

Morning Worship for Epiphany 3

Preparation

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

**Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving,
joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips
and all the day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for us to purify
a people as his own.

Let us confess our sins.

**Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse you from your sins,
and restore you in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

The Benedictus (The Song of Zechariah)

**Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.**

**He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.**

**Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.**

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:

**to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.**

**And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,**

**To give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of all their sins.**

**In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in
the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen. (Luke 1.68–79)**

The word of God

A reading from the book of Revelation.

I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'

This is the word of the Lord; **thanks be to God** (Revelation 19:6–10)

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This is the Gospel of the Lord; **Praise to you O Christ** (John 2:1–11)

A reflection by Rev'd Joy Cousans

Last week we heard about Jesus' encounter with Nathanael. Nathanael recognises Jesus as someone special and declares: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Immediately after calling his first disciples, and his meeting with Nathanael, Jesus visits Cana for a wedding

feast. Cana was Nathaniel's native village. As Jean Varnier observes, another religious leader might have led new followers into the desert for a spiritual experience, or to a school to deepen their knowledge of scripture. Jesus, however, takes them to a week of feasting in an obscure Galilean village. There he reveals himself, and the nature of his mission. The miracle at Cana is the first in a series of 'signs' in John's gospel. They point to Jesus' passion and the nature of Jesus as Son of God.

This first miracle of Jesus has caused commentators a number of headaches. Jesus performs an astounding miracle but he does not heal anyone of a dreadful illness or rescue those who are threatened by a storm. Rather, he provides a vast quantity of wine for a wedding feast and spares the blushes of a young couple. A wedding feast in first century Palestine would have been a lavish affair which involved the whole community. The feasting at Cana would have lasted about a week. Such celebrations were times of great revelry: the Aramaic word for 'wedding feast' has the same roots as the word for 'drink'. Many residents of Galilee were involved in the production of wine, but most could only afford to drink it on special occasions. A wedding is always an expensive commitment. In Cana, the bridegroom and his family would have saved for a long time to put on such a feast. Running out of wine at your wedding was one of the most powerful ways in which poverty became a cause of shame.

Cana was a small village near Capernaum. The whole village would have been invited to the wedding feast including Jesus the local celebrity along with his mother and the disciples. The couple and their family would have wanted the occasion to be perfect. What a disaster to run out of wine! It looked as if the wedding would be remembered not for the famous guests nor for the wonderful party, but for the negligence of the host who had seriously under catered.

Mary, presumably aware of these dynamics, implores her son to act before the wine runs out. Jesus is brusque- even rude- to his mother. 'Woman what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.' (John 2:4) Angus Ritchie remarks: 'This signifies a move from the obedience that Jesus showed his family while he lived in Nazareth to a public ministry based entirely on obedience to his heavenly Father.' His mother is not fazed by Jesus' remark and asks the servants to do whatever he tells them.

Jesus uses the water held in stone jars meant for the Jewish purification rituals. Each jar would have held about 100 litres of water- that's over 200 pints. So with 6 jars that meant 600 litres or more than 1200 pints of wine. Some commentators have problems with this amount of wine. Tasker

suggests it was just the water drawn off by the servants which became wine; the rest stayed as water. Others interpret the story purely symbolically. But if we take the story at face value, we see that Jesus doesn't just create the wine out of nothing. He transforms the ordinary into something extraordinary.

This particular miracle, John tells us, was performed in the run up to the Passover festival. 'The Passover of the Jews was near and Jesus went up to Jerusalem [for the festival]' (John 2:13) The water at Cana is in jars for ritual purification. Their transformation points us to the new wine of the Kingdom: the blood which will be poured out when Jesus' hour finally comes. The final Passover which Jesus shared with his disciples was the Last Supper, during which the cup of wine was shared. 'Then he took a cup and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.' (Matthew 26:27-28) While its immediate effect is to rescue his host from shame, the miracle at Cana heralds a far greater work of transformation.

The miracle of the wedding at Cana outlines the unimaginable generosity of Jesus. It is a generosity demonstrated throughout his earthly ministry and beyond in the gifts which Jesus gives to his followers. Besides being the third Sunday of Epiphany, today also falls in the Week of prayer for Christian Unity. It is during this week that we celebrate the things which unite us as Christians and pray for one another in our worship and our witness. The generosity which Jesus showed at the wedding feast is a challenge to us to show generosity to others. As Pope John XXIII said, 'Whenever I see a wall between Christians, I try to pull out a brick.'

