

BLACK'S
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

**THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING
TO SAINT JOHN**

ANDREW T. LINCOLN

PORTLAND PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT
UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

 **HENDRICKSON**
PUBLISHERS

 **continuum**
LONDON • NEW YORK

and the action in the Jerusalem temple, the discourses with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, or the further testimony of John the Baptist or the comments of the narrator. The concentration is particularly on Jesus' self-disclosure through his word (cf. e.g. 2.19-21; 3.11, 12, 29, 32-4; 4.26, 29, 41-2). The opening and closing signs do not detract from this perspective. In the first Jesus' Jewish mother believes in the effectiveness of Jesus' word (2.5) and in the second a possibly Gentile official believes in Jesus' word (4.50). The response to Jesus in this section is predominantly positive, even if there are questions raised about the perceptiveness involved in the acceptance of his signs on the part of both Jerusalemites and Galileans (cf. 2.23-5; 4.43-5).

(i) *Water into wine at Cana*

2.1-12

(1) On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. (2) Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. (3) When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' (4) Jesus said to her, 'What concern is that to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come.' (5) His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' (6) Now six stone water jars for the purification rites of the Jews were standing there, each holding from eighty to one hundred and twenty litres. (7) Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them to the brim. (8) He said to them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' So they took it. (9) When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew, the master of the banquet called the bridegroom (10) and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first and the inferior when people become drunk. You have kept the good wine until now.' (11) Jesus did this, the first of the signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (12) After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there a few days.

The first of the 'greater things' that shows Jesus' heaven-sent role is now narrated. This inaugural scene of Jesus' mission sets its stamp on the readers' construal of Jesus' character and identity. The portrayal of the extraordinary deed of turning water into wine associates him both with the plenty of the messianic age and with divine beneficence. The account takes the basic form of a miracle story, a form found frequently in the Synoptic Gospels. So vv. 1-2 provide the initial setting, vv. 3-4 depict

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN

the situation of need, vv. 5–8 set out Jesus' miraculous intervention in response, vv. 9–10 serve as confirmation of the miracle, and v. 11 gives the narrator's concluding comment on the incident. The four pieces of conversation – between Jesus and his mother (vv. 3–4), his mother and the servants (v. 5), Jesus and the servants (vv. 7–8) and the steward and the bridegroom (vv. 9–10) – are elaborations within this structure. As the final verse in this section, v. 12 functions as a transition statement before the next major event in Jerusalem.

1–2 The temporal reference – **on the third day** – has, somewhat surprisingly, received much discussion. There have already been three references to 'the next day' (1.29, 35, 43), which would indicate four days to this point. This reference is taken by some to continue the sequence and produce a week, in which the miracle to be related would occur on the last day. This week has then been compared to the week of creation or to the week running up to the celebration of the giving of the law in later Jewish traditions about the feast of Pentecost. But it is by no means clear that there are any clues in the text strong enough to suggest that the reader is expected to interpret the sequence of days in this way. It is more likely that this temporal marker simply forms a loose connection between the Cana story and the promise to Nathanael, which it can be seen as fulfilling. Some have seen in its language of 'on the third day' an allusion to the resurrection, but 2.19, 20 talk of 'in three days', the phrase, 'on the third day', in connection with the resurrection does not occur in John, and there is nothing in the account of the event at Cana that points specifically to the resurrection. If there is an allusion here, it is more likely that it is to the use of 'on the third day' in Exod. 19.11 (cf. 19.16), when God appears in glory to give the law. Here in John on the third day Jesus manifests his glory which surpasses that associated with the law (see on v. 6).

The narrator supplies the setting for Jesus' inaugural deed – a **wedding at Cana in Galilee**. The modern Khirbet Qana, at which archeological excavations are taking place, is thought to be the most likely site of ancient Cana and is some nine miles north of Nazareth. It is noteworthy that the first and last signs in which Jesus reveals himself are in the midst of key events in the human life cycle – here a wedding and, in the Lazarus episode, a death in the family. The most significant persons for the narrator's account of this first sign are introduced in order of their appearance. The bridegroom, the bride and the other guests do not receive a mention here because the focus will be on Jesus' deed and the wedding simply provides the necessary stage for its occurrence and the interpretation of its significance. The master of the banquet and the bridegroom will have a minor role later in vv. 9–10 in confirming that a miracle has taken place. **The mother of Jesus was there**. Strikingly, in

