

Water into Wine?

For: Voice of the Church

By: Rev. Clarence J. VanderVelde

A first always draws attention. The very first miracle which Jesus Christ performed in his public ministry was when he turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana. In John 2:11 we read, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him” (ESV). This first miracle – or “sign,” as it says literally – pointed to the reason why Christ had come into the world.

Jesus and his disciples had been invited to a wedding banquet, as had the mother of Jesus. At some point, the wine ran out. The mother of Jesus told Christ matter-of-factly, “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3). Mary was doing more than making an observation; she wanted Christ to do something extraordinary to deal with the situation. It was like a nudge. Mary had great expectations about her son Jesus because great things had been told her about Jesus!

Before Jesus’ birth, the angel Gabriel had told Mary, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David...” (Lk 1:32). On the night of Christ’s birth, an angel had announced to shepherds nearby, “...I bring you good news of great joy...For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10,11). The shepherds went to Bethlehem and told Joseph and Mary what the angel had said. We read that “...Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). All the years Jesus lived with Joseph and Mary, Mary continued to ponder and Mary’s heart was filled with great expectations. Mary was looking for the time when Jesus would be great, as had been announced to her, and she was looking for the appearance of his kingdom.

Mary would have known that Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist at the Jordan River and anointed with the Holy Spirit. The voice of God the Father had even spoken from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:16,17). Mary must have thought that maybe now was the time for Christ to reveal his greatness by doing a miracle at this wedding! We get the impression that Mary came to Jesus at the wedding as his *mother* and approached Jesus as her *son* in an attempt to influence Jesus.

But Christ could not let family ties interfere with his public ministry. Jesus said to Mary, “...what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn 2:4). Mary had to learn to lose Jesus as her *son* and see Jesus as her *Lord*! Christ was sent by the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit to follow the Father’s timetable. And Mary had to learn to abide by God’s timetable. It’s something we must learn too. Sometimes we think: “Lord, wouldn’t this or that be good for your kingdom now?” But things don’t always happen when we would like.

But then Christ did perform a miracle -- turning water into wine – not at the moment Mary requested, but at the moment the Father determined. Christ gave orders to fill six stone vats standing there for the Jewish rites of purification, and the water became wine.

What was the meaning of this miracle? We are told in John 2:11 that in this way Christ “...manifested his glory.” This miracle was a sign that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God come in the

flesh, and anointed to be our Saviour! As John says at the beginning of his Gospel in John 1:14 as a thematic statement, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

How did this miracle reveal Christ’s glory? By the miracle itself, of course, because turning water into wine is out of this world! But especially by the fact that by this miracle Christ rescued the *joy* of the wedding banquet! Running out of wine would have put a damper on the celebration. Not that this was a drunken celebration, but wine adds to the festivities, just as it does at our celebrations. Wine is part of the joy of celebrating. Christ made wine out of water, and we are told that Christ did so superabundantly because the stone vats were filled to the brim (Jn 2:7) and the wine was even better than the first wine (Jn 2:10).

It is very significant that Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding. A wedding is about the most fundamental human relationship between two people and lies at the foundation of society because marriage produces children. The Fall into sin at the beginning of this world’s history ruined the marriage relationship between Adam and Eve, and from Adam and Eve sin spread to all their descendants. But Christ began his public ministry of miracles at the occasion of a wedding to bring joy to that occasion! That’s because Christ came to restore what is broken and to lay the foundation for fellowship among people. Where Adam brought grief through the Fall into sin, Christ came to bring joy. This miracle points to the fact that in Christ there is hope for marriage, mankind, and society. This is reason for joy!

It’s also important to see that in performing this miracle of turning water into wine Christ used six vats of water used for the Jewish purification rites. According to the Old Testament, if people touched a dead body they had to purify themselves with water (Num 19:11-13). Lepers had to wash their clothes and bathe themselves to be ceremonially clean (Lev 14:8). The rabbis in Christ’s day went even further than the Mosaic laws because the rabbis required that cups and plates be cleansed (Mt 23:25) and hands washed (Mt 15:2; Mk 7:1-5) to be ceremonially clean. That’s why those vats of water were present at the wedding.

Why had God commanded rites of purification in the Old Testament? Because uncleanness represented the reality of sin and death. We need to be cleansed from sin! But the gospel is that Christ came to cleanse us from sin! Christ came to conquer sin and death by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. By using water from the purification vats to make wine, Christ was indicating that he would cleanse us from sin and restore our joy! This is about the joy of salvation! That’s why we read in Hebrews 1:3, “After making *purification* for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high....”

The miracle and joy of salvation is that people may have fellowship with Christ the Saviour. It’s remarkable that the Bible speaks about this fellowship between Christ and his church with the language of marriage. Christ is the Bridegroom, the church is the bride. And, look, Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding banquet! That miracle set the tone for his entire ministry. Christ came to bring the joy of salvation, and the church – the bride of Christ – may have that joy because Christ has made purification for sins!

Did the disciples and the others who witnessed this miracle understand all this at that time? No, they did not. But this sign did have an effect on the disciples. We read in John 2:11, “And his disciples believed in him.” The disciples already believed in Jesus, but now their faith became deeper.

Christ manifested his glory throughout his ministry so that people would believe in him. The Gospel writer John explains that he wrote about Christ's miracles so that people would believe in Christ. John concludes his Gospel with these words in John 20:30,31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his Name." Do you believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour? Do you have the joy of salvation?