The servants at the wedding feast may have been mystified by Jesus' instructions but they did what he asked them to do. They filled the stone jars with water, which would have required a lot of effort on their part. They drew some liquid off and took it to the man in charge of the feast to taste. And the wine was wonderful!

Let us pray that God will renew and refresh us, despite the many challenges which we face. I will end with a prayer by Bishop Theodore Woods.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend ourselves and all who are dear to us. Be with us in our going out and in our coming in; strengthen us for the work you have prepared for us to do; and grant that we may be so filled

with your Holy Spirit that we may joyfully achieve all you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who made all things?
We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world?
We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in his Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God?
We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the church.

This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers led by Dave Cousans

Almighty Father in the midst of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity; help us to listen to your voice still calling us to unity in our diversity. We pray for church leaders everywhere that they may work together and promote unity among Christians.

God our Father, you reveal to us your love through Christ and through our brothers and sisters. Open our hearts so that we can welcome each other with our differences and live in forgiveness. Grant us to live united in one body, so that the gift that is each person comes to light. May all of us together be a reflection of the living Christ.

Help us we pray to establish friendly relationships among Jews, Christians and Muslims, and tear down the walls of indifference and hatred making our unity visible and bringing healing to the world.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Faithful God, you called Abram to be the Father of many nations, and so we pray for the nations of our world. We pray for all who work for justice and solidarity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war and violence, injustice and inequality, disease and prejudice, poverty and hopelessness and bring healing to the world. We continue to pray for peace in your world, and especially for those involved in the process of reconciliation and bridge-building between

peoples, cultures and nations. Help us wherever and whenever we can in our everyday lives to be instruments of your peace.

We especially think and pray this week for President Biden as he becomes the 46th President of the United States. We pray that he would be guided by your Spirit to lead with integrity and wisdom not only within the US but throughout the world.

Lord in Your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Generous God, as we remember the presence of your son Jesus Christ at the Wedding at Cana we pray for all who are preparing for marriage and those who are beginning their married life together and at this time for those who have had to put their marriage plans on hold because of the pandemic. May they experience the love of God and the support of family and friends. We also pray for those who are experiencing marital problems that they may find a way forward through their present difficulties.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Father we ask for your reassurance and comfort wherever people are hurting or crying, for those who are ill, for the lonely the disillusioned and the disheartened, for the refugee and the homeless, for the hungry and the poor.

Father wherever people are suffering whether physically or emotionally pour out your welcoming love, may they know your comfort and your strength and give them the peace they seek.

Today we think and pray especially for those across the globe whose lives and health is being affected and upturned by the Coronavirus, may we your people using all our energy, skills and imagination and trusting in your steadfast love be united with one another and work together in conquering this disease and the fear surrounding it.

We give thanks for all key workers at this current time and especially pray for their work with the most vulnerable in care homes and hospital settings. Give them your strength and will to persevere.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Father we ask for your firm holding wherever our journey leads and at the time of death your mercy. We pray for those who have departed this earthly life and ask you, through your loving kindness, to have mercy on their souls. Be with the bereaved in their loneliness and give them the faith to look beyond their present troubles to your Son Jesus Christ who died and rose again and who lives forevermore.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world a light which no darkness can quench, we remember before God all those from our Book of Remembrance for this week who have gone before us and light a candle in their memory to symbolise the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings hope.

You turn our darkness into light in your light shall we see light
Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord, bless our journey through this coming week.
May the pace be steady, paths made safe, no obstacles impede,
and conversations with fellow travellers be fruitful and uplifting

Merciful Father, **Accept these Prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Conclusion

Collect for the day

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

From the rising of the sun to its setting
your name is proclaimed in all the world.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

When the time had fully come
you sent the Sun of Righteousness.

In him the fullness of your glory dwells.

To you be glory and praise for ever.

*We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of
fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person,
nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our
Lord.*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.**

*If you would like us to pray for you during this time of stress and anxiety,
please leave a prayer request on the website email address or contact Joy
(vicar@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)*

Reverend Joy Cousins
Reverend Stephen Burge

