

Written Service Sunday 14th January 2024.
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev Alan Hargrave
Epiphany.

Charity number 1134226

Welcome: Welcome to our worship in this very short Epiphany Season. If you are reading this on a computer or tablet, you can click on the [links](#) to listen to the hymns. If not, just follow the words as they are printed on this sheet.

Hymn As we begin our worship today, let's still our hearts as we quietly sing
Be still for the presence of the Lord StF 20 <https://youtu.be/ZugvUQ4m90U>

Be still for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now,
with reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found,
we stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around
He burns with holy fire,
with splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight,
our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister His grace
No work too hard for Him,
in faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord,
is moving in this place

Introduction to the theme – Epiphany The feast of the Epiphany falls, in the Western church at least, on 6th January. It's the day we normally associate with the arrival of the wise men. It also marks for us the end of the Christmas season - the time to pack up the trimmings and put them in the loft until next Christmas. However, the word Epiphany means 'revelation' or 'manifestation.' We often use it today as a sort of '**wow**' moment, when you suddenly grasp something important.

But traditionally the feast of Epiphany was associated with the three great miracles which 'revealed' Jesus to be the Christ. The first was, of course, his revelation to the Magi, the Wise men, who were not Jewish, thus revealing that Christ had come for everyone, not just the Jewish people. Second is Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River, when the Spirit descends on him like a dove and God reveals him to be his beloved Son.

And third, which we are especially focussing on today, is Jesus' first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus reveals his power to his disciples. In fact, the season of Epiphany and the Christmas celebrations do not end, in many church traditions, until Jesus' Presentation in the Temple, or Candlemas, which we celebrate on 2nd February. So, if you haven't taken the trimmings down yet, you are in good company!

One of the features of Jesus' ministry is his ability to see right through us. To look deep into our hearts and reveal what is really going on there. So let us say together these words from Psalm 139, which reminds us that nothing can be hidden from God.

From Psalm 139 StF 835

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down; you are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night',
even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as day, for darkness is as light to you.
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Confession & Forgiveness Let's think again about those words:

'Search me out O God and know my heart. Try me and examine my thoughts. See if there is any way of wickedness in me and lead me in the way everlasting.'

So, let us take a few moments to bring before God all that is wrong and needs healing in our lives, and ask for God's forgiveness.

(We pause to confess to God whatever we need to)

Hear again the words of Jesus: 'Neither do I condemn you. Go. Sin no more.'

Thank you, Lord, for your full and free forgiveness. Grant us the grace and courage to live lives of honesty, openness & integrity, that we might serve as you deserve. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn Let's sing again. This song reminds us that Christ came to redeem us all, to deliver us from sin and death. **'There is a redeemer' StF 338**

<https://youtu.be/5SG3a7PTSFE>

There is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own son
Precious lamb of God, Messiah, Holy one

*Thank you, oh my father,
for giving us your son
And leaving your spirit
'til the work on earth is done.*

Jesus my redeemer, Name above all names
Precious lamb of God, Messiah, oh, for
sinners slain.

Thank you ...

When I stand in glory I will see his face
And there I'll serve my king forever in that
holy place.

Thank you ...

Bible reading

John 2:1-11

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.

For the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Address Water into Wine

As some of you will know, my wife and I worked for 10 years in S America – seven of them in Bolivia. In the middle of June 1982, we received an invitation to the annual Garden party at the British Embassy in the capital, La Paz, to be held in the first week of July. Unlike Argentina, where there are over 200,000 British passport holders in Buenos Aires alone, there are very few British subjects in La Paz. So, my wife & I tended to get invited to **all** the official functions at the Embassy.

But something important happened in mid-June that year. On 14th June 1982 the Argentine forces in Port Stanley surrendered, thus ending the Falklands war. The British Ambassador, Stanley Duncan, didn't want the Garden Party to look like a victory parade, esp. as the Bolivian govt. had supported Argentina during the war. So, he only invited 200, instead of the usual 400 guests. However, although the **official** Bolivian stance was to support Argentina, most Bolivians were privately glad to see Argentina lose, since they feared Argentine expansionism and also felt that Argentina viewed them as the inferior neighbours, which they did. So, everyone who **usually** got an invitation turned up anyway, assuming it was an oversight. And a number of others, who didn't want to miss out, also turned up uninvited. Hence, 200 were invited, but over 500 turned up! Thus, it was that what had been a wonderful spread of Lake Titicaca trout and other delicacies, turned into a diplomatic disaster. The food ran out, with 250 of us still waiting to be served. **Not** exactly a victory parade. More of a serious embarrassment!

Well, 2000 years earlier, at a wedding party, in the village of Cana in Galilee, a few miles north of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, they had a similar serious embarrassment. Except, in their case, it wasn't the food that ran out. It was the **wine**. Middle Eastern weddings, in those days, and even today, were not one day affairs. You had to cater for guests over several days of the wedding feast. Whether more people turned up than expected, or whether Jesus' presence brought in a few extras, who knows? But, shame & disgrace, half way through the wedding feast, the wine runs out!

