

# St. Stephen's News

St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church, Timonium, Maryland

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Edited by Anne Hawkins

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## MEDITATION ON THE EPIPHANY III GOSPEL

### Our human inclination to discount miracles

HAVE you ever wondered why Jesus chose to inaugurate his ministry here on earth by turning water into wine to bail out a pair of embarrassed newly weds? It used to puzzle me a lot. If I were the Son of God, I would have done something a lot more spectacular.

I would have raised somebody from the dead -- or at the very least I would have cured a whole load of people of truly horrific diseases. I couldn't help but think that when he changed the water into wine, Jesus wasted a golden opportunity to demonstrate the limitless nature of his power.

Theologians frequently talk about the miracle at Cana as prefiguring the institution of the Eucharist -- the Holy Communion. And it is true: You can certainly see that in it. What's more, if Jesus can turn water into wine in industrial quantities, it is proof positive that he can turn the much more modest quantity of bread, wine and water we put on the altar into his body and blood.

Actually there is much more to the miracle than that. In truth, it was precisely the right miracle with which to start the Son of God's earthly ministry. This goes without saying, of course. The very idea that our all knowing, eternal God would make a hash of things is quite outlandish. But in fact nothing demonstrates God's deep and abiding love for mankind than this extraordinarily kindly act to save a young couple from a trivial embarrassment on their wedding day.

If God were willing to use his limitless power to do something as trivial as saving the face of a bridegroom who had been too improvident to order enough wine for his wedding party, what would he not do for us? The answer to that question came a mere three years later, of course, when he sacrificed himself to save us from the consequences of being all too human. The miracle at the wedding at Cana is a graphic illustration of just how much God loves the world.

### *Concrete example of God's love*

But if the miracle at the wedding at Cana is a concrete demonstration of the depth of God's love for us, what does it tell us about our reactions to him? I suppose the amazement of the master of ceremonies at the perfection of God's work -- the quite superlative quality of the wine -- might tell us something. But, actually, St. John really mentions nothing about the way the wedding guests reacted to the miracle.

Certainly he doesn't say that any of them ultimately became Christians as a result of the experience. Nor does he say, for example, that any of them were among the disciples to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection.

Yet the event must have been one of the most memorable things that had happened to any of them. How many folks at a modern wedding would forget if one of the guests conjured half a truckload of champagne and single malt Scotch whisky out of thin air? Very few, I'd guess. So why did this most memorable event seem to have so little lasting effect?

The same question might be asked of all of the other thousands of miracles Jesus performed. What lasting effect did any of these wonders have on the hearts and minds of the witnesses and beneficiaries? Many, no doubt, cheered Jesus into the Holy City on Palm Sunday, but I wonder how many also bayed for his blood on Good Friday. Certainly significantly fewer were there to greet the risen Christ.

If you find this strange think on Jesus' words when a group of students of Jewish law and Pharisees asked Jesus to prove himself by performing a miracle for them. "An evil and

adulterous generation asks for a sign and no sign shall be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jesus was referring, of course, to his death and resurrection. But it's important to remember that many of those who witnessed Jesus raise the widow's son at the city of Nain and the raising of Lazarus nevertheless deserted him -- just as many of those who saw the empty tomb ignored the evidence of their own eyes.

As a youngster, I found such things shocking. I knew modern Christians wouldn't have been like that. I knew we would have stood shoulder to shoulder with Jesus all the way. I knew that we wouldn't have been like Peter and denied the Son of God in his hour of need. Today I know differently. I know how readily human beings rationalize away discomfiting and disturbing happenings. And miracles certainly fall into the realm of the discomfiting and disturbing.

Today many folks seem to assume that miracles only happened in the "Olden Days" -- Olden Days being defined as the time before the invention of the steam engine and the discovery of electricity. That, however, is far from true.

### *A happening in East Harlem*

Let me tell you about a miracle which took place in New York about 20 years ago. A young mother who lived in East Harlem was severely afflicted with schizophrenia. A day or so before the miracle took place, she had felt an unusually severe attack of her illness coming on and had gone to St. Luke's hospital to seek treatment.

At St. Luke's, she was given a prescription for a popular psychotropic medicine and sent home. Instead of getting better she got worse -- very much worse. Soon she was hallucinating badly -- so badly, in fact, she became convinced her baby, just nine months old, was possessed by the devil and attempting to bewitch her.

Her grandmother, who lived with her, heard her crying and screaming and found her on the balcony of their 19<sup>th</sup> story apartment, threatening to throw the baby to the ground. It being New York, a crowd soon gathered, attracted by the shouting and hollering from the 19<sup>th</sup> floor. And New York's media being what it is, among the crowd were the usual gaggle of paparazzi, cameramen looking for a story to sell to the TV stations and the morning papers.

I don't know if anybody shouted "Jump" or "Throw the baby off the balcony." But someone might well have done. In any event, suddenly the baby was in the air -- a tiny, fragile white speck against the grimy, gray concrete of the apartment block.

It was one of those sweltering, leaden, humid New York afternoons, with no hint of a breeze. The atmosphere was so still you could hear the collective gasp from the crowd as the infant plummeted toward the reinforced concrete canopy that covered the front doors. The grandmother said afterwards, as the babe went over the balcony she began to pray as she had never prayed before.

### *No one doubted the miracle*

When the child was no more than 15 feet or so from the canopy, a powerful gust of wind came suddenly from nowhere. It swept up the child and deposited him some 40 feet away on the only spot of soft earth within best part of half a square mile -- a flower planter that had been turned over by city workers not a half hour before.

