

The Wedding at Cana, John 2:1-11: The Importance of Mary

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INTRODUCTION

The episode of the wedding at Cana, wherein Jesus turns water into wine, was a benchmark in the lives and ministries of Jesus and His Mother, Mary. Although John is the only Gospel that relates the miracle, most scholars regard this as the first miracle of Jesus. The first striking feature is that it is placed in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1). The Gospel of John focuses largely on Jesus' ministry around Jerusalem rather than in Galilee. This is what one would expect of the writings of a native of Jerusalem. The Gospel speaks of Jerusalem as one who is familiar with the city and is known throughout the city. Few details of Jesus' ministry beyond the environs of Jerusalem are narrated. Perhaps, the strongest evidence of John having a high social status and living in Jerusalem may be shown by the fact that he was known by the high priest. This enabled him to enter the high priest's court with Jesus being arrested. Peter was barred from entering, and the disciple had to intervene to get Peter access to the courtyard (18:15-16). It has been argued that John may have been a priest himself, as illustrated by the fact that he knew the High Priest and the name of the servant of the High Priest (18:10-12).¹ The second-century Christian writer Polycrates agreed: "John, who was both a witness and a teacher, who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest wore the sacerdotal plate . . . also sleeps at Ephesus" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:31:2).

¹ John's Gospel is the only Gospel that names the servant.

F. Knecht puts forth a summary of the importance of this miracle. He brings out three aspects

The object of our Lord's miracles. We can see clearly by this story the reason why our Lord worked miracles. His first object was to induce men to believe in the divinity of His mission and in the truth of His doctrine (see the words of Nicodemus, chapter XV: "No man can do these miracles which Thou doest, unless God be with Him"). If God were with Jesus, then everything which He taught must be true, because God is only with what is true. The second object of our Lord's miracles was to instruct men not only by words, but by deeds also. The miracle at Cana teaches us that we ought, according to our means, to help our neighbors in their necessities. It is also typical of that great and lasting miracle of divine love, power and wisdom, the changing of bread into the Body of our Lord Jesus, and of wine into His Blood. Thirdly, our Lord worked miracles in order to help men in their sufferings and necessities. By the miracle at the marriage-feast Jesus desired to deliver the bridegroom from an awkward dilemma, and to restore the festal joy. The help given was so lavish that a quantity of wine remained over after the feast; just as, later on, after the feeding of the five thousand, twelve baskets-full of bread remained over. Let us recognize in all this the goodness of Jesus, and appeal to His Sacred Heart for help in all our necessities, both spiritual and temporal.

The power of Mary's intercession. This first miracle, which confirmed the faith of our Lord's disciples, was wrought at Mary's intercession, for it was by her persuasion that He first manifested His glory by a striking miracle at Cana instead of at Jerusalem. Let us contemplate Mary's compassion on the distress of the poor bride and bridegroom, her living faith in the omnipotence of Jesus, and her confidence in His goodness. Mary is ever willing to help us by her intercession; but then we must obey her exhortation: "Whatever He (Jesus) shall say to you, do ye!"

Matrimony. By His presence at the marriage-feast of Cana, Jesus honored and sanctified marriage, which had already been instituted in Paradise. It was always from the beginning an indissoluble contract sanctioned by God. But now it is to become even more sacred and indissoluble. For Christ is going to make it a Sacrament and a symbol of His own union with the Church. Hence, He comes here with the first fruits of His Church to celebrate, so to speak, a double marriage-feast, that of Himself and His Church, and that of the bridegroom and bride.

Lawful pleasures. The fact of our Lord taking part in the marriage-feast teaches us that it is lawful and pleasing to God that we should take part in innocent recreations and harmless pleasures, rejoicing with those who rejoice.

St. Joseph is not mentioned in this story, nor in any part of our Lord's public life, even in His Passion. He had already died a blessed death in the arms of Jesus and in the presence of the Blessed Virgin. Therefore, the Church invokes the faithful foster-father of Jesus as the patron of a happy death. We ask him for his intercession, that we, like him, may leave this world, united to Jesus by sanctifying grace, and especially united to Him in Holy Communion.²

Our present work will focus on the depiction of Mary and how her role is foundational and, ultimately, maternal to the ministry of Jesus. Although this is the beginning of Jesus's public life and miracles, it introduces and summarizes the exchanges between Jesus and Mary. Moreover, it provides a narrative template for Mary's role as disciple and apostle for her son.

