

24th Jan 2021

Epiphany - 3 events that reveal who Jesus is - the wise men visiting, his Baptism, and turning the Water into Wine  
Also week of Christian unity

So for those of you who don't want to bother with the old testament, who say its irrelevant -

well, I'm not sure what you can get out of this story.

Jesus goes to a wedding and helps his mum out of a bind, and gets everyone drunk by doing a party trick.

More Paul Daniels than the son of God.

What you might manage to get is

A. - Jesus has miraculous power

B. - Jesus is not a party pooper

C. - Its a wedding - two things joining together - that is the old way of Judaism, now joined to the new way of Jesus.

I really don't see how you can make sense of it without a bigger picture.

Firstly -

**This in on the 3rd day.**

- Day God shows his presence down the mountain in Exodus 19:11-16

day of crossing the river Jordan into the promised land in Joshua 1:11, 3:2

Ezra 6:15 - temple completed

Hosea 6:2 - after 2 days I will revive you, on the third day you will live in my presence.

Over 50 references.

Hugely significant - day of fulfilment, finishing up, Jonah, Jesus resurrection

So I wonder what's being fulfilled today, or finished or accomplished?

Well, the Jewish faith has a system of how to keep right with God. How to stop God smiting you, and how to be friends with God.

And it had principles and rules, and over time it got rules on top of rules.

And many of them were to do with sin - what things might be sinful and how you might deal with it, so you're not sinful and can meet God.

Actually that's not fair - Judaism is more sophisticated than that - God promised a one sided covenant with them, he would always be their God - no matter what they did, so actually he knew that they would sin, and it wasn't a problem.

And these rules and laws - they were not what made people sinful. The rules were there to remind them about God, not to act as a kind of test if they were good enough.

But then that's the trouble with so many religions - they start off good, but over time, people make the rules more important than the relationship, and people start to use things for power and money - which really is sinful. And the truth about God or whatever, gets lost along the way.

And so.. these big stone jars at the wedding - they were there for all the holy washing that was needed - so that people could be cleansed and ready to be in God's presence.

And you're going to need a lot of water, because there's going to be a lot of washing. You'll never be clean, or good enough, for very long.

So at this wedding -what is it third day of, the final chapter of...

Of the old way of doing things - of the old temple system, of sacrifices and animals bought and a whole load of religious leaders restricting access to God to those who were pure, who were Jewish, who were male, who didn't have any blemishes.

The old system was all about being exclusive - the Temple courts - with restrictions about who could get close to God.

So Jesus takes this water - and says - you won't be needing this any more! You're not waiting outside anymore - the party has started!

80 Gallons of wine!! More than enough for any party. The wine steward is fuming - why have you saved the best till last? You fool, you've made me look like an idiot!

And meanwhile - this poor village has no more water for washing with. After this wedding, when someone came and thought - oh, I've slipped up again, I walked my cow too far on a sabbath - I better go and wash myself before I meet God - and they go to the stone jars - and BAM - its wine! I can't wash in that! And then the penny drops - oh, I don't need to wash in that anymore - Jesus has finished that.

And people might respond in different ways.

For some that would be sad - they liked all the washing and rules, they liked knowing where they were. And liked knowing where other people were - those samaritan scum!

And some would be like - nah, so what. One less thing to do, no washing. Don't care. Don't care much about all this religion anyway.

And only a few would be like - oh wow - so what does this mean? That God likes me as I am? That I can meet him anywhere, or talk to him anytime? Oh - is that a bit frightening, or am I ok with that.

And only a handful will go - oh Jesus - Thank you!! Amazing - You've set me free! Because of you I can be friends with God - thank you thank you thank you!

And usually the ones who are most thankful at the ending of the temple system, are the ones most excluded by it. The poor, the women, those with defects and blemishes, those who the authority call "sinful".

So what's going on here is that John is telling us who Jesus is and what he's here for. - Jesus is God - only God has the authority to do this - to tear down the walls that separate poor humanity from our loving God.

The temple was where people used to meet God, but now anyone can meet God - the prostitutes and beggars can brush up against God when they see Jesus.

The wedding at Cana is about a revolution. God is for everyone. All the time.

Here's a note of warning.

Yet.. what did I say at the beginning about religions starting off good, but then losing their way, and making rules and deciding who's in and who's out. And money and power and control taking over.

Well this party that Jesus started, I'm afraid the church has tried to ban it again and again.

When John Wesley started to try and get the down and outs and drunks into church and people said - oh no we don't want them in here - so Wesley went out to them and formed Methodism. There was no room for the new wine with the old wineskins.

When the Salvationists said let's praise him on the trumpet and timbrel and tell others about him. and the church said - thou shalt only play the organ and only worship in seriousness and solemnity inside the building - and the new wine burst the old skins. The old way threw stones at the army - yes, Christians did that!

And when the holy spirit started moving in the 1970's in churches and some said - this is not right, stop speaking in tongues and singing endless soft rock choruses about all your emotions - but others said - this is the spirit of Jesus - setting people free.

The temptation to become like the pharisees - to corner the market in who can know God, or to set rules about who can come to church or how we worship or what is right or wrong belief, or hoops for people to jump through before we accept them. And the antidote is to keep coming back to Jesus - he is the way of truth and freedom, his is the only way of accessing God - so we must keep coming back to Jesus to set us free again.

You see the wedding shows us that Jesus has miraculous power - but that wasn't just for back then, 2000 years ago. Jesus came back from the dead, power undiminished, and sent his Holy Spirit to be with us on earth - so we have access to that power right here and now.

And Jesus **is** for a party - but it's far more than wine - it's the celebration of realising that because of him we can be friends with God. We can have a real living relationship with the God of the whole universe. Jesus doesn't say - oh wait till you die, I'll show you heaven, he says - right here and now - in the midst of this pandemic, you can enjoy eternal life, you can experience the peace and joy and love of knowing God.

And that is a promise for you, me, and everyone - it's the 3rd day, there's a wedding, there's a feast.