

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 19 January 2025

Epiphany 2

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Call to Worship

Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You,
Lord, preserve both people and animals.
How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:5-9

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Loving God,
we join with all of creation to worship and adore you.
We love you because you first loved us,
and we see your love so beautifully,
so powerfully, and so gloriously in Jesus Christ.
Forgive us, Lord, when we have lost sight of your love,
and have not loved as you love.
Open our eyes afresh to your love today,
and fill us anew with your Spirit,
that we may be transformed and live for you alone. Amen

We join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father..

Reading

St John 2:1-11

All-age Activity

The story of Jesus turning water into wine is a great one to retell. If you want to ‘magically’ turn water into wine, put some red food colouring in the bottom of a glass and watch the water turn red as you pour in the water. For some more ideas on telling the story in an interactive, all-age way, see this video from ‘Faith Fillers’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7stid7FyYQ>.

You could also do an introduction to the 7 signs of John’s Gospel here. You could print a picture of Jesus on one side of some A3 paper, and then print or draw images to represent the 7 signs on the other (e.g. a picture of an empty bottle of wine; 5 loaves and 2 fish; a blind man; etc.). Cut the picture up into a jigsaw, with each of the 7 signs on one jigsaw piece, and then organise a treasure hunt around the church for the children to find all 7 pieces. Get the children to put the pieces together as you talk about how John’s Gospel’s signs are like jigsaw pieces helping reveal who Jesus is.

Sermon Notes

Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana is the first of his 7 signs in John’s Gospel. You might like to set the scene by talking about how the signs are clues, signposts or jigsaw pieces, helping us to grasp the truth (or picture) of who Jesus is and what Jesus has come to do.

When Jesus called Philip and Nathanael to follow him in John 1:51, Jesus reveals a startling truth: *“I am telling you the truth: you will see heaven open and God’s angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man”* In other words, those who follow Jesus will see heaven and earth meet. They will see Jesus doing amazing things, heavenly things, God-like things. The signs or clues are the moments when that happens. They are *significant*, significant displays of power that point beyond themselves to deeper realities. They are moments when heaven is opened, when the transforming power of God’s love and Kingdom burst into the present world.

There are countless sermons that could be preached on this passage! In my sermon, I draw out three elements of the story that helped retell the bigger story of what Jesus had come to do:

1. The master of the banquet (v.9)

Weddings were big affairs in Jesus’ day, often lasting for a week or more. Running out of wine would have brought shame on the couple, their family, and especially on the Master of the Banquet, who had the job of making sure that everyone had a great time. The good news is: Jesus steps in to rescue them from that shame.

You might like to consider or explore:

- Why did Jesus choose this for his first miracle?
- How does it point us to God’s greater plans and purpose?
- In what other ways does Jesus transform shame into joy?

- Could Jesus be looking ahead to his own wedding (Isa. 25:6-8; Rev. 21)?

2. The water (v.6)

Jesus is going to bring transformation and joy. But how will he do it? Using these great jars of water that the Jews used for ceremonial washing – and that’s significant. The Jewish washing rituals vividly got across the idea that God is holy and perfect, but we are flawed and broken – and so we need to be washed clean if we are to connect with God. We can’t just walk into God’s presence. We need forgiveness, we need a fresh start.

You might like to explore the topics of sin and shame, both of which can be uncomfortable for us to hear. I use illustrations about Adolf Eichmann and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to connect and challenge us with the reality of evil in our own hearts... but then brought it back round to the good news of Jesus.

3. Jesus’s conversation with Mary: “My hour has not yet come” (v.4)

When Jesus refers to his ‘hour’ in John’s Gospel, he’s talking about his death on the cross. So what does that mean in the context of a wedding? Why does Jesus connect a request for wine with the hour of his death?

The author Timothy Keller suggests that Jesus is looking beyond his mother, beyond the bride and groom, and past the whole wedding scene. He’s seeing the great wedding feast of heaven, but He’s also thinking about what needs to happen first – his death on the cross. This opens the way to discuss what Jesus’ death means for us, and the forgiveness, freedom from shame, cleansing, and new kingdom life we can experience as a consequence.

Prayers of Intercession

Master of the banquet,
 We thank you that you came to overcome our sin and shame,
 and to lead us into eternal joy.
 We pray today for ourselves, and for your Church across the world.
 May we, as your people,
 be filled with your kingdom joy,
 and may it overflow from us to those around us.
 Inspire and equip us to share your good news –
 in word and in action - with those we meet this week.

In a moment of silence,
 we now lift up to you others we know
 who need your joy in the midst of suffering, sickness and despair.
 (Silence)

We pray too for situations around our world
where your healing and hope are so desperately needed.
Bring your transformation we pray, Lord Jesus,

- to the injustice of our world
- to our politics and to those in positions of power
- to those facing violence, modern day slavery, oppression and persecution

May we, as your transformed people, be your agents of change:
blessed to be a blessing, for the sake of your kingdom and glory. Amen

Offertory

Maybe Jesus didn't set off for the wedding at Cana intending to save the day by the gift of turning water into wine. Maybe he thought he was just there to celebrate but, in response to His mother's prompt, he saved the day and the embarrassment of the host! Often we give in unexpected ways in unexpected places – the surprise in finding our shoulder is a good place to cry on, the listening ear for pain we'd not anticipated, the gift to a charity that catches our eye. God, of course, planned the miracle at Cana and, of course, encourages us to both plan our giving and to be ready for the unexpected. Now, at this point in worship, we bring our gifts, the planned and the surprising, and give thanks for them and for all that they represent. We thank God for the giving direct to the bank and in the plate, for the gifts of time and talent and love and laughter. Let's pray.

O God, may Your grace come close to those whose grace is spent.
Let our gifts give love when hearts are tired or sore and hope is bruised or bent. Through these gifts may Your will be done, and all know that Your grace is here to stay embracing those who walk Your way. Amen.

Blessing

May Jesus fill your life with His transforming presence,
bringing you grace and mercy, love and joy,
each and every day.
And may the blessing of God,
the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with each and every one of us,
today and always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
God is love: let heaven adore him	95	122	103	187
Praise to the Holiest in the height	103	378	334	563
Praise, my soul, the King of heaven	104	160	83	560
How deep the Father's love for us		549		988
Amazing grace	92	555	440	31
The love of God comes close	107		654	940
Joy to the world	135	320	330	393
The kingdom of God is justice and joy	200		255	651
My Jesus, my Saviour		531	363	1003
Be Thou my vision	489	465	545	51
Love divine, all loves excelling	663	519	503	449
Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine		561	548	59
In Christ alone			351	1072

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*