this Gospel (cf. also 19.25-7) she is not given her personal name of Mary, known from the Synoptics and presumably familiar to Christian readers from the tradition. Attention is concentrated on her familial relationship to Jesus, which enables her to have an important intermediary function in involving her son in dealing with an embarrassing situation of need (cf. vv. 3-5). **Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.** The mention of the disciples here prepares for the narrator's comment about their belief in v. 11, since they do not appear again in the story itself. The response of the other characters to Jesus after his deed is not of interest to the narrator. What counts is the effect of the sign on his disciples.

3-4 The situation of need to which Jesus eventually responds – **the wine ran out** – might appear to modern readers to be a trivial one and therefore Jesus' use of miraculous powers to be somewhat frivolous. Weddings, however, were not simply private family affairs but could often involve a whole village and in Jewish custom the wedding feast lasted for a week with guests coming and going during that time and the groom being responsible for ensuring there was sufficient wine for the whole period, often through organizing donations ahead of time from close relatives and friends. To run out of wine was not simply a social embarrassment but entailed a serious loss of family honour, suggested a lack of cooperative friends and had dire implications for the web of reciprocal obligations in which a person was involved.

When Jesus' mother apprises him of the situation, he rebuffs her. The question **What concern is that to me and to you . . . ?** can denote either a peaceable or hostile response depending on the context. Jesus' question here clearly expresses a refusal to become involved and a rejection of his mother's implied request that he should do so. There is an interesting parallel to this question in 1 Kgs 17.8-24 LXX, where the widow of Zarephath uses precisely the same words to Elijah. The dialogue is surrounded by two miracles. In the first Elijah replenishes the meal and oil that have run out and in the second restores the widow's son to life. Elijah's words, 'Your son lives', are also the same as Jesus uses to the official in 4.50. It could well be that the formulation of the first two Johannine signs draws on the Elijah traditions and is designed to show Jesus as a greater prophet than Elijah in his miraculous powers. Addressing one's mother as **woman** would not have been usual. It need not, however, express a harsh attitude, as is clear from Jesus' use of the same address to the Samaritan woman (4.21), his mother again at the cross (19.26), and Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb (20.15). Yet, employed by a son to a mother, it does suggest distancing.

My hour has not yet come supplies the reason for such distancing. This is the first mention of a theme that will be pervasive in the narrative. Its plot moves towards Jesus' future hour, which is depicted as an hour

of glory and has at its heart his crucifixion and exaltation (cf. 7.30; 8.20; 12.27–8; 13.1; 16.32; 17.1). The hour is also an eschatological hour in that the exaltation of Jesus inaugurates the benefits of the life of the age to come and its resurrection (cf. 4.21; 5.28). There is a further twist to this theme in that John's Gospel frequently collapses two temporal perspectives, that of the post-exaltation period and that of Jesus' earthly mission, so that the hour can already be anticipated in the offers of life and other benefits of the new order that Jesus makes (cf. 'the hour is coming, and now is' in 4.23; 5.25). The force of this first reference to his hour is that Jesus is working according to a schedule and agenda not determined by humans but by God, not instigated by his earthly mother but by his heavenly Father. A similar pattern will be at work later in 7.1–10, as Jesus responds to his brothers' suggestion that he go and show his works publicly at the feast in Jerusalem. Jesus rebuffs them, saying that his time has not yet come, but then goes to the Feast of Tabernacles anyway. The pattern can also be seen with the second and seventh signs. Both the official and the two sisters, Mary and Martha, do not have their request granted immediately but instead receive different forms of rebuff (cf. 4.48; 11.4–6) before Jesus eventually acts. The characterization of Jesus is clear. It is not that he is indifferent to human need. He listens and responds, but he does so on his own terms. His initial refusal to do anything also heightens the tension by prolonging the crisis.

But a further question is raised by this verse. If 'My hour has not yet come' is the reason for not acting, does this mean that when Jesus does act, his hour *has* come and within a very short lapse of time? The hour as a whole remains future, awaiting the end of Jesus' mission, but, as has been noted in other references to the hour, it can be anticipated at points in Jesus' ministry. Since the hour is an hour of glory and the narrator will explicitly state that in this sign Jesus revealed his glory (v. 11), the turning of water into wine should be seen as one of those proleptic eschatological moments.