The events that happened in Cana were, by no means an isolated nor self-contained episode, but held a singular significance due to their unique presentation that we find only

² F. Knecht, *A Practical Commentary on Holy Scripture* London: Herder, 1910) 441.

in John. Within the flow of the Gospel, the episode concludes the vocation of Philip and Nathaniel.³ Admittedly, they are not mentioned by name, but the proximity of texts seems to imply a connection. This event in Cana serves to open the “book of signs”, according to John, wherein the power and authority of Jesus will be made public.

PART 1: Cana in Galilee

The first chapter of John introduces the Divine identity and Jesus beginning to acquire disciples. John shifts the scene abruptly, perhaps relying on the common knowledge of wedding ceremonies of the Jews. He writes, “*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there*” (John 2:1). John, specifically, cites Cana as the location.⁴ However, scholars dispute the actual location. Archaeology has proposed four sites as possible sites; Kafr Kanna, Khibet Qana, and Reineh in Lower Galilee. In Upper Galilee, Qana in southern Lebanon is sometimes proposed. While most linguists see the name as deriving from the Hebrew קנה, “canah”, usually meaning stalk, reed, bone, or balance. This name, and the miracle attached to the location, may have been part of John’s explanation of the identity of Jesus and His messianic mission. This noun apparently denotes the Persian reed *Arundo donax*. However, other sources note that this root represents several reed-like plants in Akkadian. From the primary denotation derives the second meaning, that which is shaped like a reed, i.e., a stalk, bone (only Job 31:22), balance part (Isaiah 46:6, lever). This word also represents an aromatic spice used in sacred ministrations. This word occurs sixty-two times. It is to be distinguished from gome’ (Cypenus Papyrus), supposedly an Egyptian loanword meaning rushes in general, ‘ahu (marsh plant), and yaraq (green plant). It also seems to be related to “qana”, meaning “get”, “acquire”, “create”. Egypt is called a

³ D. Kulandaisamy, “The First Sign of Jesus at the Wedding of Cana”. *Marianum* 68 (2006) 25.

⁴ John also cites Cana in 4:46 and 21:2.

bruised reed—an undependable, weak staff (1 Kings 18:21). God pronounces judgment on Egypt because she boasted of her self-made power, and weaned Israel away from trusting him. When the test came, Egypt proved to be a weak support (bruised reed) and thus caused Israel to suffer pain (Ezkekiel 29:6-7). When the Messiah comes, he will gently lead his flock, not setting on them more than they can bear. The Lord's servant will establish justice even on a bruised reed—either the poor of society or possibly Egypt (Isaiah 42:3; cf. II Kings 18:21). This expectation found fulfillment in Jesus' healing of the crippled man, a truly broken reed, in the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:9-21). The subtle way Jesus performed this miracle also demonstrates the combination of gentleness and power.

The spice *ganeh* was one of the four which God directed to be mixed and used as holy anointing oil. With it the instruments and ministers of the tabernacle (and temple) were anointed (Exodus 30:23). Later God berates his people for ignoring his appointed means of worship in the midst of their great sin (Isaiah 43:24, “sweet cane”). Finally, he tells them that external sacrifice apart from inward devotion is useless (Jeremiah 6:20). God's worship is holy to him. He intends men to follow his directions specifically. If so, the result will be sweet smelling (acceptable) to him. If not, the result is unacceptable: rite and attitude must conform to his standard.⁵ The undertones of this name will come into the spotlight in the words of Mary when she quietly tells them to do as Jesus instructs them.

