

## New wine

22 1 12

Almighty God,  
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles  
the wonder of your saving power:  
renew your people with your heavenly grace  
and in all our weakness  
sustain us by your mighty power.

My text may be found in today's gospel according to John chapter 2 and verse 3:  
'When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine".'

Today we've come to the Third Sunday in Epiphany. Continuing the theme of the way God chooses to reveal himself to us, let's turn to consider the miracle of turning water into wine, an event which John alone records – Jesus' first miracle.

Weddings are a good reason to come together to celebrate: family, friends, people we know, love and like, all sharing the joy of two people in a fundamentally life-giving relationship. It gives new life to the man and to the woman as they share what they have and who they are with each other; it has the potential by the delight of their union to produce new life. Cherishing each other, they can cherish their children. As such, marriage is a basic building block of our society.

So if marriage is a real cause for shared joy, there is little surprise that a wedding is a good reason to have a celebration: food, drink, music and dancing, being together, talking together, a welcome break from the daily round of work.

The wedding in question is in Cana of Galilee. Mary and Jesus and his disciples are all invited. A good time is being had by all until the wine begins to run out.

You know what happens and it is a great story. But given that Epiphany means manifestation and that our focus today is the way God reveals himself to Man, then my question is who knows? Who knows that Jesus has changed the water into wine? Well for a start, let me say that the chief steward in charge of the proceedings didn't. When he tastes the wine, he hasn't a clue that what seems first-class to him, to his discerning palate, was just a few minutes ago local water.

The people who must have known were the servants. Mary had told them to do whatever her son was to ask. They did. They took six stone water jars and filled them with water, somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons – more wine than I could store in my chaplaincy's cave. They then took a sample to the steward to taste who as we know declared it to be wine of the best quality – grand cru classe!

The people who probably knew were his disciples. It would only need Peter or his brother Andrew, Philip or his friend Nathaniel, to be there to see what was going on. Certainly John must have known to have included it here at the start of his gospel.

And the person most likely to have known was his mother Mary who had set up the miracle in the first place by coming to her son and telling him of the people's need. Mary knew who her son was; she knew what Jesus was capable of; her experience of her boy now a man was unparalleled and her confidence in Jesus as his mother is well founded. As a good boy, he does what his mother asks of him.

And the miracle itself? To a Puritan mind it must seem odd – turning water into wine hardly seems a spiritual thing to do. It smacks too much of enjoyment, of having a good time drinking alcohol. Well John's is the most spiritual gospel and it is possible to read into the miracle a spiritual interpretation that Jesus is transforming the water of Judaism into the new wine of Christianity. Well good!

But honestly it works on a literal level too. Miracles are transformational: the sick are healed; the storm stilled; Thomas believes because the Risen Lord Jesus stands before him wounds and all. So why not believe that the Son of God can change water into wine if by doing so he is revealing himself to us as the person who can transform our lives by a real and living relationship with God our Father?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
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H: Sermon 25: New wine