5 The narrator does not move straight to the miracle but builds suspense again through depicting the response of Jesus' mother. This response comes as a surprise. Jesus' words should have had the effect of discouraging her, but instead she is expectant and tells the servants, **Do whatever he tells you**. With her leaving of the initiative to Jesus and her trust in the efficacy of her son's words, she serves as a model for believing readers.

6 **Now six stone water jars for the purification rites of the Jews were standing there.** A family would normally possess only one such jar, so others may have been brought in for the occasion. But such an observation concentrates attention on the surface level of the narrative. The number and size of the jars remain unusual and the symbolic nature

of what will
The number
of the old o
jar that cor
without se
evangelist's
established
of narrativ
represents
that each
underlines

7–8 The j
but precis
Jesus' resp
the need
the jars
compliance
they have
again sug
instructed
servant w
only othe
tone dov
that only
which lie

9–10 On
the samp
the serv
This forc
of variou
(cf. e.g. 1
that the
in abund
coming,
all the h
... they
Isa. 25.6
tradition
for life
rating t
The
good

of what will occur is signalled by the mention of Jewish purification rites. The number six may well then represent the imperfection or insufficiency of the old order of Judaism. The objection that Jesus does not add a seventh jar that contains the wine is insubstantial. Six can represent imperfection without seven as perfection having to be explicitly mentioned, and the evangelist's fondness for seven as representing completion is in any case established by his reporting of seven signs in the ministry and his shaping of narrative episodes into seven scenes. Jesus will transform that which represents the old order into that which symbolizes the new. The note that each jar held **from eighty to one hundred and twenty litres** underlines the abundance of the provision of wine Jesus will make.

7-8 The process which produces the supply of wine is depicted briefly, but precisely when and how the transformation occurs are not narrated. Jesus' response is to give an order that appears to have nothing to do with the need that has been pointed out. The command to the servants – **Fill the jars with water** – suggests that the jars stood empty. The servants' compliance with the command has been prepared for by the instructions they have received from Jesus' mother. That they fill the jars **to the brim** again suggests the abundance of the supply that will follow. They are then instructed to take a sample to **the master of the banquet**, the head servant who was in charge of the arrangements for the festivities (cf. the only other extant use of the Greek term in Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 7.27.7). To tone down the miracle by suggesting, as some commentators have done, that only the water that was drawn out became wine is to miss its point, which lies precisely in the extravagance of Jesus' provision.

9-10 Only through the reaction of the master of the banquet upon tasting the sample is it made clear that **the water . . . had become wine**. Unlike the servants, he does not know from where (πόθεν) the wine has come. This foreshadows what will be said about people's ignorance of the origins of various aspects of the new order, including Jesus himself, its inaugurator (cf. e.g. 3.8; 4.11; 7.27-8; 8.14; 9.29-30; 19.9) and is another of the signals that the wine symbolizes that new order. In the Jewish Scriptures wine in abundance signifies the salvation of the end time – 'The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when . . . the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, . . . they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine' (Amos 9.13-14; cf. also Isa. 25.6; Jer. 31.12; Joel 3.18). 2 *Bar.* 29.5 and 1 *Enoch* 10.19 continue this tradition in their depictions of the messianic age. In addition, wine stands for life and joy (cf. Ps. 104.15; Eccl. 10.19; Sir. 31.27-8; 40.20). In inaugurating the new order, Jesus provides life that is to be enjoyed.

The comment of the master of the banquet – **Everyone serves the good wine first and the inferior when people become drunk. You**

have kept the good wine until now – functions on a number of levels. It confirms indirectly that a miracle has taken place, though its speaker does not know that this is what he has witnessed. It indicates that Jesus' supply has not only saved the bridegroom's honour but also enhances it. His hospitality surpasses the norm, even if the guests might not be in the best condition to appreciate it. There is also an irony in the master of the banquet attributing the supply of good wine to the bridegroom, when in reality it has come from Jesus, who will shortly be depicted as the true bridegroom (3.29). Jesus is a guest at a wedding, in which the bridegroom fails in a crucial aspect of his role. He fulfils the role of the bridegroom and does so in a way that exceeds all its usual expectations. In addition, the reversal of what is alleged to be the usual practice at such feasts also has symbolic force by underscoring the time sequence in the order of salvation. The best comes last; the good wine of the new age has been saved 'until now'. The 'now' is at a wedding banquet and in the Jewish Scriptures this serves as another image of the end time, when God, the bridegroom, rejoices in his bride, Israel (cf. Isa. 62.4–5). Elsewhere in the New Testament Rev. 19.7, 9 presents Jesus as the bridegroom at the eschatological wedding banquet.

