

# St Swithun's Church Family

## God's party



**24<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**10am Zoom**

**Or use this booklet to join  
together with us in Spirit**

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** on zoom at 10am – or read through this service knowing that we are joining our prayers together in Spirit.*

*Create a sacred space – if possible gather a candle and a cross if you can find them.*

*The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.*

*In addition we will be audio recording today's sermon which will be uploaded to the website [www.saintswithuns.org.uk](http://www.saintswithuns.org.uk)*

*There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.*

***Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.***

*You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...*

**Great is thy faithfulness**

<https://youtu.be/0k1WhFtVp0o>

**All are welcome**

<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

**Praise my soul**

<https://youtu.be/blpf8rSJtn4>

**Amazing Grace**

<https://youtu.be/maeSHVZX8xc>

**Love divine all loves excelling**

<https://youtu.be/sw5ZCZeS32M>

# Introduction

Today is the third Sunday of Epiphany and we hear the miraculous story of the Wedding at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine. This amazing thing happens at a party – something that we are unable to do in these current times and many of us miss so much. But despite this, it is good for us to imagine today that wedding party as we learn more about who Jesus is and God's party, which we are all invited to join.

## The Gathering

### The Greeting

In the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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

**And also with you**

### Prayers of preparation

As we gather for worship together:  
let us remember that we are invited to a party that never ends,  
let us remember that wherever two or more are gathered  
we are dancing in the presence of Jesus,  
let us remember that God transforms us in love, brings us joy  
and makes us whole,  
let us remember that we are a family  
**meeting together in Spirit  
with faith, hope and love  
Amen**

## Prayers of Penitence

*In a moment of quiet, let us say sorry to God...*

Let us open our lives to God and ask for forgiveness and grace.

For those times when we have kept our faith to ourselves  
and we haven't invited others to join God's party

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For those times when we ignore our call to share God's love  
Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

For those times when we have been unwelcoming and  
thoughtless to others.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

## The Absolution

Loving God, you welcome all who turn to you  
in repentance and faith,  
may God forgive us and restore us  
to the light of God's presence. **Amen**

## Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,  
**and peace to all people on earth.**

Rejoice knowing that God loves us, liberates us and makes us  
whole. Today – as we join God's worship party together – recall the  
best party you have ever been to....

What about  
that party  
made it so  
good?

What makes  
God's party  
so good?



# The Liturgy of the Word

## The Collect

God of all mercy,  
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,  
release to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed:  
anoint us with your Holy Spirit  
and set all your people free  
to praise you in Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Gospel Reading *John 2: 1-11*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

On the third day 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.**

## Sermon *Richard Evans*

Today we read the story that the writer of John's Gospel tells us is the first of the "signs" through which Jesus showed just who he was. The Gospel of John was last of the Gospels to be written, possibly as many as 60 years after the events that are being described. The writer had a purpose in selecting the events and sayings of Jesus to include in the book. To find the purpose, you need to look to nearly the end of the Gospel, in chapter 20, verses 30 and 31, where it says this:

*"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

By the time this writer came to tell his version of the story, there would have been written records and a wealth of stories told about Jesus. John's idea was to pick out just a few miracles and use these to tell the story alongside the teaching about and by Jesus himself. The miracles he called "signs" and there are just seven that are used in the book. Seven signs to help the readers of all time to believe that Jesus was just who he said he was. Seven signs to point us to life at a new level.

In the story of the wedding at Cana we hear about the first sign of Jesus' identity. And "His disciples believed in him". As we come to think about the story again today, what will we discover about Jesus' identity? Will John's gospel have the desired effect in our lives as it did for the first hearers and for those early friends of Jesus witnessing the very first sign?

It is the story of a celebration.





A celebration lasting several days and involving many people from the village of Cana and the surrounding area.

We have had almost a year when parties of any kind have been restricted, cancelled, banned.



Today I am asking us to remember different times and imagine going into the crowded excitement of a Palestinian wedding. Think about it. The noises, smells. Music, dancing, food...wine. It is worth making the effort to imagine this as it is not only culturally different and 2000 year of distance that we need to cross. Perhaps our year of pandemic life can be put aside for a few minutes to help us experience this extraordinary moment of history.

How does it feel to be at the wedding?

In the middle of the celebrations, the wine begins to run out. This would have been a disaster for the bridegroom. The provision for the party was his responsibility and insufficient wine or food would have been a disgrace that he and his new wife

might never live down. A bridegroom might even have been taken to court for allowing such a thing to happen.

So, suddenly there is tension. Jesus' mother heard about the problem and decided to tell her son.

How does Mary sound? Anxious, perhaps. She knew a bit about social embarrassment. She may well have felt worried for the young couple. Jesus' reply is odd "my time has not yet come" What does Jesus mean? Can you imagine having no expectations about what would happen next?