As most scholars attest, John was a native of Jerusalem. Yet, the first episode of Jesus is placed in Cana of Galilee. He introduces Jesus, Mary, and His disciples. It is unclear if John was there or was a witness to the ceremony. If he was not present, it would explain why the names of the disciples were not given. The name “Galilee” can mean “circle” or “district”. It

⁵ Laird, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 2:805.

was the northern portion of Palestine and served as a type of crossroads of important trade routes, radiating in all directions. Particularly in the Greco-Roman period it was a cosmopolitan region, with a mixed population. The area acquired the name of *gelil haggoyim*, meaning region of the nations. In the New Testament era, Sepphoris was the administrative capital. It was the area in which Jesus spent most of His life and ministry, which might indicate that Jesus was native to the region.⁶

R. Rosales argues that the third day is an allusion to both Old and New Testaments. He cites Exodus 19:10-12; *And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death.'*" This describes a great Theophany, an appearance or presence of the Lord. Yet, the instructions are very specific as to how to protect the people from fully experiencing the awesome power of the presence of the Lord. Indeed, this was the first time the power of God was made in public and in the form of Jesus.⁷ It could also be a foreshadowing, as Rosales argues, of John 2:19, which reads, *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."* Therefore, John could be weaving a foreshadowing into his narration.

Furthermore, following Lightfoot Rosales argues, John could also be making a reference to the Jewish custom of the third day of a wedding feast the ceremony is held. Symbolically, this makes Jesus the bridegroom. On the fourth day, the couple is presented to the assembly and Sanhedrin. On the fifth day, the man could move toward divorce if the wedding agreement was

⁶ J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Chicago: Bruce, 1965) 293-294.

⁷ This is a reason why clouds are often seen as a sign of a Theophany, Cf. J. Roskoski, "The Storm Theophany: A Theology of the Storm". *AJBT* 13 #40 September 23. 2012.

not honored in some way.⁸ It is also possible that the ceremony was held on the third day for the practical reason of giving those traveling, particularly on foot, arrive before the actual ceremony.

Part 2: Mary's Involvement

Some scholars have noticed that only Mary is mentioned in this verse. This identification may suggest that John, the "beloved disciple", is placing the focus on Mary.⁹

This Marian emphasis is evident in that John places Mary at the wedding independently and introduces Jesus and the disciples after the reference to her.¹⁰ R. E. Brown mentions an apocryphal tradition and says, "Mary was the aunt of the bridegroom, whom an early 3rd-century Latin preface identifies as John, son of Zebedee. This is to be associated with the tradition that Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of John, was Mary's sister, a relationship which makes John the cousin of Jesus. The presence of Jesus makes it not implausible that a relative was involved in the wedding, unless the invitation came through Nathanael, who was from Cana."¹¹ Clearly, Mary had a strong connection to the affair, either as an honored guest or, more likely, a relative who helped arrange the affair.

In verse 3, the text reads; "*When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."*" (John 2:3) This, seemingly simple, reporting of the state of affairs offers a glimpse into the process of such a feast. It has been suggested

⁸ R. Rosales, "Exegesis on John 2:1-11; The Wedding at Cana" (LaSalle University, University Press, 2020) 3.

⁹ This would be consistent with the words on the Cross in John 19:25-27. Cf. J. Roskoski, "Behold Your Mother: John 19: 25-27, Redefinition of the Motherhood of Mary". AJBT 20 #16 (April 21, 2019).

¹⁰ Rosales, 3.

¹¹ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*. (NY:Doubleday, 1966) 98.

that the late arrival of Jesus and the disciples might have caused the wine supply to be endangered of running out. Many

exegetes, trying to explain the “third day reference”, count it from the day of Philip and Nathanael’s call, suggesting that that day and the next were spent on the journey from the Jordan valley to Galilee.¹² More likely, this is Mary reporting the situation to Jesus, but the simple tone, without a specific request, seems to imply Mary is certain Jesus will intervene, but is uncertain of manner for miracle.¹³

