

Wyndham Abbey - Epiphany 2 19.01.2025

Sermon preached by Fr Chris

The Wedding in Cana of Galilee

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Some scripture from hundreds of years before Our Lord's earthly life - *'as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you'* - you should recognise a verse from today's first reading.

So to today's Gospel and The Wedding Feast. *'Jesus turns water into wine.'* - *'God brings joy'*.

'Dear God, help me to use my gifts (to bring joy) for your glory and honour.' Some words from Archbishop Desmond Tutu to the Children.

Jesus used his gifts for the first time in his earthly life, and the Divine breaks into the physical world.

John's Gospel is very different to the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

It was written much later. It was the result of prolonged reflection on those amazing years of Jesus's ministry. John arrived at some basic assumptions; the first principles of his Gospel as I like to think of them.

Incarnation is crucial to John's writing. The writer assumes, stronger than that, the writer knows, that Jesus is the Word of God transformed into human flesh (Incarnation) and that informs the whole Gospel.

Remember, last year, when we read Mark's Gospel, we were constantly hearing the questions about Jesus like *'Who is this?' - 'What is all this about?'* It isn't until the end of the Gospel that we hear the Centurion by the Cross declare *'Truly, this man was the Son of God'*

But John assumes that from the very start as we heard at Midnight Mass Chapter 1 Verse 1 *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him*' In other words - God's glory and eternal life becomes available immediately, through faith in his Son Jesus. Not at the end of time at the great judgement, as in the Synoptics. This is it, if we reach out in Faith, it can be ours now!

In today's reading Jesus firmly tells his Mum that his *'hour has not yet come.'* This is the first time we hear from him in active ministry after the first chapter of the Gospel when he gathered the disciples and began to teach them.

For the first time we see him with Mum but he is no longer subject to her and he acts when he knows he has to do so. God's glory and the eternal life that comes with it will come in his earthly life through his passion, death, resurrection and ascension. These weighty assumptions underpin today's miracle story. This was the first sign he gives us, of his deity - many others will follow - in this Epiphany season we will see Paul converted and hear Simeon's words at the Presentation - *'Now Lord, you let your servant go in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation. A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people.'*

Why is this story only in John's account and not in the other Gospels? Because it depends on everything that I have tried to say so far.

This is a wonderfully simple story about Jesus bringing joy to the assembled group of people and nobody, except Mary and the servants know what has happened. The immortal breaks through into the everyday.

On the other hand, this passage has been the subject of debate and controversy for nearly two millennia.

Remember the life of Jesus was passed on by an oral tradition, from person to person before anything was written down and John's Gospel didn't appear until well into the second half of the first century.

Yet, here we are, fine detail, the words of the conversation between Jesus and Mary, the six stone jars for the purification rite, holding twenty or thirty gallons and the concluding line *'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.'*

Writers speculate about the part played by his mother and the apparent un-Jesus like response 'Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come'

This is the first time we see his ministry on his own – his mother watches as she will do throughout his life – caring for him spiritually, if not physically until his dead body is laid in her arms at the climax of the Passion.

But Mary says to the servants '*Do whatever he tells you!*'

The words apply to us just as much as to the servants.

John has found something in the story, through his assumptions, that the others couldn't access.

Why don't we hear about the bride?

This is the moment to briefly look at some of the discussion over the many years about this simple joyful story.

Start with the Isaiah reading '*For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*'

Our marriage culture is greatly changed from that of twenty or thirty years ago let alone the culture of the Old Testament. But here we are, thoughts of God's bride as his land.

It's a little bit of jump, for 'land' substitute 'Church', and think of the famous nineteenth century hymn '*The Church's one foundation.*'-

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy Bride,
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.*

Listen carefully today for the words of the Eucharistic Preface.

They'll mention the celebration of God's glory at Epiphany time through the coming of the Magi and in the waters of baptism, Jesus being revealed as the Christ.

Then '*In the water made wine the new creation was revealed at the wedding feast. Poverty was turned to riches, sorrow into joy.*'

We gather now at the Altar of God and we wait for the elements, the bread and the wine (with a little water) to become for us the Body and blood of our saviour.

Happy Eucharist and remember

'Dear God, help me to use my gifts for your glory and honour.'

and '*as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*'

'You shall be a crown of beauty in the hands of the Lord!

+ Amen.