Imagine the noise of the party going on but you are part of this tense, anxious moment. Mary seems strangely confident. She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them.

How does Jesus sound talking to the servants at the wedding? Perhaps he sounds confident as he asks the servants to fill up the six huge stone jars with water. I guess filling up the jars will have taken a bit of time. No hoses. The servants going to and fro to the well. Finally they are full to the brim. What now?

Jesus is in charge again. "Take some of the water out and take it to the master of ceremonies for the banquet".

Imagine following the servants through the crowd. The astonishment on the steward's face. There is a lot to be said for a drink of cool fresh water (if you have some, taste it now) but back in the wedding, this is no longer fresh water. This is wine and it is really good wine. Try it. If you have some wine, or some other delicious thing; taste it now.

Now the astonished master of ceremonies calls over the bridegroom. "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." Apart from the fact that this was the first of Jesus' miracles, what was it that persuaded John to add the story to his list of signs? The signs are told in order to show us why Jesus was exactly who he said he was.

I don't think this is mainly about an amazing, supernatural happening. In this story we see Jesus responding not exactly in a life and death situation. You might even say that the context of



the wedding celebration was commonplace. It was a big thing, no doubt for the newly married couple but in the scope of situations where Jesus might intervene, surely not a big deal.

Do we sometimes think that the things that worry us and keep us awake at night...do we think that God is not interested or needing to be bothered? This sign shows us how Jesus is firstly ready to be present with us in every situation and secondly that our God can and does intervene to meet our needs where we are.

Can we relate to a situation where the world around, perhaps even those close to us seem unaware of the problem that is staring us in the face? Like the servants trying to avert disaster in the middle of the feast.

This sign shows us Jesus hearing the need, recognising the gravity of the situation. Understanding why the need is real despite the apparently lighter context. Our God can and does intervene to meet our needs where we are.

Do we understand a feeling when even good things in our lives do not seem to be satisfying us as they might? Perhaps this is the easiest part to imagine today. Life seems to be all anxiety and grief and constriction in the times of Covid. Even good things are spoiled and denied.

This sign shows us that what Jesus brings into any situation is better than can be expected: the best kept until now. Our God can and does intervene to meet our needs where we are. This sign reminds us that God loves us and wants to help us find that God provides immeasurably more than we can ask or even imagine.

Inviting Jesus to join the celebrations was the best decision that the married couple in Cana ever made. Not because of what Jesus would go on to do or because of who they could in future years say they had had at their wedding.

Having Jesus with us in our every situation is the best for us because it is with us and where we are that our God wants to reach us.

Amen

## **Affirmation of faith**

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.  
We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with love.  
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us with power from on high.  
We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

## **Prayers**

Loving God, as we remember that yours is the best party - may we remember to invite others along to join in the love we share and to dance with us as we journey together through good times and bad times. We remember those we party with around the world – our global neighbours. Bring joy where there is sadness and relief where there is suffering.

Let us pray: **God, have mercy.**

Loving God, as we remember that we are a family of love, we pray for our whole family the church. As we remember the wedding at Cana, we especially remember those who have recently been married, or are soon to be married. We pray for those whose plans have had to change due to the pandemic we live with. We pray for Nicholas and Marina as they continue their married life together.

Let us pray: **God, have mercy.**

Loving God, as we remember your transforming power and the many people and worries that we have in our hearts – we first offer to God in silence our concerns for ourselves and our loved ones.... We also pray especially for those who most need our prayers and those who have asked for our prayers. Fran and family, Lamar, Maureen, Karen, Paulette and their families, Andy and family, Philbert and family, Catherine and Alfrina and family, Betty, Fr Richard, Martin, Rossy and family, Kevin, Gwen, Pamela, Neil, Debbie, Elaine and family, Clinton, Francis,

Cynthia, Diane, Harold, Ivy, Sean, Taneisha, Talabi, Susan, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen. Transform our sorrow that there are so many people in need of our prayers. Transform their suffering and bring them comfort and relief.

Let us pray: **God, have mercy.**

We remember all those who have died recently: Carl, Gloria, Alan, Joseph, Sydney, Simone and John.

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord

**And let light perpetual shine upon them**

Merciful Father

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

## **The Lord's Prayer**

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has 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.**

## **The Peace**

The angels sang, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to all in whom he delights.'

The Peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

## The Notices

- *We will continue with our services on Zoom – links will be shared via email and text; we have decided not to go into the church building at the moment – we do hope that as soon as it is safe to do so we will be able to offer communion in person.*
- *We will continue to upload the services and the audio sermons on the website.*
- *Happy Birthday to all those who have a birthday this week*



## Dismissal and Blessing

### The Blessing

May God our loving parent, from whom every family in earth and heaven receives its name strengthen us with the Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith and that we may know that we are beloved; and the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

### The Dismissal

We have seen God's glory, the glory revealed to all the nations. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

### Contacts:

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