

# Adult Teaching Resources

January 17, 2016



A Good Way to Begin — Psalm 147:12-20

## Jesus: The Curtain Rises

Of Water and Fire — Luke 3:15-22 (RCL 3:15-17, 21-22)

**Of Water and Wine — John 2:1-11**

An Old Scroll and a New Mission — Luke 4:14-21

A New Prophet and an Old Response — Luke 4:21-30

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# Of Water and Wine

John 2:1-11

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson: There are two videos you may want to show in the Information session.**

### Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

When did you last attend a wedding? Whose was it? Where?

What is your favorite kind of wine?

### Information

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Have you ever been to a wedding where something went horribly wrong? Maybe you've witnessed "wedding fails" like some of these:

[Show a video of wedding fax pas/goofy things. There are dozens of these on YouTube. Here is a shorter one that has some pretty good "fails." ("Hilarious Wedding Fails" 1:20 m. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=369LAqh8bTM>)]

There is a huge "wedding reception fail" in today's Scripture.

[Have a class member read John 2:1-11.]

Today's wedding ceremonies take from 20 minutes to an hour. A reception normally follows which make take 30 minutes to several hours, depending on the food served, the program, the dance, etc.

However, in Jesus' day, the reception was much more extensive.

"Families often went deeply in debt trying to outdo each other in the honorific competition to provide the best wedding the village had ever seen. Because a wedding celebration would often include a whole village, arrangements were usually quite elaborate and could take many days to complete...Such wedding celebrations traditionally began on a Wednesday and lasted seven days if the bride was a virgin and if the family and its village had enough resources; they would begin on a Thursday and last three days if the bride was a widow." (Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1998. p. 70f.)

## Information *continued*

We can only imagine how expensive this would be — and how socially embarrassing it could be not to have enough food or wine.

One of the expectations of guests was that they would bring gifts, including wine, with them to this lengthy celebration. Mary, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples would have been such guests. So, running out of wine meant both that the family of the groom had not prepared well and that the guests did not bring enough gifts. At this point, everyone loses.

Jesus' mother is never called by her name in the Gospel of John. She is always "the mother of Jesus." According to one author, this was "the respectful way of referring to a woman who has borne a son; the birth of a son defines the woman as a complete adult person." (Ibid. 66.)

What did Jesus' mother say to him? What do you imagine was the emotion behind her words? (shame, pity, embarrassment, guilt)

Remember that 30 years before this celebration, Joseph and Mary married. It was a socially complicated situation. We are not given any details about their ceremony or reception, but it is easy to imagine that there was a lot of slanderous gossip about this pregnant bride. How do you think her experience transferred to this wedding reception?

What was Mary "really" saying to Jesus? (do something! Go buy wine. Work a miracle. Etc.)

Jesus' response is somewhat surprising. What was he "really" saying to Mary? (You're no longer in charge of me; I'm not ready to come out yet; this is their problem, let them solve it; this is a tiny molehill compared to the mountains of problems I am going to face, etc.)

Why do you think Jesus is reluctant to do anything about this problem?

What does Mary say next, to the servants?

One author says, "I have this image of the mother of Jesus much like encouraging your child to get on the school bus for the first time: 'Come on, you can do it! I know you can!' But, I also wonder what she saw in that moment. What had Jesus revealed to her up to that point that would cause her to believe that such a miracle was possible from him? How did she know that this was the time for revelation, the event of Epiphany?" (Karoline Lewis. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1556](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1556))

What do you think was going on in Mary? What was going on between Mary and her son, Jesus?

Hands and feet were to be washed before entering a home or eating. Most families had a single water jar that stood about waist high. Here, there are six! That may indicate that the village was supportive in lending more jars and/or that this was a large gathering, therefore many jars were needed. Either way, the water in the jars was low, so Jesus commanded they be refilled. Who would refill them?

Do you think Jesus could have refilled the jars without anyone's help? If he could snap his fingers and miraculously refill the jars, why didn't he do so?