11 Jesus' miraculous act is described as **the first of the signs**. The term translated as 'first' (ἀρχή) can also mean beginning (cf. 1.1–2) or foundation. This opening miraculous deed will set the pattern for the rest. In the LXX σημεῖον, sign, was used of visible phenomena, not necessarily miraculous, that conveyed further knowledge or meaning. It is associated with Moses in Exod. 4.1–17, where three miraculous signs are meant to confirm to the people his call from God and to produce belief. One of these is the turning of water into blood. Later the plagues are described as signs, designed to pass judgement on Pharaoh and to show that Yahweh is the one true God (Exod. 7.3; 10.2). Deut. 13.1–5, however, establishes that the display of signs and wonders are not sufficient in themselves to authenticate a prophet; the prophet's teaching must also be in line with God's commandments. In the Synoptics Jesus, of course, performs miracles but they are not designated as signs. Instead, when asked for a sign, he states that none will be granted (Mark 8.11–12), except the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12.39; 16.4; Luke 11.29–30). In Graeco-Roman writings 'sign' had a broad variety of connotations, but in religious contexts most frequently referred to portents or omens and in discussions of forensic rhetoric referred to the sort of argument or evidence that did not in itself constitute proof but, as part of a cumulative case, could be convincing. In John the signs testify to who Jesus is, just as Moses' signs had testified to his status as God's messenger. But they are not unambiguous and indeed the opposition to Jesus believe that, like the false prophet of Deut. 13, he is deceiving or leading the people astray (cf. 7.12, 47). As in the

Synoptics, when asked, Jesus does not submit to the demand for some unambiguous proof on which people might base their belief (cf. 4.48; 6.30). Nevertheless, he performs signs which, for those with eyes to see, serve to establish and confirm his identity. Given the forensic themes in this Gospel, it may well be that its audience would have also associated 'signs' with their rhetorical function and considered them not as proofs but as part of the cumulative witness of the narrative to Jesus' identity. After all, Jesus' works are said to testify to who he is (cf. 5.36; 10.25) and the evangelist's statement of purpose confirms that the signs have been written down as part of the Gospel's overall testimony in order that the readers might continue to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (cf. 20.30-1; 21.24).

In this opening sign Jesus **revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him**. Glory has been mentioned earlier in the prologue, where it is that of the incarnate Logos and full of grace and truth, replacing the grace and truth associated with the law and Moses (1.14, 16, 17). The reality of the incarnation is underlined by the sheer materiality of this action in the midst of normal human life, while at the same time the divine glory of the Logos is disclosed precisely in and through his enabling water to become wine. Again, such glory surpasses that associated with the law, as the wine of the end time replaces the water used for the law's purification rites. This perspective is reinforced, if, as noted above, 'on the third day' may be seen as an allusion to the glory manifested in the giving of the law in Exod. 19.16. Jesus' glory both awaits its full demonstration and confirmation in the future hour of death and exaltation and is disclosed in anticipation in his earthly mission. The last sign in that mission, the raising of Lazarus, is also explicitly connected to the revelation of this glory (cf. 11.4, 40) and the *inclusio* thereby provided suggests that this is the perspective from which to view all the signs.

The narrator gives no explanation of how the disciples knew about the miracle when the master of the banquet did not. Nevertheless, they are said to have believed and their response to this sign raises the question of the relation between signs and belief, which will surface again in the narrative, most immediately in 2.23-5. Here the disciples have been shown to have already a considerable measure of belief in Jesus (cf. 1.35-51) and so presumably the sign strengthens and confirms them in that belief. More generally, the evangelist will be concerned neither to advocate a faith that is merely dependent on signs nor to devalue such signs. Instead the self-disclosure of Jesus through the signs is seen as creating the conditions which can initiate or reinforce the response of faith (cf. e.g. 10.37-8; 11.15; 20.31).

