

'The Lord is Here'

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Introduction

In the season of Epiphany, we're celebrating three major events in which those with eyes to see and understand, see God acting in the world as each event relates to us as God's people: birth, baptism, and, today, covenant, told in the form of a wedding-story. God acting in time. Oh, the importance of God's timing, sometimes not of our own choosing!

Seeing and understanding God in this way, is part of the wonderful inheritance we have as Christians from our Judaic forebears in faith. Not so the gentiles. Some worshipped birds or animals, their state personified in their supreme ruler, some the solar system. Those three wise men who brought gifts to the infant Jesus and saved his life by not returning to Herod, were gentiles; astrologers who sought portents in the stars, a form of religion with the others denounced by Judaism, since God is the creator of the sun, the moon, the stars and of all that is. Yet, through the stars, God told them 'A king has been born. Do him homage'. In faith they set out on their long journey, like Abraham, but not like Abraham to the Promised Land, but to the Promised One, the infant king. They were obedient to that faith even though they went first to Herod, the evil one.

Last Sunday, we heard how Jesus came to John the Baptist for baptism and heard God acknowledge him as his Son.

Which brings us to the wedding at Cana in Galilee, the third event showing us Jesus, the Messiah, our Saviour, our brother, enacting a new covenant by filling up our shared feast of life with bountiful joy, finest delight.

John 2:1-11 – The Marriage in Cana of Galilee.

Mary was at a wedding in Cana in Galilee. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. The festivities would last a week and the honour of families on display in the sharing of God's blessings in the best of food and wine. The joining of not only a couple, but two families, was part of the very fabric of the local community on every level: economically, politically and in future children. Weddings were, and still are, part of building and strengthening society. But to run out of food or wine in Jesus' day was to run out of blessing, not only diminishing the honour of the families and the couple, but threatening the structure and stability of the district.

Jesus arrived on the third day of the feasting, and his mother greeted him with the devastating news: already there was no more wine. Like all who have been faithful to God in their history, from Abraham to Samuel to King David to the prophet, Jeremiah, to Mary and Joseph, to the three wise men, now Jesus doubts and inquires before obedience in faith. For him, it's a matter of timing!

Turning our attention to the wedding for a moment, St. John gives us signs of deeper meaning.

Jesus arrives on the third day. He would be raised to new life on the third day. That's when new wine really starts to flow. There are six stone jars and they are specifically related to their Jewish religious significance. Six is one short of the perfect number seven. Seven blessings are read under the wedding canopy. Jesus is the one who brings the blessing missing from the faith of his people.

The water of purification has been used, as for us at our baptism, and the jars stand empty. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water" and after they had filled them to the brim, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." There was now a huge volume of the finest wine, probably about 500 litres, about 600-700 of our

bottles. The blessings of God for us and humanity are so great, you could swim in them: what joy! What was lacking, was given – freely. As stewards of the feast of God's blessings: Taste and see that the Lord is good! He fills us, who come like empty jars, with a joy that comes from being acknowledged, claimed as his beloved; pleasing to Him, endowed with His own Spirit, made whole – holy – and empowered to act.

And then there's the connection with the true Vine of John 15, and the wine of sober joy at communion.

But, do you see that the only people at the wedding beside Mary and possibly the disciples, who know what's going on, are the servants. John makes this very clear. All the guests get to drink the wine – enjoy God's blessing, but the only people who really appreciate what's happened – those in the know – are the servants, who like Jesus, believed, and obeyed.

Anyone who's ever worked in hospitality, even preparing and serving meals at home! know that it can be hard work and often thankless. Nothing's changed. It isn't the guests who know the full story, it's the servants.

Jesus calls us to be servants, not to him, for to him we're friends, and more, kin. Through Him, we're heirs of the Kingdom, inheritors of the same spiritual DNA. His call to us is to be like him in and to our families, our brothers and sisters in faith, and to the world. So with your feet, bring the blessings of God's love. With your hands, carry the wine of joy to those who have none or not enough. Oh, yes, the work of hospitality requires particular alertness to want, even that shown by over-indulgence or obsession. It requires nimbleness, humour, mopping up spillages, and many more things besides – well, actually nothing less than the exercise of our full humanity but filled with the joy of loving as God loves us and using our spiritual gifts whether wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of Spirits, or languages. Our Christianity is to fulfil God's promises to the

world, sign-posted by Epiphany, as serving workers who know what's going on.