## Information *continued*

Think about this experience from the servants' point of view. What water is going to be used from these jars that day has already been used. There is no logical reason to refill them. You must go to the well and refill 120-180 gallons. That would be many, many trips to the well. What might be going through your mind?

How could we relate the servants' experience with our own spiritual lives?

Jesus turned the water into wine. We might call this a miracle. But John doesn't use the word miracle. What does he call it in verse 11?

John's gospel presents seven of these "signs."

"Writers commonly identify seven of Jesus' acts of power as signs of particular significance:

1. Changing water to wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum (4:46-54)
3. Healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14)
5. Walking on the water (6:16-24)
6. Healing the man born blind (9:1-7)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45)

The number seven is significant in Hebrew thought, as an indicator of completion." [From the online resource: "The Hardest Question, What does John mean by 'signs?'" ]

Johnny Cash wrote a song, "He Turned the Water Into Wine" that includes three of these signs.

[Play the song/video: "Johnny Cash — He Turned the Water into Wine — Live at San Quentin" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fE09xqZYBLI>]

John seems to steer away from the word, "miracle," maybe because he was concerned that his readers would focus more on the *what* than the *who*.

"In John, these sort of actions — changing water into wine, for example — are not 'miracles' — they are **SIGNS**. John does **NOT** want us to look at them; he wants us to look at what they point to. It is a complete mis-reading of this text to respond, 'Wow! I wonder **HOW** he did that?' John wants us to respond, 'Wow! I wonder **WHO** did that?' Wasting time discussing the sign is like going to a fabulous restaurant and spending the evening talking about the menu instead of enjoying the feast." (David Ewart. <http://www.holytextures.com/2013/01/john-2-1-11-year-c-epiphany-2-january-14-january-20.html>)

What do we learn about "who did that" from this story?

## Information *continued*

Although John describes seven “signs” in his Gospel, there were many more.

[Have a class member read John 20:30-31.]

## Transformational Exercise

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One thing we might learn from these “sign” stories is that the life of a disciple is an abundant life.

[Have a class member read John 10:10.]

How does your version translate that last phrase? (KJV: “more abundantly”; NIV: “to the full”; GNT: “life in all its fullness,” NRSV: “abundantly,” etc.)

[Write on the board the words, “abundance” and “scarcity.”]

How does today’s story illustrate a life of abundance?

What does today’s story say to an attitude of scarcity?

[Read or summarize the following quote:]

“We who are now the richest nation are today’s main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us.... We must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity -- a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity.

“The conflict between the narratives of abundance and of scarcity is the defining problem confronting us at the turn of the millennium. The gospel story of abundance asserts that we originated in the magnificent, inexplicable love of a God who loved the world into generous being. The baptismal service declares that each of us has been miraculously loved into existence by God. And the story of abundance says that our lives will end in God, and that this well-being cannot be taken from us. In the words of St. Paul, neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor things -- nothing can separate us from God. What we know about our beginnings and our endings, then, creates a different kind of present tense for us. We can live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for.” (Walter Brueggemann. “The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity.” *Christian Century*, March 24-31, 1999. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533>)

In today’s story, empty or nearly empty vessels of water were refilled to the brim to become wine. Shame was transformed to wonder. Embarrassment was transformed to joy.

In the next few moments of silence, consider this question. Is my typical mindset one of scarcity or abundance?

## Transformational Exercise *continued*

[After a few moments of silence, close in a prayer something like this: *God, you provide for us in surprising ways. These are signs that you care and that you love. Forgive us for any attitudes of scarcity that lead us to hoard what is to be shared. Fill our souls to the brim and transform us. Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Communion juice** — A Methodist minister/physician/dentist named Thomas Bramwell Welch first pasteurized grape juice to prevent it from spoiling precisely so churches could use the “fruit of the vine” for communion without having to use alcoholic wine. It was 1869, and official Methodist disciplines opposed the use of fermented wine, but that was hard to come by, so some continued to use wine for communion, which seemed troubling.