12 This transitional verse describes a move to Capernaum after the wedding and a limited stay there on the part of Jesus, his family members and the disciples. His **brothers** have not been mentioned as being at

the wedding, but, as these were family affairs, it is highly likely that the narrator intends it to be understood that they were also there. They will reappear in 7.1–10. Capernaum was at the north-western corner of the Sea of Galilee and features in the Synoptics as a centre of Jesus' Galilean activity. In John it has less emphasis, being mentioned in 4.46b and then providing the setting for Jesus' discourse on the bread of life in 6.17, 24, 59. The narrator's comment at this point that Jesus and his entourage remain there only **a few days** directs readers' attention away from this location and prepares them for his next move – to Jerusalem (v. 13).

While the form of this miracle story is familiar from the Synoptic tradition, the miracle itself is unique to John's Gospel. The most likely scriptural influence on the shaping of this account is provided by the Elijah stories in 1 Kings 17, and the conceptual and linguistic parallels between them and the first two signs in John have already been noted (see comments on v. 4). The parabolic sayings in the Synoptics about the bridegroom and new wine (Mark 2.18–22 parr.) also feature in discussions of the origins of the Cana miracle. The Lukan version of this cluster is particularly interesting. In response to the criticism that his disciples eat and drink, Jesus says, 'Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?' (Luke 5.34). The sayings about new wine requiring fresh wineskins then include the critical observation that those who drink old wine are not able to appreciate the new – 'And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says "The old is good"' (Luke 5.39). Certainly the account of the miracle reflects these themes. Disciples and wedding guests drink freely in the presence of the true bridegroom, who supplies wine in abundance, and here it is the new that is most definitely the good wine. Whether the Lukan sayings in themselves would provide a sufficient basis for the construction of the miracle story is another matter.

The closest parallels to the actual miracle and its significance are in fact found in the Dionysus legends, despite the too easy dismissal of such parallels by some commentators. Dionysus was the Greek god of fertility and new life and was known as Bacchus in the Roman world. In the myths of his origins he is depicted as the divine son of Zeus and of a mortal mother, Semele. Among his titles were the Saviour, the Fruit Bringer and the Abundance of Life. He was particularly famed as the god of wine, who had given this gift to mortals. During the spring festival the drinking of wine was the most prominent feature of his cult and it represented the fullness of life and the presence of the god. In the second century BCE Pausanias (*Descr.* 2.26) reports a miracle involving wine occurring among Dionysus' adherents – 'three pots are brought into the building by the priests and set down empty in the presence of the citizens and of any strangers who may chance to be in the country. The doors of

the building
may be so
sealed, and
The basic
there is n
however,
does occ
springs
god (Pi
striking
came t
can or
not y
herds
did y
vine
Dion
him
Joh
cor
wa
als
Is
th
r
t

the building are sealed by the priests themselves and by any others who may be so inclined. On the morrow they are allowed to examine the seals, and on going into the building they find the pots filled with wine.' The basic points of contact with John's story are obvious, although here there is no water in the pots that is transformed into the wine. Elsewhere, however, there are stories of Dionysus in which such a transformation does occur. Rivers taste of wine (Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 1.7) and fountains and springs produce wine on the days that celebrate the appearance of the god (Pliny, *Nat.* 2.231, 31.13; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist.* 3.66.2). Particularly striking is the story in Achilleus Tatius (*Leuc. Clit.* 2.2.1-6) of how wine came to the people of Tyre. Dionysus visits a hospitable herdsman who can only offer him the same drink 'as that of the oxen, since vines did not yet exist'. They drink a toast and the drink becomes wine. 'The herdsman, drinking of it, danced for joy, and said to the god: "Where did you get this purple water, my friend?"' Dionysus then takes him to a vine and says, 'Here is your water . . . this is its source.' Since worship of Dionysus was widespread in the Graeco-Roman world and stories about him well known, particularly in Asia Minor and Ephesus, at the very least John's readers would have picked up on the implied comparison and contrast. But if that is the case, then it is equally likely that the account was composed with these parallels in view. The Dionysian stories were also known in Palestine and may have already penetrated the retelling of Israel's history. Haggadic legends include miraculous supplies of wine in the stories of the patriarchs and depict the water which comes from the rock struck by Moses as tasting of new wine (cf. *Mek. Exod.* 18.9). Philo had already depicted both Melchizedek (cf. *Leg. Alleg.* 3.82) and the Logos (cf. *De Som.* 2. 249) in Dionysiac terms. There is a further dimension to the parallels. Rulers were depicted as emulating Dionysus and his role as the provider of life was attributed to them. They include Alexander the Great and Roman emperors such as Trajan, Hadrian and Commodus, with an inscription about the last proclaiming him as the 'new Dionysus'. Martial (*Epig.* 8.26) even describes Domitian as surpassing Bacchus. In this light the evangelist begins his account of Jesus' deeds with a story of a prodigious supply of wine that sets this Jewish Messiah who is believed to be God over against any other gods and rulers who are held to be the givers of life in abundance.

