

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS WITH A PARTY

On the third day there was a marriage in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, 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 steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:1-11, RSV).

About age 30 Jesus began His public ministry, but not at the religious headquarters in Jerusalem. He started at a wedding reception in a small village in Galilee. Jesus showed from the start that He wanted people to be happy. In Cana, a village close to Nazareth, some relatives of Joseph and

Mary invited them to the party. Jesus, who had been away from home for some weeks, joined them and brought His recently called disciples with Him.¹⁷

A quiet anticipation and excitement filled the air as small groups of guests discussed Jesus. Mary was proud of her Son. While they had been separated, she had heard reports of His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, and it brought back to her mind many memories. From the day she heard the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth in her home at Nazareth, she had treasured each evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. His continuously unselfish life convinced her that He could be no one else. Yet she also experienced doubts and disappointments and longed for the time when He would finally show His divinity. By now, death had separated Mary from Joseph, who had shared her knowledge of the mystery of the birth of Jesus. So she had no one in whom to confide. The past weeks had been especially difficult.¹⁸

At the marriage feast she saw the same tender Son she had raised. Yet she could tell He had changed. She saw the evidences of the cruel temptations in the wilderness and a new sense of dignity and power as He walked and talked. A group of men accompanied Him. Their eyes followed Him constantly, reverently, and they called Him "Master." These men told Mary what they had seen and heard at His baptism and elsewhere. They concluded with what Philip told Nathaniel: "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45, NIV).¹⁹

As Mary saw the many glances of the guests in Jesus' direction, she longed to have Him prove His Messiahship. She hoped and prayed He might perform a miracle. At that time marriage festivities continued for several days, and at this wedding the wine ran out before the party ended. As a relative of the bride and groom, Mary was among the caterers, so she

commented pointedly to Jesus, "They have no wine." It was an undisguised suggestion for Him to do something dramatic.²⁰

Jesus' answer, "My hour is not yet come," indicated that no earthly ties would dictate His conduct. Though Mary did not fully understand her Son's mission, she trusted Him implicitly. And Jesus responded to that faith. He also acted to strengthen the faith of His disciples by performing His first miracle.²¹

Beside the doorway stood six large stone water jars. Jesus directed the servants to fill them with water. And because the guests needed to be served immediately, He told them to take some of the contents to the person in charge of the gathering. When they did, instead of the water with which they had filled the jars, they poured wine! Hardly anyone knew the original wine supply had run out, but when the wedding coordinator tasted what his servants brought, he knew it to be far superior to any he had drunk thus far at the wedding. Turning to the bridegroom, he said, "Everyone man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10).²²

The "wine" of the partying that you and I do ultimately turns sour. But the gifts of Jesus are always fresh. What He provides for us always satisfies and brings us happiness. Each new gift we receive increases our capacity to receive more and enjoy more from Him. He gives grace and still more grace and, unlike the wine at Cana, His supply of blessings never runs short and is never exhausted. Actually, the gift of Jesus to the marriage party is a wonderful symbol. The water in the jars represents His "baptism into death," and the wine represents His blood spilled for us to cleanse us from sin. At this first feast with His disciples, Jesus gave them a cup of wine to symbolize His work for their salvation. And at the Last Supper He gave it to them again and invited them to drink it in this symbolic way until He returns.²³