

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Epiphany III
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rmcneely+

Have you ever considered the importance and sheer number of signs in our lives?

There are signs that mark the beginning of the seasons.
The trees that explode into their colors heralding fall
The flocks of birds that fly in those great V formations
That tell us of winter and summer.
The signs of the weather, the rain, the cold the heat and fog.
All of them crying out the rhythm of our lives.

There are commercial signs
Seeking our trade
Traffic signs intended to keep us safe from ourselves and other drivers.
Navigational signs helping to keep us on our journey.
Street names and destination signs on our freeways
Literally arrows that point our way.

We encounter literally hundreds of them every day.

And then there is another type of sign.
The one St. John would have us consider this morning.

The account of the wedding feast and Jesus changing water into wine

We have only from St John.
Some of our Christian cousins view this event as the Epiphany
Rather than the arrival of the Magi as we do.
It was clearly important to St John that we know about it.

At the end of the story, John tells us:

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee
and manifested forth His glory”.

Now, the King James translators used the word “miracles”.

Not inaccurate.

John wrote in Greek of course

And the word he used is perhaps more appropriately
“signs” rather than “miracles”.

And if we accept that translation

The story takes on a more direct and
More important meaning for us.

If this is a “sign”, to what or where is it pointing us?

Whenever we read John, there are a few things we must keep in
mind:

The other three Gospels had already been written

So John did not write to tell us what happened.

That was already done.

John was an eyewitness to most of the events in his Gospel.

So if John was not writing to tell the story

What was his purpose?

I think you will find it in the meaning of the story.

But you must always dig deeper into John’s words for
meaning.

So let’s do that with today’s Gospel.

John begins with the words: “And the third day”.

He does not tell us the third day after what.

His account does not follow a narrative of the time before the third
day.

So the reference does not place the story in any chronology

And the Third Day does not seem to be a reference to time.

So what is it? The Third Day?

We, who know the rest of the story, immediately think of the Resurrection, on the third day.

But how would that reference begin the story?
Consider the broader text of Holy Scripture.

There are times in the Bible when mankind meets God.

We call those times a theophany.

If we examine them

Many occurred on the Third Day

For example Moses encountered God on Mt Sinai

On the Third Day.

So was John at the very outset of his account pointing us to

A theophany: to a time when God met man?

Did John, in four short words

Give us notice that his account that followed,
of water into wine

Was a theophany: a time when God met man?

Has there been a theophany in your lives?

Was it a sign for you too?

There is another aspect linked to timing in the story: Jesus tells Mary “My time is not yet come”

It’s a comment he will make several times over the next three years.

In an immediate sense,

Jesus does not act and decide

According to his own likes.

But always in harmony

with the Father’s will and plan.

More particularly, His “hour”
 is his “glorification”,
 which brings together the Cross and His Resurrection
 His presence
 and Sacrament
 throughout the world.

The “hour” of Jesus’ glory begins at the moment of the Cross. And
 its precise historical setting is at Passover.

At the very time when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed
 upon the Jewish altar,
 Jesus’ blood is pouring out on the cross,
 As the Lamb of God,
 sacrifices Himself for mankind.

How about the wine?

We cannot consider the wine
 without thinking about His blood.
 About the Last Supper and
 The consecration of Communion that we are about to behold
 at the altar, when wine is consecrated,
 And becomes the Blood of Christ.
 Is John foretelling the sacrifice of Jesus for our redemption?

The quantity of new wine is baffling at first.
 It may be some time since you had a firkin of anything in your
 hands.

So let me refresh you.
 A firkin is a volume measure used by the Jews
 in the manner that we use a gallon.

As used by the ancient Jews a firkin was about 7 to 9 gallons.
 There were 6 water pots each containing 2 or 3 firkins each.
 When you do the math
 That comes out to between 84 and 126 gallons of fine wine.
 Enough for the small village of Cana to last for months.

So why the large quantity?

John tells us that these water pots were particular ones.
Water pots used in Jewish ritual ceremonies of purification.

It was the water in the pots that Jesus used to convert to wine.
So the Jewish water was made wine.
Is John giving us a sign that Christianity would replace Judaism?
In abundance?

The water is thought to represent
Judaism itself,
the old covenant.
It had run its course and remained but as an empty husk,
the heart and life of it were gone.
The wine of the wedding feast
like the wine of Judaism
had run out,
had run its course.
Judaism still existed as a religion,
but it had degenerated into a cold, rote and
mechanical routine,
exemplified here by the purification ritual
Judaism was utterly destitute of joy in God.
Israel had lost the joy of its espousal.

Israel could no longer bring itself from the pit of its despair.
It needed a saviour
And without a saviour how could there be any joy?
It remained only that Judaism be set aside and the bringing of a
new hope.
Mankind needed a Saviour
and only Jesus could be the One,
the One who could restore the wine,
to restore the joy of salvation

to the wedding party
and to all of mankind.
This first sign points us toward the new covenant with God,
toward the new religion,
toward the crucifixion
as Jesus makes the water into the wine.
Changes the old into the new.

So just like the many signs we see every day in our lives,
The change of water into wine is a sign
that will help direct our lives in safety.

It will help us navigate our way
and lead us to our destination
help us find the necessities of our lives.

It will help prepare us for what is coming

It will warn us of what may be if we are not prepared

Let us pay attention to the signs of our lives.
And to the Biblical signs along that narrow pathway to God.

The consequence is nothing less
Than everlasting life.