He advertised the wine to other churches but had few takers, because up until about the 19th century, the predominant approach in Protestant, Catholic, and even Puritan churches was that wine was a pleasure-inducing gift of God — to be used in moderation. The Industrial Revolution that both packed poor people into cities and enabled the mass production of alcohol led to an increasing problem of drunkenness, however, causing many churches to rethink their positions.

The issue continues to be a live one, with Christians of equally sincere faith on both sides of the question. There is no question, however, that Jesus and his disciples, Paul, and other New Testament believers drank fermented wine. Arguments that the word *oinos* (used here and commonly in the New Testament) refers only to “new wine” that is unfermented cannot be substantiated.

**Where was Cana?** — Several sites have been proposed as the location of the original Cana of Galilee, most in the general region of the current city of Cana. Recent excavations at Khirbet Cana, less than nine miles from Nazareth, make a strong case for it as the site. It matches ancient descriptions of the location (some of which are rather general) and is an appropriate size. It's clear that a Jewish village occupied the site during the first century CE. More importantly, a system of caves at the site were used as an early Christian shrine, where an underground altar sat beneath a shelf that had room for six stone water jars, two of which were still in place when the first cave was excavated. For more, see Tom McCollough, “Searching for Cana,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 44:6 (Nov/Dec 2015), 30-39).

**Jesus, a party guy?** — The story of the wedding in Cana is one of the first gospel indications of how much Jesus evidently enjoyed parties. He was known for his willingness to befriend all people and to share meals even with shady characters. The Pharisees accused him of hanging out with sinners, being a glutton and a drunkard (Matt. 11:19, Luke 7:34).

## Digging Deeper *continued*



**Hand washing** — To this day, Orthodox Jews wash before meals by pouring from a two-handled cup and washing one hand at the time: one handle can be touched by the pre-washed “unclean” hand, the other by the “clean” hand after washing.

**Communion wine?** — Some writers see a double meaning in the miracle, and imagine that Jesus was also pointing toward the wine of the Lord’s Supper. There is really nothing in the context to suggest this meaning, however.

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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## What does John mean by “signs”?

The notion of unusual works or actions as “signs” of greater significance is common in the Old as well as the New Testaments. When Moses first met God in the burning bush on Mount Sinai, God said “This shall be a sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain” (Exod. 3:12). When Samuel secretly anointed Saul as the future king of Israel, he pointed to three different signs that the calling was legitimate (1 Sam. 10:1-9). Isaiah made the often-misunderstood promise that a young woman would conceive and bear a son as a sign to King Hezekiah (Isa. 7:10-16), a sign that was later interpreted to have eschatological consequences.

In John and the synoptic gospels, the mighty acts of Jesus serve not only as signs that Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth, but also point to greater things that are yet to come.

John has more to say about signs than the other gospels, and many scholars argue that a “Book of Signs” (John 1:19-12:50) is an integral part of the gospel’s structure. John does not remark on or keep count of all the signs, as with the first two, and some scholars debate how many signs there were and what should be included. Writers commonly identify seven of Jesus’ acts of power as signs of particular significance:

1. Changing water to wine (2:1-11)
2. Healing the royal official’s son in Capernaum (4:46-54)
3. Healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (6:5-14)
5. Walking on the water (6:16-24)
6. Healing the man born blind (9:1-7)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-45)

The number seven is significant in Hebrew thought, as an indicator of completion. Some argue for these seven signs, with Jesus’ resurrection going beyond traditional notions of perfection and adding an eighth. An alternate view is to not count walking on the water as a sign, so that the resurrection becomes the seventh and completing sign. A few scholars also consider the miraculous haul of fish after Jesus’ resurrection (21:1-14) as a sign of the harvest of believers yet to come.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

Precise numbers are not as important as the awareness that John preferred the word “sign” to “miracle,” and saw the signs as pointers to Christ’s divinity that called people to follow him. Toward the end of his gospel, John notes: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31).

For more on this, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36 of Word Biblical Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 1987), 31-33, or any other quality commentary on the gospel of John.