Whether there is any actual incident in the life of Jesus that gave rise to this story is extremely hard to know. Some hold that it is likely that the evangelist himself considered he was retelling a miracle story from his tradition that had a basis in the ministry of Jesus, since for him a 'sign' is not merely symbolic but a concrete deed that points to the glory of Jesus and the significance of his mission. How present-day readers deal with the historicity of so-called nature miracles would then be another matter, and negative evaluations need not be thought to be dependent on

a world-view that rules out the miraculous altogether. But the evangelist is also capable of creating history-like material that points to the significance of Jesus and his mission (see, for example, the later discussion of the conversations of Jesus with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman or the Lazarus story or the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side). In this case, in particular, there are strong reasons to think that this story may have been the result of such a process. All the other signs have some parallel in the miracle stories of the Synoptic tradition, but this first one is unique and its recounting of the actual miracle is more allusive than in any of the other sign narratives. There is a further peculiarity about the way it is told. Of all the characters actually participating in the event only the servants, who had drawn off the sample taken to the master of the banquet, are said to have known its origin and none of them, including Jesus' mother, are depicted as then having a response to its miraculous element. Only the disciples, who have not been involved in what happened and whose understanding of it is not explained, are said to have believed in Jesus as a result. The rarity of the term used for the master of the banquet has already been noted but his function also raises historical difficulties. His final comment suggests a familiarity with the bridegroom that seems more appropriate to a friend or fellow-guest than to a servant. This is a family occasion in a small Galilean peasant town, while, even allowing for Hellenization of Galilee, a master of the banquet is more at home in the Graeco-Roman urban setting of a symposium, where he would usually be chosen from among the guests. But more important than this apparent importation into the story is the observation that nearly all its features only take their force as part of a sign because they are elements within specifically Johannine stylistic structures, literary motifs and theological themes. Jesus' relation to his mother, the pattern of request, rebuff and then response on Jesus' own terms, the motifs of the hour and of the ignorance of the origin of Jesus' gift, the theme of fulfilment/replacement of Jewish observances, the spectacular nature of the miracle (the other signs all have features showing Jesus as surpassing the miraculous activities depicted in the Synoptics), the symbolism of the wine as the abundance Jesus provides for living and of the wedding at which Jesus is the true bridegroom (cf. 3.29 and the betrothal-type scene which follows in 4.1-42) – all these key ingredients of the meaning of the account derive from the evangelist's distinct perspective which fashions the Gospel as a whole. If one were to add to this list influences from the Dionysus tradition, in which pots are filled with wine and water becomes wine, then it would become almost impossible to isolate within the present account any core historical tradition for this event set in Cana. In fact, the essential content of the whole story depends on a view of Jesus that arose only after the resurrection, namely, that he was a divine being.