But Jesus' mum has picked up the panic from the servants, so she leans over & says to Jesus: 'They've run out of wine.' And Jesus, clearly peeved, replies: 'Mother, what has that got to do with you & me? And in any case, my time hasn't come yet.'

But Mary knows her son, and maybe knows the times, better than anyone else. So, she turns to the servants and says: 'Do whatever he tells you.' And Jesus tells them to fill up 6 stone jars with water. These are huge things, dug out of the rock. If you've ever been to the Olde Trip to Jerusalem in Nottingham, and seen the vats in the cellars, dug out of the rock where they used to brew beer, you can imagine what they might have looked like. Each jar held 20 or 30 gallons. So, all told, we are talking about at least 600 litres of wine. Then, they scoop some out and take it to the Chief steward to try it.

Now remember, this is Jesus' **first public miracle**. And what does he choose to do? Does he feed the hungry? Or calm a storm? Or heal some lepers? Or open the eyes of the blind? Or raise the dead? **No!** Instead, he turns **water into wine**. And it's not just any old plonk. It is, as the Chief Steward says, top notch stuff. Even better than the top-shelf at Lidl. And Jesus doesn't just produce a **little bit** extra, to tide them over. He produces **over 800 bottles!** It's **massive!** More than they could possibly drink! And Jesus produces it when, as the Chief Steward suggests in verse 10, the guests are **already hammered**. When they've already had a skin-full.

Thus, Jesus reveals himself, to be, well, **not** a good Methodist! He doesn't seem to have heard of the word 'moderation', much less temperance. This is **not** the sort of thing you see recommended in Government guidance on sensible drinking. It's not the sort of story you'd want to read to your teenage kids, just before they go clubbing on a Friday night. In fact, it seems completely over the top; utterly irresponsible.

Why? Why does he do it? It is, my friends, **extravagance**. Glorious super-abundance. Lavish profusion. Copious, luxurious **excess**. It is like creation itself. At the end of this passage, John comments: 'This was the **first** of Jesus' signs.' The Greek word is perhaps better translated: 'the **beginning** of his signs'. It is the same word used at the start of John's Gospel: 'In the **beginning** was the Word'. And it is the same word which is used at the very start of the Bible: 'In the **beginning** when God created the heavens and the earth.' Something totally **new** is happening. A new work of creation is going on. Like the original creation itself, which bursts forth in all its glorious, spectacular extravagance and excess. It is like the Kingfisher, flashing past as you walk along the banks of the river Trent, or like the first light of the dawn breaking over Stanage Edge. It is like the Himalayas, the Grand Canyon or the Great Barrier Reef. It is like gazing at the wonder of the Great Nebulas, the Whirlpool Galaxy or the Rings of Saturn. (Just have a look at the amazing new images from the James Webb space telescope on the BBC website.) It takes an awful lot of faith to believe that **all this** is simply down to **chance!**

It is all utter, unnecessary, **extravagance!** The generous, joyful, overflowing of God's amazing, creative love and grace. And likewise, at the very start of Jesus' ministry, there is a new creation, symbolised by a super-abundance of the very best wine that anyone could ever buy - an image used again and again in the Bible as a sign of God's blessing. And so, by this amazing sign, Jesus reveals the glory of God – and his disciples believe in him.

I am so very lucky! So richly blessed. I have drunk an awful lot of that wine. **Not** the £1.99 Liebfraumilch we used to drink in our student days. Not even the 1967 Chateau Lafite Rothchild which the Devonshire family have stashed away in the cellars of Chatsworth House. I am talking about the superabundant outpouring of the rich, fine wine of God's extravagant **love** and **grace**. Such as the good wine of falling in love with my wife, Annie, who helped me discover the love and grace of God and the joy and privilege of serving others. Annie, who has shared my life for over 50

years and with whom I have shared the great blessing of our children, their partners and our dearly loved grandchildren.

And such as the sparkling wine of celebrating New Year in 1979 in Carboncito, a new community on 4000 acres of land, bought by the Canadian Government for indigenous people of N Argentina, who had been forced from their traditional lands, which were sold to big oil and agricultural companies. I had never experienced **such joy** as I did that night – the celebration of a people who had entered their promised land.

Or that fine wine of the very first baptisms of the nascent Anglican Church in Bolivia, which included whole families, and the baptism of our infant son, Ben. Baptisms which did not take place at a font, but in the freezing cold waters of Lake Titicaca.

Or that rich, rewarding wine of seeing a young woman, a single parent from a council estate who told me she was ‘rubbish’ and ‘thick as 2 short planks’, but who started our church youth group, did some A Levels at night school, and ended up with a 2.1 degree in Youth Ministry and the top marks for her dissertation of anyone across the country.

Or the intense sweet wine of sharing this Christmas with a Kurdish family who sought asylum here. This past year they were finally able to buy their own home, in Sherwood, and they invited **all** our family for Christmas – 20 of us – to a most amazing feast and a celebration of lives once broken and devastated, now restored, reborn, full of joy and laughter.

