

Glorious Miracles
John 2:1-11
January 20, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

The season of Epiphany is all about Jesus becoming manifest, becoming known as the Messiah. At Christmas, He arrives; during Epiphany, He makes it known that He has come to save. In last week's Gospel, we heard about Jesus' baptism, and a lot happened there. Jesus was baptized to demonstrate that He came to take the place of sinners. Then, God the Father declared Jesus to be His beloved Son, even as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. A lot was made known about Jesus there: namely, that the Son of God—the second person of the Holy Trinity—had become flesh to redeem the world from sin.

This week, Jesus goes to a wedding and turns water into wine. But there's a lot more going on in this text, too.

Here's what we know from the text: Jesus and His disciples attend a wedding at Cana, where His mother Mary is also present. In fact, some pretty reliable theologians have suggested that Mary isn't just a guest; this might well be a wedding involving some blood relatives, so she might have a personal stake in making sure that the wedding party isn't embarrassed. Wedding feasts can go on for days, involving a lot of food and a lot of wine. In this case, the wine runs out while the feast is far from over. Mary tells Jesus to do something about it; and although He has some curt words for her, He also tells the servants to fill six large barrels full of water, then to take some water to the master of the feast. When the master of the feast tastes the water, he finds that it has become wine. In fact, it's become good wine—far better than the stuff they've been serving up to now. Our text concludes that this is the first of Jesus' signs in order to manifest His glory, and His disciples believe in Him.

So Jesus turns water into wine. That's a miracle, a supernatural feat. But there's a lot more going on. There's a lot that Jesus is making manifest about Himself.

I. Five Aspects of Jesus' First Sign

First, take that exchange between the Lord and His mother. She tells Him, "They have no wine," a nudge that He should do something about it. Jesus' response seems a little strange: "Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." For all the honor Mary rightly deserves, we remember that she's also a human being in need of redemption. Here, it seems, she's decided to use her position as Jesus' mother to get Him to use His divine authority for her will. Jesus puts a quick stop to that. Although He is the Author of the commandment to "Honor your father and your mother," He is also the Son of God with godly wisdom and a divine will that Mary can't comprehend. He's not here to do Mary's will, even when her selfish requests are with the best of intentions. He's come to do the will of His Father in heaven: that means going to the cross to die for the sins of the world, not backing up

unprepared caterers at wedding feasts. He is going to do the miracle here, but for a different purpose: He's going to do so to make His glory known. In the meantime, though, there's a valuable lesson of Law in this: one of the biggest temptations you face, when faced with crisis, is to try to influence the Lord to do what you want. If the Lord didn't let His own mother influence Him, He's not going to let you alter His holy will, either. Instead, faith prays, "Thy will be done." But there's more to this miracle than mother-son relationships.

The Second Aspect: way back in Deuteronomy 18:18, it was prophesied that the Messiah would be a second Moses—God would put His words in His mouth, and all who listened to Him would be saved. As the Messiah, Jesus was the second Moses. At the start of *his* public ministry, Moses turned water into blood before Pharaoh: it was an announcement of judgment for the king's unbelief, a warning that he should let God's people go. That first plague brought death to the food supply as the fish of the Nile were killed: Moses' miracle made the water worse. At the start of **His** public ministry, Jesus turns water into **wine**. It is not an announcement of judgment, but a proclamation of joy. The Lord is at a wedding feast—and where He gave Adam and Eve the wedding gift of Paradise—the Garden of Eden, at this wedding His miracle conveys a promise. Abundant wine is a symbol of redemption and restoration. In Amos 9:13-14 the Lord declares:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord,
 "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper
 and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
 the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
 and all the hills shall flow with it.

¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
 and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
 they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
 and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

And by His death and resurrection, Jesus will restore man to the Paradise of heaven. Eternity will be called the wedding feast of the Lamb. Thus, in this way, Jesus—the "second Moses"—is not like the first. The first warned Pharaoh of judgment, while the second came to declare redemption. Some will tell you that Jesus is all about judgment, that His cross is one more reason to make you feel guilty for your sin. But He's not at the wedding for blood and death: He brings wine and life, by shedding His own blood. He didn't come to pile on the guilt and shame. He came to die in your place so that you could be delivered from sin to everlasting life, to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

There's still more going on here: **The Third Aspect** is that Jesus uses the big stone water jars—the ones that are normally set aside for the Jewish rites of purification. You might recall the practice of the Pharisees from elsewhere in the Gospels (cf. Mark 7:3-4), how they insist on washing hands, utensils, cups and even couches before they eat a meal; it's a law they've made

up, one that they said you had to follow in order to be clean. They're big on laws—in fact, they believe that you earn God's favor and work your way into heaven by keeping lots of laws. But washing hands and silverware doesn't get rid of sin, so Jesus has a better use for these pots: He has them filled with water, and it's this water that He turns into wine by His Word. It's another facet to the miracle: Jesus replaces man's water with His wine, a visual statement that He is the One who cleanses, who purifies. He replaces man's rules, which could never save, with Himself, who will die for the sins of the world.

Fourth, on a much less grand or consequential note: it's wine, wine with all of the properties that wine has. There are some Christians who declare that the consumption of all alcohol is sinful; and I've heard it said that when Jesus turned water into wine at Cana, it was non-alcoholic wine or was really just water that people called "wine" in a good-natured way. It had to be, they say, because consumption of alcohol is sinful. But that isn't what the Word says. It's wine. Thus, the teaching that all consumption of alcohol is sinful is a false doctrine. The lesson I wish to draw here is certainly not that everyone should drink and get blasted. Certainly not! Alcohol is not for all, and should be consumed in moderation by those who partake. The far greater lesson is this: let us not make up laws which God does not make up, and bind people's consciences to them. Doing so creates false guilt and false pride; it turns the Gospel back into Law, and turns people back into slaves rather than those set free by grace.

Finally there's one last facet to this first of Jesus' signs that I'd like to point out: except for Mary, His disciples and a few servants, we have no proof that anyone knows that a miracle has taken place. To those who know, and to you, the glory of Jesus is manifested. But to the casual wedding guest, how would he know that anything has happened? The master of the feast himself thinks that the bridegroom has opened up a new supply that he's had on hand the whole time, because all he knows is that the servants brought him some wine to taste. There's been no lightning flash, thunderclap, rushing wind or blinding light. Nothing supernatural appears to have happened. In fact, if you were there to watch the whole miracle take place, here is what you'd see: Jesus tells the servants to fill some jars with water. He tells them to take some of the water to the master of the feast. When the master of the feast tastes it, it's wine.

It's a miracle, one by which Jesus manifests His glory. But it doesn't look glorious at all. Kind of like the manger. Kind of like the cross. Kind of like how Jesus normally works to save, manifesting His glory behind the scenes.

II. Behind the Scenes

That's why I think this text would be a great one for an ordination sermon, and also why this miracle is a comforting one for you.

I think it would be a great text for an ordination sermon for this reason: Jesus is present there at the wedding, and He's performing the miracle. But while He speaks His Word to get it done,

He's using the servants as His instruments. The servants don't do anything miraculous; and the Lord Jesus may not even move from His chair the entire time this miracle was taking place. And yet, it was by this miracle that Jesus manifests His glory. It is by this miracle that His disciples believe in Him.

So if I were to preach an ordination sermon, this is what I would tell the new pastor: you're the servant at the feast. You're the instrument of God. You're not a miracle worker, but the hands and the mouth. As you preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, the Lord is present to give forgiveness, life and salvation. You won't see Him, you won't feel Him; and there will be times when you're ministering to people in dire situations when you'll feel completely helpless and ineffective. But it's not up to you: you're the servant who's doing what the Lord has told you to do. Be faithful to that calling, and leave the miracles up to Him. He will work the wonders and manifest His glory as He sees fit.

See, our gathering here has some important things in common with the wedding at Cana. We're gathered here, and Christ is present with us. We don't see Him, but He promises He is here. We hear His Word and we receive His Supper; and because He gives us the forgiveness of sins here, this service is a foretaste of the feast to come—the marriage feast of the Lamb in eternity, when we are in the presence of Jesus in all of His glory.

