

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

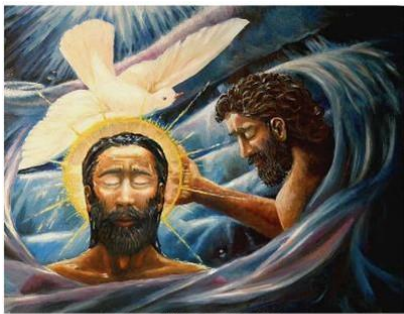
Intro

Last week, we were reminded that the word Epiphany comes from the Greek meaning “manifestation” or “showing forth.”

And that the whole Season of Epiphany revolves around themes of how Jesus is manifested or made known to the world.

Traditionally, Epiphany focuses on the three-fold manifestations at the beginning of Jesus' life and ministry:

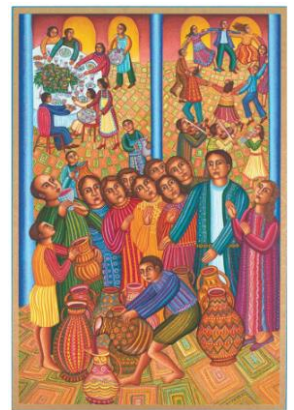
- The Adoration of the Magi – as Jesus is made known to the Gentiles



"Baptism of Christ" (2005), Dave Zelenka,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baptism_of_Christ.jpg

- His Baptism – where God's purpose is made known:
“This is my Son the Beloved, listen to him”

- And the Wedding at Cana – where Jesus is made known in his first miracle – *“and his Disciples believed in him.”*



As traditional as it is – especially in the Orthodox Church – we only get to hear this tryptic in lectionary Year C.

Two weeks ago, we celebrated the Adoration of the Magi, otherwise known as “The Feast of the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles;”

- and last week we heard the story of Jesus' Baptism.

And today we celebrate this third manifestation of Jesus – this making known – in his first miracle at a Wedding in Cana of Galilee.

I. Gospel

A. Jesus and his Disciples are invited to a wedding.

1. And while they are there – the wine runs out.

2. Now this is not good – in fact, it would be a terrible humiliation for the bride and groom.

3. For a Jewish feast, wine was essential.

- “Without wine,” the Rabbis said, “there is no joy.”

4. What are they going to do?

- It’s not like they can run off to Trader Joe’s and get more.

5. Jesus’ mother come to him and says, [whisper] “Jesus, they’ve run out of wine.”

6. To which Jesus replies, like any good son, “Ah Mom, what am I supposed to do about it – it’s not my time yet.”

7. But she tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

8. So, Jesus has the servants fill up six huge jars with water,

- (not those dinky things on the cover of the bulletin these are huge, holding 20 or 30 gallons – to put it into perspective, that’s about the size of your water heater.)

9. Then he has them take some out and take it to the person in charge of the feast – the “Arranger of the Drinking” – I love that title – sounds like Maurice Hill, doesn’t it.

- Anyway, when he tastes it, he is astonished.

10. He says to the Bridegroom, “Everybody serves the good wine first; and then when the guests have drunk a good deal, and their palates are dulled and they aren’t in much of a condition to appreciate what they are drinking, then they serve the “Two Buck Chuck” – but you, you have kept the best until now.”

11. And his Disciples believed in him.

B. What a great story! But we need to remember that this is John we're dealing with, and that means we always need to take a look below the surface to see if there is a deeper meaning.

1. Scholars think that John used a source consisting of mainly miracle stories when he was writing his Gospel – they call it “The Book of Signs”.

2. Its purpose was to use a series of stupendous miracles to convince potential converts that Jesus was the Messiah.

3. This story is the first of those “SIGNS” that also include the Feeding of the 5,000 – various healing stories – and the raising of Lazarus.

4. John's Gospel is also rich in symbolism – and this story is no exception.

5. One of these symbols is when Jesus tells his mother, “It's not my hour.”

6. Whenever Jesus refers to “his hour” in John – he's talking about his **glorification** at his death, Resurrection and Ascension.

- Remember in John's Gospel, Jesus is always in charge, all the way up to the end when on the cross he says, “It is finished.”

7. Jesus' “hour” was to be THE time of revelation and faith, and he didn't want to squander it on an unprepared wedding party.

8. But his mother wanted a miracle NOW!

- So Jesus gave in – and in so doing found some flexibility that would help him in other encounters along the way.

C. There is a lot of other symbolism in this story as well.

1. John says there were six stone jars for rites of purification - these were ritual washings to make one “clean”.

2. And scholars think the number six is also a symbol.

- In Jewish tradition **7** was the number of perfection and **6** is the number that is unfinished or imperfect.

3. So what John is saying is that through the cross, Jesus has replaced the imperfect with the perfect – he has replaced the old purification rites with his own pure offering made once for all on the cross.