The role of the mother of Jesus in these verses is very significant. So much has been commented over this dialogue between Jesus and Mary. The narrator does not give any explicit details about Mary’s concern with the lack of wine but he makes his readers understand the mediating role of Mary. It is evident that the narrator wishes to give a prominent and active role to Mary. Does Mary ask her son for a miracle? or does she simply report to her son about the problem? Some exegetes say that Mary simply reports to her son about the desperate situation and does not seem to directly and openly ask Jesus to perform a miracle. That means Mary is reporting this fact hoping that Jesus would intervene with some miraculous act to solve the problem.¹⁴ F. J. Moloney also denies any description of the event as a typical miracle story. He says that a more detailed narrative approach to the text would clearly show that it is not a typical miracle story. F. J. Moloney says that such a description of the passage fails to meet Bultmann’s description of a typical miracle story. Bultmann proposes the form of the Synoptic miracle stories in this way: (a) A problem is described in some detail, so that the gravity of the situation will be clear. (b) A request is made. (c) The miracle is performed, and it is accompanied by the description of a gesture, a touch,

¹² Kulandaisamy, 58.

¹³ Brown, Gospel, 103. Brown suggests that this situation is a parallel to Matthew 15:32.

¹⁴ Ibid, 99.

a word, or a name. (d) The miracle and its successful accomplishment are described. (e) The miracle closes with the wonder of all who saw it or heard about it.¹⁵

F. J. Moloney also says that many elements present within this structure make it evident that this text is not a usual miracle story. When the mother of Jesus makes a request to Jesus, he rebukes her request in v.4. This refusal of the request to make a miracle breaks the regular form of the miracle story. In the miracle stories of the Synoptic gospels, this rebuke against the request does not happen. The following are a few other indications within the text that go against the regular form of a miracle story: “without being instructed in any way by Jesus, his mother is the one who turns and tells the attendants what to do...The final element in the Johannine story is also somewhat foreign. One does not read of the wonder of all who see or hear of the miracle. Nothing is said of the effect of the miracle upon the guests, who are never mentioned”.¹⁶ Following Moloney, we would suggest that John is writing of this event in this way to show the effect on the new disciples and the readers. Clearly, in this account, Jesus did not want to draw attention to himself.

Moloney overlooks the maternal bond that Mary enjoys with Jesus, her son. Even without His Divinity, as a son he would understand the tone which Mary would have taken in reporting the situation. By their singular relationship, this event is set apart from the typical “miracle story”. However, the unique qualities does in no way lessen the miraculous event.

The response of Jesus has evoked much scholarly debate. The text, literally reads, “*And Jesus says to her, ‘What to me and to you, woman- my hour has not yet come’.*” (John 2:4). Some scholars say that Jesus’ refusal to become involved gives us a clue that something was being asked of him by his mother.

¹⁵ F. Maloney, *Belief in the Word*, (Minneapolis, Augsburg Press ,1993) 90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

Brown sees this response as a “semitism” suggesting this is not his concern. Perhaps the best example of this is Joshua 15:18. The verse concerns Caleb’s newly-won bride: *When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she got off her donkey, and Caleb said to her, What do you want?*” Literally, the Hebrew means “what to you?”

In the Ancient Near East, the status of “mother” was a place of high regard, especially if her son was a famous man. Therefore, the use of the title, and not her name, signifies the importance of Mary in the Gospel as she is the mother of the “Word Incarnate”. Brown continues the argument by suggesting that Mary’s role, given at the hour of death by Jesus, may not pertain to his earthly ministry but looks to the era of community after Jesus’ glorification.¹⁷ Jesus uses the term, γυναι, gynai, which carries the meaning of “woman”. Catholic and ethnic scholars agree that there was no disrespect in the words of Jesus. It is a title of honor, but translates as sounding much more abrupt and discourteous than it was meant.

The reference to “hour” seems to suggest that only His involvement is being avoided.¹⁸ The fact that the author refers to Mary as “the mother of Jesus” instead of mentioning her proper name shows that the author chooses to characterize Mary only in reference to Jesus. This shows the author’s Christ-centered theology in the fourth gospel. This way of characterizing Mary stresses her identity as ‘mother of Jesus’. It shows that her role is very important because she has given birth to Jesus. This way of characterization keeps Jesus at the center and Mary as his collaborator in the work of salvation.¹⁹ The term for “hour” is ὥρα, hora, meaning “a definite space of time” or “a season”, “an hour”, or “the particular time for

¹⁷ Roskoski, “motherhood” 14.

¹⁸ Brown, *Gospel*, 99.