This is comfort. You don't see your glorious Savior with your eyes, either; and there will be times that you'll really be wishing for a miracle—to heal, to set things right, to make things the way they used to be, to get you out of a tough situation you're in. You and I don't like fear, pain, or uncertainty; and when confronted by affliction, we're tempted to impatience as we pray that the Lord would deliver us now—right now. We know He can if He so chooses: there are plenty of miracles in Scripture where the Lord worked some spectacular wonder for all to see. But when it's your turn to suffer and that time drags on, the devil will tempt you to be impatient with God, to grow weary of waiting for Him to work miracles.

Do not forget that faith trusts in what it does not see. Do not forget that faith means trusting in what you do not see, often in spite of what you do. Do not forget, in the words of Romans 8:24-25, "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." The Lord is faithful, even when you do not see miracles. Your proof is the cross: for if God has already sacrificed His Son for you, He will not forsake you now.

But the message of the wedding of Cana is not patience, of waiting for a miracle at a later date. When told that the wine was running out, Jesus didn't say, "Be patient! And don't worry: in heaven there will be enough wine!" He worked a miracle then and there, even though many didn't notice the miracle.

That's the lesson of the wedding at Cana: the Lord is present here, with you. And where the Lord is present, He is working miracles. And the miracles He works here are far greater than turning water into wine: He's turning dead sinners into living children of God.

As we spoke of last week, do not discount your Baptism. To see someone raised from the dead would be a pretty awesome wonder to behold. To see the devil cast out of an individual would be another outstanding sight. But both of those things happen in Baptism: you were raised from sin and death to life and salvation. The devil was cast out and Christ is now your King. When Hollywood does exorcisms, the devil is cast out after all sorts of supernatural wonders and signs; but you don't get your faith from Hollywood. You get it from the Word; and the Word assures you that Christ was present at your Baptism. He used a servant—probably a called and ordained one—to speak His Word and apply the water. But it was His doing—His miraculous doing. By that Baptism, you were raised from death to life—eternal life. By that Baptism, the devil was sent packing. And since the glory of Christ is His cross for your salvation, your Baptism was a miracle that manifested His glory.

Do not discount the preaching of the Word, be it the sermon proclaimed here or your conversation with a friend. The devil would have you believe that such talk is cheap, that pastors are windbags and the sermon is just something to be endured. But whether it be a sermon or your own conversation, the speaking of God's Word is the speaking of God's **powerful** Word—the same Word that created the heavens and the earth, the same Word that Jesus spoke to heal the sick and raise the dead. By that Word, He still creates faith and forgives sins. In the sermon, the pastor's just the mouth: but the Lord is at work in His Word to give you life. When you speak His Word to others, you're the mouth of God, and the Lord is at work to bestow the miracle of eternal life on others.

We dare not leave out the Lord's Supper, for Jesus is certainly present there. We receive it often, and rightly so, for Jesus told us to receive it often. But with familiarity comes contempt, and you'll be tempted to think of it as just another rite or something that makes the service drag out. But once again, it is here that Christ gives forgiveness and life. It's here that heaven and earth come together. It's here that you have a foretaste of the feast to come. With God's permission, man will come up with all sorts of spectacular discoveries; but only Christ can give you eternal life, and He does so here.

After the service today, you depart from this place—and the Lord goes with you. You'll go back to family life, school, work, whatever your callings entail. Some of the things you have to do will be frustrating and seem to border on futility as you beat your head against the wall. But you are a child of God, living a sanctified life; and as you deal with those around you, you are God's voice and God's hands to care for them. The Lord used servants to fill the water jars at the wedding. He will use you in service to others, too.

That's the lesson from the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performed His first sign and manifested His glory, and no one seemed to notice, except his disciples. The same Lord is with you, present to save, working to give you the miracle of eternal life: and He manifests His glory in the miraculous truth that for His sake, you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the Name...