4. The ultimate Epiphany, then, is Jesus – truly manifested in the saving work of the Cross.

5. Scholars find many symbols in the water turned to wine.

- “God’s Kingdom was to be a feast with endless wine and merriment.

- “Water has a baptism motif, while wine is Eucharistic...

- “Even the nature of the new wine (the revelation of Jesus) is superior to that of the old wine that ran out (the old revelation of the Law and Prophets).”

6. These are just some of the symbols here in this story.

II. Gifts to make Jesus known

A. There are some other people at this wedding we might want to look at – the Servants.

1. Jesus asks the servants to fill the jars and then draw out the water-now-wine and take it to the Person in Charge of the Feast to sample.

2. It’s interesting to note that the word used here for “Servant” is the same word from which we get the word **Deacon**.

3. Jesus always needs people to help in sharing God’s gracious gifts, and it was the Deacon’s job in the Early Church to feed the poor, tend the sick, and to instruct new converts in the way of the faith.

4. Now, what would have happened if the Servants had said, “No!”

5. What if they said, “Look, buddy, we’ve got a crisis on our hands here that we are trying to deal with the best we know how. We need wine –

NOT 120 gallons of water!! Now be a good guest and get out of the way – have an hors d’oeuvre or something.”

6. Without the Servants – there is NO miracle!

B. And the same is true for us.

1. Just as Jesus used the servants then – so too is he using US now.

2. WE are the servants of Jesus today – we are the ones he asks to do for him.

3. And just like those Servants, we need to do WHATEVER Jesus asks US to do – no matter how crazy it sounds.

4. As St. Paul says in our N.T. Lesson, Jesus gives us all the gifts we need to get the job done.

5. St. Paul reminds the Corinthians, and US, that the gifts we have are given, not for our own gratification, but for the benefit of the whole community.

6. Paul stresses that there are a VARIETY of gifts – and it is the work of the Spirit to give each an appropriate gift so that various needs can be met.

7. Paul also says that the Spirit gives a gift to EACH person – that means that each and every one of us here has been given a gift to use in the service of God.

8. In other words, as I said two weeks ago – we are EPIPHANIES in the way we make Jesus known in our lives – and the way we make Jesus known is through our gifts.

III. Making Jesus Known

A. Jesus mother told the Servants, “Do whatever he asks you.”

1. Jesus had them fill up 6 jars with water – and when they drew it out, it had become wine – not just any wine, but the best wine the Steward had ever tasted.

2. Jesus took WATER and turned it into WINE.

3. He took something plain and ordinary and made it something wonderful and extraordinary.

4. And he doesn't just do a glass or two – he makes over **120 gallons** – that's over 600 bottles of wine!

5. Here again is the symbolic abundance of God – NO - the **extravagance** of God.

6. And it's the same with our lives.

B. Jesus can transform OUR lives – just as he turned that water into wine.

1. Jesus takes something we think common and ordinary and makes them wonderful and extraordinary – full of life, and zest and flavor.

2. But as soon as Jesus turns the water into wine – we seem to want to change it back to water.

3. We turn the enlivening wine of the Gospel back into something plain and ordinary by fighting over what it means instead of finding out what it means by living it in our lives.

4. We take the exhilarating challenges and opportunities placed before us and turn them into hopeless impossibilities by our lack of faith and reliance on God.

5. We mean to do well – we want to do wonderful and amazing things for God – it's just that something always seems to get in the way.

6. We say, “I just can't get to it right now, God – I don't have time – I've got too much to do – I'll do it next time” – and then next time never comes.

C. God has given us all the gifts we need – we simply need to offer them back to God and allow God to use them.

1. Jesus can take the “dull water” of our lives and make exciting and effervescent wine – if we only let him.

2. We need to be like those servants and DO whatever he asks.

3. We need to offer our gifts to Jesus that he can take them and use them as he sees fit.

4. Who are you using your gifts for?

5. How are you an EPIPHANY for Jesus by the use of your gifts?

6. How are those gifts being lived out in your life – in your family – at work – and here at St. Columba’s?

7. How do you make a difference in people’s lives and how do you make a difference for God?

11. Which servants are we going to be?

- The ones who try to ignore Jesus, or send him away as we work out our problem on our own?

- Or are we going to be the people that Jesus uses to convey his precious gifts to the sick, the friendless, and the needy?

Conclusion

Put your gifts to work in the service of the One who gave them to you.

Let Jesus turn your life from dull life-less water to full-bodied wine.

Be the Servant who does whatever Jesus asks – no matter how crazy it sounds.

Offer your gifts to Jesus that he may transform you and empower you – so that the water of your life may become exciting wine in him.

Let us Pray

Almighty God, who gives to your servants a diversity of gifts, that we may share them with others: Grant us grace, we pray, to take on the ministry we

have received in the Body of Christ with simplicity, diligence, and cheerfulness; that none may think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, and none may seek another's calling, but rather be found in their own work; to the glory of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.