



January 14, 2007

Signs

Last week we celebrated Epiphany the day the wise men came to see the Christ child. We learned that Epiphany means to make known or to manifest and we saw that the arrival of the wise men was and is symbolic of the gospel coming to the gentile people. But Epiphany is one more thing; it is the beginning of the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is that season between Christmas and Lent and it is devoted to Jesus being made known as the Christ or the Messiah Jesus being made manifest.

To be honest, in today's day and age that may be the most important message that can't be taught. As we all know today's cultures demand diversity, tolerance and rights in all aspects of life yet the simple titles "The Christ" or "The Messiah" are singular in nature in Christ's claim in John 14:6 where he says, "I am the and the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me", fails those three demands on all three counts. This also came out in the most recent elections in November. I heard Nancy Palosi the new speaker of the house state, "Americans are tired of people who claim to know the exclusive truth", to be honest I'm afraid there are quite a number of Americans who are very much like the people of Christ's time.

People who Jesus chastised in Luke 12:56 when he says, "Hypocrites you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky how is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?" You see, Jesus was saying that the people could look at the sky if they saw clouds on the horizon to the west they knew a storm was coming in off of the Mediterranean it was going to rain. If they felt a breeze starting from the south they knew that wind si coming off the desert its going to be hot. But they couldn't look at Jesus and interpret he's the Messiah and that is exactly what Epiphany is about. For six weeks we will be looking at the signs that show Jesus is the

promised Messiah. Today we look at His first miracle in the coming five weeks we will hear Jesus claim to be the Messiah then we will see the reaction of the enemies to those claims. We will see Jesus showing power over creation, we will His powerful preaching and then on the fifth Sunday we will bring Epiphany to a close on the Mount of Transfiguration. It's going to be an exciting journey and that journey is going to begin right now. Today we begin with miracles.

What exactly are they? I can tell you one thing for sure they are an interesting subject to most people especially Americans. According to a Newsweek poll 84% of Americans believe in divine miracles. 79% of Americans believe in the reality of the miracles of the Bible. 48% of Americans claim to have personally experienced miracles. 63% of Americans know people who have personally experienced miracles. 67% of Americans have prayed for a miracle. And 77% of Americans believe God can cure people who doctors have given no chance of survival. Those are some pretty positive percentages I bet our President right now would like to have those kinds of percentages believing in him. But what really are miracles? It goes beyond an interesting subject.

The definition I like the most goes like this. *A miracle is when God intervenes and overrides the laws of nature or science that He created.* Such is the case with the miracle we heard in our Gospel this morning. The account begins with four very interesting words, "on the third day". Those of you who have been through my Revelations class may have caught it "third day". Three is the number of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God inspired or directed events often happen in threes. Think of the most important teaching in Christianity Christ rose from the dead on the third day. The fact this occurs on the third day is a simple indication that this is God directed.

See, weddings at the time of Jesus lasted about seven days, the fact that the wine ran out on the third day not the fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh which might be expected is a little clue for us to pay attention. As the story unfolds we do see that the wine runs out now this is terribly embarrassing. A wedding was a communal affair the whole town was invited to join for the family to run out of wine meant one of three things basically. Number one, the family couldn't afford more, which is very embarrassing to have the whole town know that you can't afford more. Number two, it means the family didn't plan well maybe this was their first wedding but regardless to miss by four

days how much was going to be needed that's not very smart that's just down right embarrassing. And third, if you're out of wine people are going to know that either you didn't have enough money or you didn't plan well their going to start to leave, the festival is over. Not only is this embarrassing to have people leave early but its going to cause a little bit of strife because there's going to be a groom and a bride and they're going to be looking at the parents and saying, "why didn't you plan right?" or "why didn't you save more?" and so it is that Jesus' mother who probably knows this family probably a relative says, "Jesus, they have to more wine". It's a simple statement and probably is intended for a simple answer.

I once worked at a restaurant also a catering business. We were doing a dinner party and we were running out of meat. The manager, who was new this was his first dinner party, the first one that he had set up looked at me with a little bit of fear and anxiety in his eyes and said, "Matt we don't have enough meat". To which I asked him, "do you want me to run back to the restaurant and get a nothing slab or two and bring them back?" He looked at me speechless for a while and shook his head and said, " Yeah that's a good idea". And he suddenly looked very relieved.

Jesus' response to Mary's observation is also very simple he said, "dear woman", now please understand this not a rebuke, dear shows affection, He loves His mom. "My time has not yet come". You see Jesus doesn't say no, I'm not going to do it he just says now's not the time which would indicate that there is a proper time coming. Mary picks up on this and she says to the servants who are there, "do whatever he says", evidently she thinks Jesus has a plan. A while later Jesus sees six stone jars. Yes those of you from Revelations class are going to go, "oh six is the number of man", maybe this does symbolize mans efforts or limitations but Jesus tells the servants to fill them with water. They do, it's an odd request but they do it. Then he tells them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet". Master of the banquet was a guest, a guest who served as the master of ceremonies kind of like a best man does nowadays. This request is very odd; you see Water in Cana isn't all that good and why in the world would they take it to the master of the banquet. Here, have a drink of some lousy water, but they do. And when they take it to him and he drinks it he's amazed, in fact, he calls the bridegroom aside and he says, "everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too

much to drink you've saved the best until now." Lousy water becomes the very best. This is scientifically impossible; you can't take water, lousy water or good water, and make it wine because the laws of science says matter can neither be created nor destroyed. All you have in water is hydrogen and oxygen and maybe a few little impurities from the well. Wine, you've got all sorts of things in there. You have carbon; you have to have sugar but you cant make hydrogen and oxygen into carbon. This is impossible. But as I said a miracle is when God intervenes and overrides the laws of nature that He Made.

And then the very next verse of John brings us right back to the beginning of the sermon. The people couldn't interpret the signs that Jesus was the Messiah. John says, "This is the first of His miraculous signs". That phrase "miraculous signs" is very important. In the Old Testament this is what was used to describe the miracles of God they were called miraculous signs and wonders. John is saying this is the Messiah this is God working. He doesn't stop there he continues and says, "He's thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him". Which also takes us back to the beginning of this chapter on the third day.

In this story today, on the third day Jesus gave them the best an abundance of it. 120-180 gallons, that's going to last you at least the next four days without a problem. He gave them more than they needed. On the third day Jesus also rose he gave us the best, salvation, unlimited forgiveness. Can you interpret the signs? If you can, are you like His disciples are you going to put your faith in Him? It is my hope and prayer that during this Epiphany season Christ becomes manifest in our lives.

In our Savior's name, Amen