

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of the Lord, and heard the story of Jesus being baptized as a grown man in the Jordan River by his cousin, John the Baptist. Between that event and today's Gospel story, Jesus has been travelling to Galilee. On his journey, he is beginning to assemble the group of 12 disciples who will be with him over the next 3 years and will take up his ministry following the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection.

This morning's Gospel story from John is important because it is the first of the public miracles that Jesus performs. It is interesting that Christians in the Eastern tradition celebrate this event as part of the celebration of Epiphany, right after Christmas. They do so because it is also one of the first acts of Christ's ministry and because, like the birth of Jesus, it is a miracle. But that tradition of tying this story to Epiphany is also significant because it reminds us that Jesus was born with the ability to perform miracles. He was the Son of God, and his nature meant that he had these powers from birth. We can only imagine what kind of added pressure that this would have put on Mary and Joseph who had been charged by God to raise Jesus as a human child and to see him safely into adulthood when he could then take on his ministry when the time was right. The danger that they faced as a family was very real. We know from the Gospel accounts in Luke that King Herod had a very definite interest in finding the baby that the three kings were seeking. Herod was concerned that this baby might eventually depose him as king, and so it was in Herod's best interests to lie to the Wisemen and say that he also wanted to worship this new baby and ask the Wisemen to return and disclose the location of this new baby king. And we also know from Luke that Joseph had a dream in Egypt that warned him to take Mary and Jesus out of Egypt for their safety.

I am sure that all of you have experienced the spontaneity of young children, including toddlers, at some point. They act out of joy, out of sadness, out of frustration, out of excitement and so forth. Keeping in mind that Jesus was fully human, we would have to assume that he showed that same spirit of spontaneity of all children. And this leaves us to

wonder how many times Mary and Joseph may have seen or experienced Jesus performing private miracles that they feared would become public miracles when he was very young. It would be quite terrifying to see your own child be able to do things that seemed to defy the possible; particularly if you were charged by God to keep this child safe. And safety, for Mary and Joseph, required that they be a very anonymous family. We only need to remember the story of Jesus becoming separated from his parents in Jerusalem when he was about 12 years old when the family had travelled to the Temple for the feast of Passover. Mary and Joseph searched frantically for Jesus for 3 days until they found him in the Temple, talking and listening to the teachers. We are told that the teachers were astonished that a young boy, the son of a carpenter who was supposed to be uneducated, could hold such a mature and insightful conversation. We can only imagine the mixed emotions that Mary and Joseph would have experienced at that moment.

And so, it is very important that we keep all of this background in mind when we consider the story of the miracle of the water being turned to wine. It is Mary that subtly asks Jesus to perform this miracle, and so we know that something has definitely changed. Mary is no longer fearful in the same way; she is now openly supportive of her son's new ministry and this story seems to introduce Jesus to his community in a new way.

The wedding happens on the 3rd day that Jesus and his newly forming group of disciples are in Nazareth. We know from history that weddings were very important events in Jewish tradition because they reminded the community of God's deliverance from slavery to becoming the blessed people of Israel. Weddings were a time of celebration, of sharing family bonds, and of dreams for the couple as they began their own family life. We do not know if Jesus and his mother are related to the bride or to the groom, but they are definitely invited guests.

When the wine runs out during the banquet, it is a potentially embarrassing situation for the hosts. When Mary says to Jesus, "They have no wine", Jesus at first appears to refuse to act. This is actually part of a larger pattern that we will see played out over and over in the Gospels. Someone asks Jesus to perform some act that would be considered a miracle, but he seems to always step back before taking action. The same is true in the

story of Lazarus when his sisters, Martha and Mary, ask Jesus to come immediately because Lazarus is on the point of death. Jesus waits for 2 days and the sisters seem upset with him because he delayed coming and Lazarus consequently died. But when Jesus steps back and waits, he is making it clear that he does not perform miracles to satisfy the requests of his family or of his friends. He wants to make clear that performing miracles is not a kind of magic trick that he can do on demand because the point of the miracles is to glorify God. If he simply gave in to every request that he fix things for family and friends, the focus would then be on Jesus as a kind of magician (and possibly someone who held demonic powers) and not on glorifying God.

It is interesting that Mary simply tells the servants to do whatever Jesus asks them to do. There is no great fuss. There is no public performance of Jesus standing over the jars of water and laying his hands over them. It just happens that the water is suddenly wine. We can only assume that the groom was quite surprised by this turn of events; particularly so because he is being complimented for his strategy of saving the best wine for later. We can imagine him saying something to the steward like, “Well, um, yes, of course” and then walking away with gratitude that he was not publicly embarrassed in front of his bride.

It seems that the real purpose of this miracle was to help the disciples overcome any misgivings or doubts that they may have had about Jesus and his true nature. Over the next 3 years of Christ’s ministry, the disciples will often need to see some tangible sign that Jesus is the Son of God. For them, their faith will need to be bolstered many times by these miracles. We only need to remember the story of “Doubting Thomas” when Thomas declared that he would not believe that the man who had been resurrected from the dead was the risen Christ until he could touch the wounds on his hands and side. There will be many times when the disciples and other followers will think of the miracles as proof to them for their own reassurance rather than the miracles being performed for the glory of God.

It can be very tempting for us to fall into the same trap as the disciples. God does still perform miracles in our day and age; perhaps in different and more subtle ways than He did at the time that Jesus lived among us. We can fall into thinking that miracles are a

kind of favour that God does for us; perhaps as proof that he loves us. But the central purpose of miracles remains the same – to glorify God. And so, when we encounter the miraculous, we should keep this perspective in mind. Perhaps you will even experience a miracle in some form or another this week or in the year ahead. And if you do, I hope that you will reflect on it in the same way that the writer of the Gospel of John encourages us to do so – as an opportunity to glorify God rather than to glorify ourselves and our own wants and needs. Amen.