Nobody who'd seen what had happened doubted they had witnessed a miracle -- even the cynical paparazzi. Later that day, one told me he had paused at a church on his way back to his newspaper to light a candle to St. Jude, the patron saint

**THE SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR  
THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
January 25th, 2009**

8.00 AM & 9.15 AM  
HOLY COMMUNION  
The Epistle: Roman 12:16-21  
The Gospel: St. John 2:1-11  
11.15 AM MORNING PRAYER  
The Psalter: Psalm 43  
First Lesson: Isaiah 41:8-10, 17-20  
Second Lesson: St. John 4:1-14

of hopeless causes. He would be taking his children to church next Sunday, he said.

Six weeks or so later, I asked him how his kids were enjoying church. He looked at me like I'd lost my wits. "Be serious," he said, "It was only a gust of wind . . ." Actually, I'd wager that the only folks left who still believe the crowd witnessed a miracle that day are the grandmother, the mother and myself.

"An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign and no sign shall be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." In fact, those Pharisees – like the crowd in New York – had had ample opportunities to see signs. But, then, there's none so blind as those that will not see." **GPH**

**COLLECT FOR THE WEEK**

**The Epiphany II Collect**

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *AMEN.*

*Book of Common Prayer, Page 111*

**✠ St. Stephen's Traditional ✠  
Episcopal Church**

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Tel.: Office (410) 560-6776; Night 665-1278  
Web Address: <http://www.ststephens-md.org>

RECTOR: The Ven. Guy P. Hawtin  
ASSOCIATE RECTOR: The Rev. James V. Johnson, Jr.  
VICARS: The Rev. Rhae E. Kelley, The Rev. Robert Menas & The Rev. Jonathan Filkins  
ORGANIST & CHOIRMASTER: Adric  
DIRECTOR OF PASTORAL CARE: Anne Hawkins (410-308-2771)  
WEDDING CO-ORDINATOR: Anne Hawkins (410-308-2771)

**SUNDAY SERVICES**  
8.00am -- Holy Communion  
9.15am -- Holy Communion (Nursery & Church School)  
11.15am -- Morning Prayer (Nursery)  
(1st. Sun. of the month: Holy Communion at 11.15am)

**WEEKDAY SERVICES**  
Wednesday: 6.00pm Evening Prayer  
Friday: Noon: Healing Eucharist  
Saturday: 5.00PM Family Eucharist.

**✠ PARISH PRAYER LIST ✠**

OUR Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the office at 410 560 6776.

**RECOVERY:** McKayla, Rosemarie, Debbie, David, Skippy, Jack, Grace, Bob, Fran, Doris, Carolyn., Ken, Serina, Wyatt, Bobby, Alexander, Erline, Jack, Kathleen, Earle, Judy, Polly, Katherine, Helen; William, Betty, Cal, Wendell, Jack, Peggy, Linda, Millie, Dorcas, Walt., Bruce, Cienna, Tracy, Leliliah, Jennifer, Miriam, Harriet, Karen, Steve, George, Eliza, Mel, John, Randy, James, Sarah, Linda, James, Suzanne, Marian, Edith Anne, Steven, Jeanne, Betty, Judith, Angela, Tammy; Ellen, Jim, Patricia, Henry, Bonnie, Mary Ann, Robert, Christine, Ruth, Dee, Brian, Barbara, Gillian, Eileen, Matthew, George, Bryan, Jason, Jane, Joan, Frances, Mary, Ernie, Pat, Lynn, Michael, Ray, Leslie, Brandon, May, Scott, Stephen, Robert, Danny, Billy, Betty-Ann, Mildred, D'Metrius, Rachel, Laura, Stacey, Frank, Alma, Christine, John, Henry, Eric, Naomi, Pam, Betty, John, Ben, Kevin, Gwen, Elizabeth, William, Gloria, George, Lee Emily, Elsie, Bruce, Regina, Lewis, Madolin, Eudora, Carol, Bernie, Charlene, Josephine, Margaret, Mackie, Jody, Sheila, Jo Anne, Thomas, Jeanne, Sister Catherine-Grace, Mae, Marilyn, Lawrence, Rebecca, Dorothy, Joanne, Albion, Martha, Matthew, Jackie, Charles, Tony, Edward, Kim, Wendell, Vivian, Geradine, John, Maxine, Ann Sharon, Tom, Dennis, Alice & Anita.

**LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE:** Melba, Debbie, Phyllis, Georgetta, Carolyn, Perry, Suzanne, Tony, Robert, Doris, Drake, David, The Norris family; Gillian, Beverley, Adrienn, Jhana, Marla, Matthew, Joan, Laurie, Ellen, Lynn, Mildred, Sarah Lee, Tom, Susan, Debbie, Kathy, Owen, Douglas, Amy, Jo Anne, Mary, Gregory, Isabel, Bobby, Dorothy, Harriet, Darren, Scott, Rebecca, William, Charles, Joyce, Asfa, Eleanor, Kathy, Linda, James, Barry, Ann, Evelyn, Jeanette, Elizabeth, Virginia, Mildred, Chris, Micki, Stephen, Erik, Carol, Sandra, Elsie, Anita. Rhae, John, Robert, Mary, Michael & Loyal.

**ON ACTIVE SERVICE:** Alex Bursi, US. Navy; Capt. Charles Bursi & Lt. Col. Harry Hughes, U.S. Air Force; Lt. Col. R. J. Lytle & PFC Charles E. Heintz, IV, U.S. Army.

**HYMNS FOR THE SECOND  
SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

Sunday, January 18th, 2009

**PROCESSIONAL: 363 (Slane)**  
Lord of all hopefulness

**GRADUAL: 424 (Vox Dilecti)**  
I heard the voice of Jesus

**SERMON: 296 (England's Lane)**  
For the beauty of the earth

**COMMUNION HYMN: 190 (Luise)**  
Let thy blood in mercy poured

**RECESSIONAL: 545 (Woodbird)**  
Hail to the Lord's anointed

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