But preoccupation with matters of facticity, however understandable on

2.1-12

the part of
story, which
readers of
Israel and
have four
claim be
Gospel c
indeed i
story of
signs. N
but Jes
the so
water
not r
that i
His i
the
Dic
hur
cel
say
T
p
c
a
i

the part of the modern reader, may well lead to missing the point of this story, which lies precisely in its extraordinariness and extravagance. Ancient readers of the Gospel, with knowledge of God's activities in the history of Israel and of the reports about the deeds of other gods, are not likely to have found it offensive or incredible but to have seen it as part of the overall claim being made in the narrative about Jesus' divine power. After all, this Gospel does attempt to persuade its readers that Jesus has divine status and is indeed the divine Logos incarnate. The evangelist, then, chooses to tell the story of an inaugural deed which will provide the paradigm for the other signs. Messianic titles have already been applied to Jesus by his first followers, but Jesus is to be seen as surpassing ordinary messianic expectations and as the sort of Messiah who is himself divine. The depiction of him as turning water into wine at a wedding banquet, thereby ensuring that the wine does not run out and, what is more, that the best is saved until last, makes clear that through his mission Jesus is offering the gift of the life of the new age. His bestowing of the conditions for human flourishing surpasses, explicitly, the provision of the law and, implicitly, the claims of rival gods, especially Dionysus, and imperial rulers. Wine, grain and oil were the three staples of human existence and an appropriate quantity of wine enabled life to be celebrated with joy. It is no accident that the first sign and the last 'I Am' saying with a predicate – 'I am the true vine' (15.1) – emphasize this theme. The sheer quantity in Jesus' provision of wine will be replicated later in the provision of bread and fish for five thousand and its significance is spelled out in the mission statement of 10.10 – 'I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance' (cf. also 1.16). The prologue has already stated that the created world came into being through the Logos and that in the Logos was life. This sign now shows the incarnate Logos exercising his power over the created elements by transforming water into wine and by dispensing the life he embodies. In composing this first sign, the evangelist stakes out the bold claim the overall narrative makes about Jesus. The other signs, which have Synoptic equivalents, will provide corroborating evidence of his life-giving powers. There is a further dimension to its paradigmatic function. It suggests already that the nature of Jesus' power and of his bestowal of life will also be very different from what would traditionally have been expected of a messianic figure or of other gods and rulers. Jesus' statement that his hour has not yet come and the narrator's comment that this sign revealed Jesus' glory anticipate the fuller development of the notion that the supreme hour of Jesus' glory will paradoxically entail his crucifixion, and his mother's only other appearance in the narrative will be at that point. From the evangelist's perspective, Jesus' divine power and glory displayed in this sign is most truly seen in the apparent powerlessness and shame of the cross, and the supply of abundant life, indicated by the extravagant quantity of wine, has been made available for humans only by the incarnate Logos' absorption of death. The fulfilment of the promised vision of the marriage of heaven and earth

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN

through the Son of Man (cf. 1.51) is given its first instalment in the story of the sign performed at a wedding in Cana, but this story also points ahead to the crucial final instalment, to the hour when this Son of Man will be lifted up (cf. 3.14; 8.28; 12.32-3).

(ii) *Jesus and the temple*

2.13-22

(13) The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) He found in the temple those selling cattle, sheep and doves and money changers seated there. (15) Having made a whip¹ out of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, both sheep and cattle, and poured out the money changers' coins and overturned their tables, (16) and said to those selling doves, 'Take these out of here; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.' (17) His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' (18) The Jews then responded and said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing these things?' (19) Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' (20) The Jews then said, 'This temple has been in construction forty-six years, and are you going to raise it up in three days?' (21) But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (22) When, therefore, he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

In its context in the narrative this passage follows on from the incident of Jesus' turning of water into wine, which adumbrated the theme of his fulfilment of the old order within Judaism. Up until this point Jesus has been depicted in Galilee, but now the same theme is played out in a dramatic new way as, at the time of the major Jewish festival, Passover, Jesus goes to Jerusalem and to the heart of Jewish religious life – the temple. There, at the beginning of his public mission and through a symbolic act in the tradition of the prophets, he provokes a confrontation with the religious authorities. Since Jerusalem and the temple were regarded as God's own possession in a special way, Jesus' activity there can also be seen as a graphic illustration of the prologue's formulation about the Logos coming to 'what was his own' (1.11a).

After its depiction of the setting in v. 13, this account falls into two parts. The first (vv. 14-17) treats Jesus' actions and accompanying words in the temple incident itself, while the second (vv. 18-22) relates the

¹ Some manuscripts read ὡς φραγέλλον, 'like a whip' or 'a sort of whip'. Despite the early date of two of the witnesses – p⁶⁶ and p⁷⁵ – this appears to be a clear scribal attempt to soften the portrayal of Jesus' action.