Or the rich, full-bodied wine of being with people at significant moments of their lives: in birth, in love, in pain, in sickness and in death. What a very great privilege that has been – and still is. Just a few of so very many examples I could give. I have tasted the rich wine of God’s Kingdom – and I suspect you have too. I wonder what examples **you** might give?

I have been so lucky. So very fortunate. So greatly blessed. Of course, there have been some **bitter mouthfuls** to swallow. But I have drunk **so much** of the very best vintages from the cellars of God’s new creation. And I am deeply thankful for it. And deeply grateful to so many people, with whom I have shared that good wine of God’s Kingdom, over many, many years. And I am hoping to **keep on drinking it**, for a while yet, in these Jubilee Years of my retirement.

One last word - and I’ll give it to the Virgin Mary, a much-neglected figure in protestant circles. She says to Jesus: ‘They have no wine’. Note what she doesn’t say! She doesn’t say: ‘**I** have no wine’. She doesn’t say: ‘**You** have no wine’. She doesn’t say: ‘**We** have no wine’. She says: ‘**They** have no wine. **THEY!** **We** are the lucky ones – most of us here. We **have** wine. We have tasted the fine, rich, satisfying wine of God’s Kingdom. But **THEY** – they have no wine.

The refugees streaming across North Africa and the Middle East into Europe across the deadly waves of the cold sea – **They** have no wine.

The people who work in conditions of slavery to produce **our** clothing, **our** tea, **our** coffee, **our** chocolate – **They** have no wine.

Those caught up in the appalling violence in Israel/Palestine and troops in the bitter trenches of the Ukraine winter – **They** have no wine.

Women in Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, unable to study or fulfill their God-given potential – **They** have no wine.

Men and women who will sleep out rough tonight, in freezing cold shop doorways, just a short distance from here – **They** have no wine.

Housebound, elderly people who are profoundly, often desperately alone - **They** have no wine. I could go on.

We – we **have** wine. Good wine in superabundance, overflowing. Wine to spare. But it is not just wine to **spare**. It is wine to **SHARE**. To share with those who don't have any. **Not** to share the leftovers after we've finished what **we** wanted. **Not** the £1.99 stuff from the back of the cupboard. But to share the very best we can give, the good wine of God's Kingdom. And what a great blessing it is to **share** that good wine with those who have none.

A minute ago, I said: 'One last word.' But there is **another** word. And this is from Mary too. Mary **always** points us to Jesus. And she says to the servants, and to all of us, these words: 'Do whatever he tells you.' 'Do whatever **He** tells you'. I don't know if there is a better way to live. But if there is, I haven't found it. 'Do whatever **Jesus** tells you.' And if you do. If you give away that good wine, which you have been so richly given, you will discover an amazing thing. It won't be easy or painless, but if you live generously, selflessly, giving of your best, you will discover that **you** are the one whose life is enriched. **You** are the one who is profoundly blessed.

There are no losers in this equation. The love and grace of the new wine of God's kingdom is an extravagant, bottomless well. They are **not** diminished by being offered up and given away. Instead, as we offer them up, and give them away, they grow, and blossom, and flourish. And the world is a better place. And everyone, everyone, is blessed.

Amen.

Prayers Let us turn our thoughts into prayer together. Let us pray.
We begin with the prayer Jesus taught us, saying together:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name
Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

So, let us pray for the coming of Christ's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. During the silences (marked by // between each section) bring to God whatever comes to your mind.

Where nations fight wars, Christ says: 'Put away your sword' //
Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

Where leaders battle for power, Christ says: 'Blessed are the meek' //
Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

When we throw away good food, Christ says: 'I was hungry, and you fed me' //
Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

Where God's creation struggles to cope with our greed, Christ says: 'Behold the lilies of the field'
// Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

Where we put our trust in wealth, Christ says: 'This very night your soul will be required of you'
///// Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

In the suffering of many millions, Christ says: 'Blessed are the poor' /////
Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

Where our faith is weak and we are sinking, Christ says: 'Take my hand.' /////
Your Kingdom come **Your will be done**

And let us pray for the coming of God's Kingdom to the particular situations & people on our hearts. Feel free to mention someone by name, in the quietness of your heart.

All our prayers we offer to you, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn Again, at the start of this new year, let us thank God for his keeping in times past & pray for the courage & strength to make a difference, for the better, in the year ahead: Lord for the Years STF 470 <https://youtu.be/RkkYUEcN234>

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us;
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world, when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him;
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves, in living power remake us-
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Blessing & Dismissal

This is the day that the Lord has made **We will rejoice and be glad in it**
We will not offer to God **Service which costs us nothing**

God the Father, who, by a shining star, led wise men to the light of Christ,
God the Son, who turned water into wine to gladden our hearts
And God the Holy Spirit who, in his baptism, revealed Jesus as your beloved Son
Grant us the grace to follow your light, to know your extravagant goodness
and to be filled with your Spirit of generous love, joy and peace.
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son & Holy Spirit,
be among us & remain with us, now & always. **Amen.**

So let us go in peace to love & serve the Lord
In the name of Christ, Amen.