

2 Epiphany 2004
"Married to the Lord"
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This is the season of Epiphany, the time when Jesus Christ is manifested to the world. That's what the Greek word Epiphany means: manifestation, shining forth. Last week we saw that in Jesus' baptism as God himself declared, "This is my Son, the Beloved. With him I am well pleased."

We saw that this declaration of God's unique relationship with Jesus fortified him for hard road ahead. It does the same for us who are in Christ through baptism and faith. We're adopted as God's children. We share in the Sonship of Jesus. What's true of him, his relationship with the Father, becomes true of us who trust in him. What a profound and life changing reality that is!

Today we see Jesus manifested in a very different way, but just as profound and life changing. Last week he was in the water. This week he is at a wedding, which is familiar to anyone who's been to a wedding in the Episcopal Church. Remember these words? "Marriage was established by God in creation and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding, in Cana in Galilee."

But Jesus was doing more than "adorning this manner of life". John tells us that this was his first miracle and that he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. We'll get to that in a minute. First lets look at the story.

So there's Jesus and his mother and disciples attending a wedding near their home town up in Galilee. We can suppose that this was the wedding of some relative of Jesus'.

The wedding party, which could often last for days, is in full swing, when the wine runs out. Uh oh! This is like someone peeing in the punch bowl. It was a major social breach and likely to bring the party to an embarrassing and premature end.

Into the breach steps Jesus' mother, Mary, before anyone else found out. Perhaps she was helping in the kitchen. She alerts Jesus to the problem and wants him to do something. Perhaps she thinks he'll do something only God's Son can do.

Jesus declares cryptically, "My hour has not yet come." He then proceeds to do something astounding. He has the stone basins used for ritual purification filled with water. And while the steward draws some of the water and takes it to the groom for sampling, the water is changed into wine.

John says this was the first of Jesus' signs and it revealed his glory. In other words, it was an Epiphany. And based on it his disciples believed in him.

How does this reveal Jesus' glory? Think of Jesus in this story. He's recently been anointed for his messianic work and his mind is on big things. He's totally alive to who he is and what he's here to do. And everything he sees points to that.

So here he is at this wedding and for him it's rich with meaning and significance. While others see a wedding, he sees the coming of the kingdom of God. Two things stand out: the abundance of wine and the joy of the bridegroom. These reveal Christ's glory. They are an epiphany. Let's look at each.

The abundance of new wine. When the preachers and poets of the Old Testament portrayed the messianic kingdom, abundance of wine is often mentioned, much to the chagrin of some Christians. But that's something Episcopalians like to hear.

Jesus picks this up in his teaching. He likens his kingdom to the new wine that breaks the old wineskins. You see fermenting wine needs new wineskins - which were usually a sheep's bladder - that can expand in the fermentation process. Old wine skins are all stretched out and burst. That's how Jesus described the abundance and power of his kingdom bursting out of the old wineskins of Israel and the old covenant.

So what's with the wine at the wedding in Cana? It's the contrast between the old wine and the new wine. There's a huge difference in quantity and quality. The old wine ran out way too soon, with potentially disastrous consequences. The new wine, in contrast, fills six 30-gallon basins. That's a lot of wine!

Jesus' wine is better, too. It's not an \$8 bottle of wine, but something much better, which is amazing because people usually serve their best wine first and once everyone is good and happy they bring out the cheap stuff. But Jesus saves the best for last.

That's the nature of the kingdom of God. It's the best for last. Israel has been drinking some good-enough-for-now wine, but it's run out. Now the new wine is here and wow it's good! That's how Jesus reveals his glory.

The joy of the Bridegroom. We hear it in our Old Testament lesson this morning, spoken by Isaiah to Israel lost in captivity in Babylon. We've seen them there before. In their shame, defeat and hopelessness Isaiah promises salvation. God promises to give a new name, which translated means, "My delight is in you."

He's going to make them the object of his delight, his most precious, like a royal diadem or like a beautiful bride. God says, "As a young man marries a young

woman, so shall your Maker marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." Nice!

Do you men remember getting married? Remember what it was like? I love doing weddings because I get to watch the groom watch the beautiful bride come down the aisle. He's never seen her like this and now she's his, all his.

At this wedding, Jesus envisions his own wedding - and it's not to Mary Magdalene. Jesus didn't marry her, because he was promised to another Bride, the Church, us.

Jesus' apostles, Paul and John, portray this beautifully. When Paul wants to teach the Christians in Ephesus about how husbands and wives should care for each other, he uses marital relationship between Christ and his people as the model. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. Wives honor your husbands as the Church honors her Lord. And John, in the Revelation portrays that wedding feast in all its glory.

So I picture Jesus at this wedding, daydreaming with all this running through his mind, snapped back to the moment. "Oh yeah, fill the jars with water." This wedding in Cana with Jesus' sign of turning water into wine offer his disciples a glimpse of what it will all be like. And they believe in him.

They begin to get it. They see more clearly and deeply who Jesus is and their lives will never be the same again. It works the same way for us. Reading this we begin to get it. We see Jesus more clearly and our lives are forever changed, too.

And with that change comes a new view of who we are. If Jesus is the groom and we, corporately, are the "Bride" that is a measure of his love and commitment to us and the intimacy we share with him.

As God said to Israel, "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." He names his bride "My Delight is In Her." That's what he's saying to you. Do you hear that? Do you know it? Are you going to let it change your life?

Let's pray.

Next time: do it from Jesus' point of view - wonder what "my time is not yet means?" What was he thinking? A reverie in which all of the expectation and destiny flashes before his eyes from which he snaps out and orders the steward to bring water.