my way."

How much better it would be if I could always say, "Lord. Here it is. Help." That's the way Mary presents the problem to Jesus.

And second, she trusts the outcome. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you to do." That's a wonderful attitude of trust/faith/belief. I don't know what'll happen. But whatever God says, do it. It may not be what you want or expect. But do it. Follow him.

How much better would our spiritual lives be if we could do those things? Bring our problems honestly to God. And then trust him for the best outcome. Mary is a wonderful role model here.

Mary tells the servants to do what Jesus says. And then John tells us that there are six stone water jars there. They're used for Jewish rites of purification. They each hold twenty to thirty gallons.

And Jesus says, "'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim."

Notice also that the jars were empty. They'd run dry. The needle was on 'E.' They were waiting to be filled again. And in walks Jesus. With Jesus, the jars are filled to the brim.

How about you? Is there any emptiness in your life? Is your life anything like the six stone jars? Once it was full, but now it seems dry and empty?

Truth is, there's always something missing in life. There's a void that can't be filled by others, not even those you love.

We Americans try to fill that void with many things, whether it's work or working out, substances or sex or stuff. We try so hard to fill the void. It's our great national pastime. But that brokenness can only be healed, that emptiness can only be filled by God. And with Jesus, the jars can be filled to the brim.

Also, notice what these jars are used for: Jewish rites of purification. The wedding guests were washing up so that they would be worthy to enter the marriage feast. But now, the jars are empty.

There's a heavy message here. John is telling us that the Jewish religion up to this time was incomplete. That doesn't mean it was bad. It just needed fulfilling.

Jesus wasn't destroying the old and bringing in the new. Jesus was taking the old, refilling it, and transforming it. Jesus was working within the Jewish system to bring about what was promised in the Law and the Prophets. That's John's symbolism here. The jars that allowed people to prepare for the feast were empty. Jesus refilled them. Then Jesus transforms them.

After the jars are filled, Jesus tells the servants to take some to the steward, and then, John tells us, almost as an aside that the water was now wine. Now think about that for a second. Six stone jars at 20 to 30 gallons apiece means 120 to 180 gallons of wine. Now I've been to some wild parties in my time. But I've never been to a party with 120 to 180 gallons of wine. That's 600 to 900 bottles. That's 2400 to 3600 glasses. An enormous amount of wine.

Through Jesus, God provides abundance, more than is ever needed. You know. There is one other time in John's gospel where Jesus provides an abundance of stuff. It's in the feeding of the 5,000, with an abundance of bread. Abundance of bread, abundance of wine, hint, hint.

And when Jesus gives you wine, it's not cheap stuff. This is not Mad Dog 20/20. Because the steward goes to the groom and compliments him. 'Everyone else serves the good stuff first,' he says. You serve the microbrew beer first, then you pull out the cheap stuff after no one cares anymore. 'But you, you saved the best stuff until last.'

Of course, the groom didn't do it. At least not the bridegroom who was getting married that day.

Instead there was another bridegroom. Our bridegroom, Jesus Christ. He provides the true feast. And he saves the best for last.

We so often look backwards. We often long for the better days of the past. Yet at Cana, Jesus is letting us know, the best is yet to come. You ain't seen nothing yet. We get a little taste of it now. We will taste it in all its fullness at God's heavenly table.

Remember that little detail back in at the beginning of ch2. All of this took place on the third day.

John is subtly reminding us of something else that happened on the third day: the Resurrection. It's a big neon sign: Look out. This miracle is a foretaste of the great miracle that is to come. It's all about new life. This wedding party is a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb. In the midst of the ordinary, God is doing something extraordinary. In the midst of mundane life God is bringing new life. So be prepared.

An angel once said, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."² We are invited. We are called. We are called to gather, and to share bread and wine. We are called to taste the abundant new life that God provides for us now. And we are called to look forward to God bringing all things to perfection in Jesus Christ.

Trust God. Let God refill you. Let God fulfill you.

God can give us more than we'll ever need.
And God is saving the best for last.

² Revelation 19:9