¹⁹ Kulandaisamy, 81.

anything”. Overall, the term refers to a definite point in time. It is God’s appointed time for specific events in the life of Christ. Jesus again and again made clear that the Father had a fixed time for every event in His life. This is evident esp. in the gospel of John. There was nothing accidental in the life of Jesus; everything He did was done according to the will of His Father. This aspect of Jesus’ ministry is found in each of the four Gospels.

This response finds full completion in John 13:1, wherein we read, ἤλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα, literally referring to Jesus knowing that “his hour had come”. This was the hour to which Jesus referred in John 2. Herein He did not yet want to reveal His glory, yet. John 2:4 and 13:1 forms a unique parallel. The miracle at the wedding begins, what scholars call, the “Book of Signs”. The words of Jesus in John 13 begin the “Book of Glory”. This theme is continued in John 17:1, *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.* This is the hour, the predestined time, for which Jesus was born and was to die.

Mary had no way of seeing the entire scope of Jesus’ response. She was acting in the present. Rosales argues that her response, in verse 5, *His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you”*, shows a persistent faith in her son, without fully understanding His response. However, the courage of her faith seems to be the catalyst which brings forth the miracle.²⁰ On another level, Mary’s actions allow for the “completion of the “vocation of the disciples”, Philip and Nathaniel. Her intercession strengthened faith of new disciples, and fulfills words of Jesus that they will “see greater things” (John 1:50).²¹

²⁰ Rosales, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Many Mariologists, typified by A. Serra, say that the Mariological character of this episode is very significant and important, without negating the primary importance of the person of Christ and the Christological emphasis of the evangelist. The emphasis that the fourth evangelist attaches to the figure of 'the mother of Jesus' is clearly evident from the following facts: 1) This miraculous event of Jesus' changing water into wine takes place because of Mary's initiative. 2) The evangelist mentions the presence of the mother of Jesus here in 2:1-12 and also in Jn 19:25-27 and thus makes an inclusion in the literary structure of the gospel. 3) The evangelist has designed his Gospel in such a way that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is present at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the end of his earthly life. This explains the importance of Mary's role in the earthly life of Jesus. 4) The fourth evangelist never mentions the proper name 'Mary'; he always calls her 'mother of Jesus'. This is not without any theological intention. This is not simply 'Mary' but the 'mother' of Jesus. This title has been deliberately repeated in the fourth gospel in order to emphasize the maternity of Mary.²²

R. E. Brown argues that despite Jesus' refusal, Mary's intervention becomes the occasion of the first of Jesus' signs, because "the evangelist does nothing to stress the power of Mary's intercession at Cana". It is surprising to see that Mary asks the servants to do whatever her son tells them, as if Jesus has positively accepted her request. Moreover, the negative reply of Jesus contradicts the miraculous act of Jesus. Because of these seeming inconsistencies in the sequence of the narrative caused by the dialogue between Mary and Jesus, some exegetes are of the opinion that while the wine miracle at Cana is a historical event, the dialogue between Jesus and his mother may have been the evangelist's creation inserted for the theological purposes of the gospel. Some other exegetes suggest that "the dialogue was also part of the primitive tradition, but that the evangelist has given us only those snatches of dialogue

²² Kulandaisamy, 103.

that served his theological purpose, thus leaving us with an incomplete and inadequate account when we try to pry beneath the theological level”.²³ The structure of the episode supports Brown, that John was more concerned about the consistency with his overall theological structure and Old Testament traditions than he was with historical details which would fill out the narration. On the other hand, Brown *et alia*, sees her instructions as a tacit subordination of Jesus’ sovereignty and she in her persistent and faithful response seems to, in a real way, prepares the way for this first miracle to take place.²⁴

Part 3: The Response of Jesus

John interrupts the dialogue with the description of the jars. In v. 6, John writes; “*Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.*” The mention of six jars might have symbolic meanings. The six water jars made of stone symbolize the old laws of Moses written on the stone. And they have been fulfilled by Jesus with jars full of new wine. The number six can be compared with the six days of creation in the beginning (Gen 1.3-2.2).²⁵ Rosales argues that the number “6” represents imperfection, as the universe was created in seven days.²⁶

Brown sees an echo of Leviticus 11:29-38;

“Of the animals that move along the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon. Of all those that move along the ground, these are unclean for you. Whoever touches them when they are dead will be unclean till evening. When one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use, will be unclean, whether it is made of

²³ Brown, *Gospel*, 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 103

²⁵ Kulandaisamy, 36.

