

Epiphany III

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[0 : 00] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. At a fancy restaurant, water is usually free, but a good bottle of wine doesn't come cheap.

And that's because good wine is the product of several years of careful planning, preparation, toil, and hard work. And yet in this morning's gospel, our Lord makes it look so easy.

Within a matter of seconds, Jesus turns water into wine. And not just any wine, but the best wine. The best wine those wedding guests at Cana probably ever tasted.

But that's not really the point of this morning's gospel. If you are focused only on the fact that Jesus can perform miracles, or that Jesus can turn water into the best wine within a matter of seconds, then you are missing the point.

In fact, St. John doesn't even call what our Lord did in this morning's gospel a miracle. He calls it a sign. And the season of Epiphany is full of them, is full of signs.

[1 : 22] For the season of Epiphany, of course, starts off with the wise men following a star to Bethlehem. But was it really a star? Or was it the planets of Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus coming into alignment, as some biblical scholars seem to think?

Or maybe the star was the light of the angels. That's another theory I've heard. Or maybe the star was something else entirely. A one-time manifestation of God's glory.

Whatever the case may be, it doesn't really matter. Because the star was a sign. And that's the important thing to focus on.

A sign that pointed the wise men to Christ. And just last week, on the first Sunday after Epiphany, we were told of another sign.

For at our Lord's baptism in the Gospel of Mark, the evangelist tells us that the Spirit of God descended upon our Lord like a dove. And again, that was a sign.

[2 : 29] A sign that the Spirit of God was resting upon Jesus. A sign of our Lord's triumphant inauguration as prophet, priest, and king.

And signs are important. Precisely because they point us towards an even greater reality. Signs show us what is really going on.

For example, if you've ever witnessed a baptism in church and thought to yourself, Oh my goodness, that baby sure must not like to get wet because I've never heard a baby cry like that before.

Well, you're focused on the wrong thing. Because a baptism is much more than just a baby getting wet. And similarly, if you come to the Lord's Supper and think to yourself, You know, I have far better tasting wine and bread at home.

Then again, you're focused on the wrong thing. For a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

[3 : 44] And that inward and spiritual grace. The mystery of our Lord's actual presence in the sacrament. That, that is what's important.

For Holy Scripture is full of signs, symbols, and wonders. But to just look upon such things as nothing more than mere miracles is to fail to understand the sign.

And so, in this morning's gospel, we hear that Jesus turned water into wine. And that this was the first sign that Jesus did at the beginning of his ministry.

So, what does this sign mean? Well, we need to understand that God's people receiving new wine was a sign that the promised Messiah had finally come.

That the heavenly bridegroom had been sent in order to be united to his bride, the assembly of believers here on earth and in heaven.

[4 : 51] For in Joel chapter 3, we read, And it will come to pass in that day, that is, the day when the kingdom of God shall finally come. It will come to pass on that day, that mountains shall drip with new wine.

And again, in Amos chapter 9, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the mountains shall drip with sweet wine. And in Jeremiah chapter 31, we read that at last the people of God will rejoice over the goodness of the Lord and over the grain and the new wine he shall give them. Therefore, when Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding at Cana, it is a much, much bigger deal than just the fact that our Lord can perform miracles.

For throughout the Old Testament, God performed many wonders in the presence of his people through the prophets. He parted the waters of the Red Sea.

He provided Israel with bread from heaven to eat and even caused water to come forth from a rock to quench his people's thirst. But never, never did God use any Old Testament prophet to miraculously provide the children of Israel with new wine.

[6 : 19] That was something that only God himself would do. It was a great sign that the promised Messiah had finally come.

And all of this, all of this took place at a certain wedding in Cana of Galilee, the land of the Gentiles, so that all God's people, both Jew and Gentile, might know the Messiah has finally come.

The heavenly bridegroom has finally arrived. And you who are members of Christ's church, the very bride of Christ, as she is called, need not fear.

For all the pains and aches of this life are really nothing more than just wedding jitters before the big day. For our life and our future is with Christ.

For we are already his beloved, as the church's engagement to her Lord has already begun. For just as God's people learned so long ago at the wedding in Cana, so shall we also learn that God has saved the best for last.

[7 : 39] The consummation of the marriage feast of the Lamb and his kingdom, at the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come on the last day.

For all throughout Holy Scripture, the coming of the promised Messiah is often described as a great wedding feast. And this is why the first sign, the first sign our Lord performed in John's Gospel was at the wedding in Cana, where the Messiah provided the people with new wine.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.