



Third Sunday of Epiphany – January 24th, 2021

FROM THE GOSPEL (John 2:10)
'You have kept the good wine until now.'

REFLECTION

Here on Lanzarote, one of the things that have really been affected by this pandemic is the postponement and in many cases sadly the cancellation of wedding blessings. So many disappointed with their plans absolutely shattered.

Throughout the world, a wedding is a time of celebration, shared food and drink, community rejoicing and family bonding. In many traditions the couple's community and family are more than mere bystanders, but they are also active participants in the ceremony, there to witness to and bless the new state that the couple are entering into. Indeed, in some marriage services, after the couple have given their consent, the congregation are asked a question as part of the service: *"Will you, the families and friends support and uphold them in their marriage now and in the years to come?"* And the response, we hope, is *"We will."*

Without that support, the blessing of friends and family, a marriage has a much more difficult path. Families and friends can't make a marriage work, but they can certainly destroy it. So getting their consent to "support and uphold" the couple in their marriage is absolutely vital. The blessing of such an occasion is therefore not just for the couple, but also for all who are present – and that blessing comes through sharing hopes, prayers, songs, food, drink and laughter.





Sharing those things helps overcome any animosity or bad feeling.

We are in the Church's season of Epiphany, and the story we hear from John's Gospel is one of the "showings" of who Jesus really is. As the final verse explains: *"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."*

John's Gospel doesn't recount the wise men's visit to the stable. Instead, we have this story of the first "showing". John has taken the marriage theme and made it a sign of God's reasserted promises to humankind. Just two chapters later, Jesus will tell the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (the traditional place for couples to meet) and how an outcast woman is witness to the blessing of the water of eternal life. The theme – of the marriage between God and the world – is also here in our Gospel today. We can't see the bride in the story. She is not mentioned, perhaps because we are that bride, come to meet our bridegroom Jesus. There is the merest hint of this, although maybe it is enough to connect it with that wedding in Revelation, where the Lamb of God and those who worship come together.

The banquet in God's kingdom for all people, for the whole of creation, is that place where enmity is over and sharing begins – where people who arrive as strangers and depart as friends, where blessing is found in the simplest of things – good food shared with love and good drink shared with delight.



The Revd Canon Stan Evans

Camino de las Cuestas 5c | 35572 Tias

Email: chaplain@lanzarotechurch.com | T: +34 928 514241



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To picture God's banquet as a wedding feast invites us all to begin with a smile, a relaxation of the tension that we so often carry around with us, and which leads to dis-ease and disharmony between us and our fellow human beings.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus appears to be uncertain whether the time is right to show what God's kingdom looks like. So his mother intervenes and the blessing of wonderful wine for everyone is given. As this story shows, God is not mean with blessing. The guests will have drunk a lot already and here is a further abundance – enough to last for days! When we meet in worship, do we do so in that same spirit of joyful celebration, or is it a grudging display of piety? Is our sharing of God's abundance too limited in our lives in our communities? Do we dare to make room for more people, and share with them in a spirit of delight and joy? Are we bold enough to let God's blessing alight on whom it will, rather than keep it for ourselves? This is the challenge of our Gospel today. When we do, even in the darkest of times, as we are witnessing here in St Laurence's at this moment, we can truly see the spirit of joyful celebration in the abundance of God's grace and blessing with those who are sharing with us. Remember, friends, Christ comes to us in our extremity. In despair, in death... and here - when the wine has given out, and before there was any embarrassment, he came to the aid of these people.

Christ does things in abundance. A small supply would have been enough, but Christ gave one hundred and thirty gallons of the very best wine. How much we can learn from this gospel for our own life.

AMEN.