²⁶ Rosales, 6.

wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean. If one of them falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean, and you must break the pot. Any food you are allowed to eat that has come into contact with water from any such pot is unclean, and any liquid that is drunk from such a pot is unclean. Anything that one of their carcasses falls on becomes unclean; an oven or cooking pot must be broken up. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean. A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean, but anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean. If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean. But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.”²⁷

This passage suggests that Jesus is using clean cisterns or jugs to perform his miracle. He is adhering to the Priestly laws of cleanliness by using the ceremonial jugs. It seems as though he is looking for a proper receptacle for the miracle that He will bring forth.

With no further challenge to Mary, in v. 7, Jesus gives the instruction; *Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.* The symbolism of water in John’s Gospel: The word ‘Water’ occurs in the following verses of the Gospel of John: 1:33; 2:7; 2:9; 3:5; 3:23; 4:7; 4:10; 4:11; 4:13-15; 4:28; 4:46; 5:7; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34. Here water is associated with the baptism, the act of healing and to the words of Jesus affirming that He is the living water (cf. Jn 4.13); and also the symbolism of water develops the point that the water baptism of John pre-announces that Jesus should be manifested thereby as the Bearer of the Spirit. And John 19:34 reads: *“The soldier pierced his side with a spear and there came out blood and water”*. Some commentators connect this symbolism of water and wine with the passion narrative. Some

²⁷ Brown, *Gospel*, 103.

others say that the water symbolism in the first sign of Jesus is connected with the Sacrament of Baptism.²⁸

Jesus, in v. 8, gives the servers an instruction; *And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.* Clearly, the servers recognized Jesus status, by virtue of His association with Mary, so they followed these instructions. It is unclear how much of the liquid they took to the Master of the Feast. Since nothing is recorded of the servers' reaction, we might assume that they did not recognize a change or, more likely, the sample was in a covered vessel to avoid spillage. John follows this with the narration, *"and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside"* (2:9). John is emphasizing the stealth in which Jesus had performed the miracle. He kept His distance from the event, still honored His mother's concern, and preserved putting His power on display. Perhaps, the servants did not tell the Master of the Feast because they did not know of the change and feared doing something wrong in the eyes of the Master.

After the Master went to the bridegroom he said; *"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."* (2:10) We can assume from the text that all the water had been changed. Some Classicists have compared this miracle to the famous myth of Dionysius and the three kettles. According to the ancient writer, Pliny, Dionysius, the Greek god of wine, who at his annual festival in his temple of Elis filled three empty kettles with wine without changing water. It is also written that on the fifth of January wine instead of water gushed from his temple at Andros. In both incidents, Dionysius reportedly produced the wine. Jesus changed a basic element, water, into good and new wine. To the Jewish, and Hebrew,

²⁸ Kulandaisamy, 35.

mind the quality of “newness” held special, almost magical, properties.

The key difference is that Jesus changed the substance of the element. This would be of great significance to the Greeks who thought that there were four basic elements; air, fire, earth, and water. To change one of these elements was a tremendous show of power. On the other hand, there are also Old Testament echoes here. The result of Jesus’ action is an abundance of wine, echoing Amos 9:13-14 and Jeremiah 31:12.²⁹ Perhaps the closest Old Testament tradition that parallels this event of Jesus is found in Isaiah; *On this mountain, the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.* (Isaiah 25:6)

