

**Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 20, 2019**  
**Said Mass**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Year C: Isaiah 62:1–5; Psalm 96:1–10; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; John 2:1–11*

Christians in Egypt celebrated a feast of Jesus' Epiphany in the late second or early third century. It celebrated both Jesus' birth and his baptism.<sup>1</sup> As the celebration spread, it picked up the story from John of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.<sup>2</sup>

In Rome, sometime in the first decades of the fourth century, the celebration of Jesus' birth on December 25 was established.<sup>3</sup> In the Christian West, by the fifth century, Epiphany is associated with the visit of the magi (probably astrologers), Jesus' baptism, and Jesus' first, but not only, miracle in Cana of Galilee.<sup>4</sup> After the transfer of what were honored as the relics of the magi from Milan to Cologne in 1164, the cult of the magi really takes off in the West.<sup>5</sup> They already had received names—Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior—in

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 137–38.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 123–24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 116.

the sixth century. Since the fifteenth century, Western depictions of Melchior portray him as black<sup>6</sup>—I’m not making this up.

In Matthew, with the visit of the magi, God intervenes to save Jesus’ life from the swords of Herod’s soldiers. In John, after the first miracle in Cana of Galilee, Jesus goes to Jerusalem and drives out the money changers and traders with “a whip of cords”<sup>7</sup>—only John adds that detail about a whip.<sup>8</sup> Unlike in Mark and Matthew, where Jesus goes to John and is baptized,<sup>9</sup> Luke mentions that Jesus was baptized but does not describe this baptism. In John, there is no mention of Jesus himself being baptized at all. Yet in all four gospels, Jesus’ proclamation of the dominion of God follows stories about the waters of baptism, whether they touched Jesus or not.<sup>10</sup> Even though Luke and John may not have wanted the Son of God (Luke) or the Word made flesh (John) to submit to having his sins washed away, the baptism John proclaimed and ministered signaled the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 108, n. 58.

<sup>7</sup> John 2:13–17.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 11:15–19; Matthew 21:12–13; Luke 19:45–48.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 1:9–12; Matthew 3:13–17; Luke 3:21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:17; Luke 4:14–15; John 1:32–34.

In today's famous gospel lesson, the meaning of Jesus' words to his mother—"O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come"—are not all that clear. The phrase "O woman" is not derogatory in Greek.<sup>11</sup> "What have you to do with me" is the translators' attempt to render a Hebrew, "What to me and to you?" make sense.<sup>12</sup> Yet New Testament scholar Francis Moloney acknowledges: "Some element of harshness cannot be eliminated from these words."<sup>13</sup>

Note that Jesus' mother does not ask her son to do anything. Instead, following Jesus' sharp words to her, she tells the servants—and the Greek word here is the word for a servant, not a slave—"Whatever he may say to you, do."<sup>14</sup>

It's worth noting there's very little in the gospel about the changing of the water into wine. It's not described—Jesus doesn't say anything or touch

---

<sup>11</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1955), 159.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible 29, 29A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, 1970), I:99.

<sup>13</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>14</sup> John 2:5. My translation.

anything. It's reminiscent in its own way of the first creation story in Genesis.<sup>15</sup> And maybe that's the point. The Word made flesh. The Word in the beginning. The Word who is for us the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of our lives and of all time. He is the Word that does not need even to speak to demonstrate his presence and his power.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2019 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

---

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1:1–2:4a.