John concludes the event, in v. 11, with the following; *What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.* The Greek term for signs which John used was σημεῖων, semeion, meaning “a sign”, “miracle”, “indication”, “mark”, “token”. It is an action given specially to confirm, corroborate or authenticate someone or something. The action’s purpose is to emphasize the end-purpose which exalts the one giving it. The end purpose, to which linguists point, is “glory”. The Greek term is δόξαν, meaning “honor”, “renown”; “glory”, “an especially divine quality”, “the unspoken manifestation of God”, or “splendor”. The semantic field includes “to think”, “suppose”, “be of opinion”. It also includes “to praise”, “do honor” or “to hold in honor”. This is extended to “extol”, “magnify”, or “celebrate”. John, probably, used the term “signs” to mean “to make glorious”, “adorn with luster”, “render something excellent”. Such signs would make something “renowned” or “illustrious”. Essentially, a sign was to cause the dignity and worth of some person or thing to become manifest or acknowledged. John, in a way similar to the synoptics, did not want Jesus to be proclaimed the Christ

²⁹ Brown, *Gospel*, 105.

prematurely, on the basis of such an action. This might be an attempt to harmonize his traditions with those of the synoptic Gospels. However, later, John the word “signs” with τέρατα, “terata”, meaning “a wonder, marvel”. In John 4:48, it reads, “*Unless you people see signs and wonders,*” Jesus told him, “*you will never believe.*” These later miracles, unlike the Cana event, were designed to promote belief and the authority of Jesus.

Part 4: John’s Conclusion

John concludes the event with the epilogue; *After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.* (2:12) Brown see this epilogue as a parallel to Luke 4:31, in that Mary and the disciples came to see what He was doing, perhaps, amidst hostile report and rumors. This might be an attempt to harmonize Johannine material with synoptic traditions. However, the vocabulary suggests that this was an early Johannine tradition, possibly predating the synoptics, but kept in the redactional stages because of its agreement with them.³⁰

Literarily, this acts as a “bridge scene”, according to Brown, as now His ministry is about to commence.³¹ However, John introduces a significant term, ἀδελφοί, adelphos, commonly meaning “brother”.³² While the term can certainly mean “brother” or half-brother, the semantic field includes a member of the same religious community or a fellow-believer. Ones who are united by some bond of affection is also connoted by this term. The term can also have a nationalistic context, as it can refer to one who has the same national ancestry, belonging to the same people, or countryman. John seems to be suggesting

³⁰ Brown, *Gospel*, 113.

³¹ Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*. (NY: Doubleday, 2003) 301.

³² This has led many critics to understand this term as “blood brother”, which it can denote. It has also led many to argue against the Catholic understanding of Mary’s virginity. However, the full rendering of the Greek term will not support this polemic against Mary.

that this was the beginning of Jesus establishing disciples, not necessarily the “twelve” that represented a New Israel, but those that would follow from a distance.

Brown points out that the earliest disciples, Philip and Nathaniel, now have had a chance to believe in the power of their new teacher. John uses a subtle, but powerful, writing style as he uses this event and epilogue to close the first part of his work and open the second part wherein Jesus now begins to make a more public mark.³³

The closing comment allows the reader a respite to fully grasp what had transpired and establishes the authority of Jesus. This authority is critical to the actions on Passover which follow. Mary accompanies Jesus and the new disciples. However, it is unclear what her role was to be or the purpose of her presence. In John’s Gospel, Mary is given no role in the active ministry of Jesus, only to receive a role of honor during the “hour of glory” from Jesus (John 19:25-27). It is the masterful writing of John that places Mary at two key junctures of the life and career of Jesus. Her image “bookends” the ministry of Jesus.

CONCLUSIONS

Although this event often gathers its importance from it being the first miracle of Jesus and it beginning the “book of signs” in John, Mary’s role in Jesus’s ministry is clearly marked and her bond with Jesus clearly depicted. It suggests that Mary’s role is complex. It is powerful, yet it does not detract from the glory of Jesus. She plays a critical role in Jesus’ actions yet stands on the periphery of His actions. She seems always to be supportive, even foundational to Jesus’ life and actions. In this way she culminates the strong archetypes found throughout the Old Testament. In many ways this, almost seeming insignificant show of power, invoked many images from the Hebrew and Jewish history which were known to both Jesus

³³ Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*. (NY: Doubleday, 2003) 301.

and Mary. In this event we see the Old Testament canon open and receive a new, messianic, context. Mary is the lynchpin, an essential bridge, from the Old Testament coupling to Jesus.

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