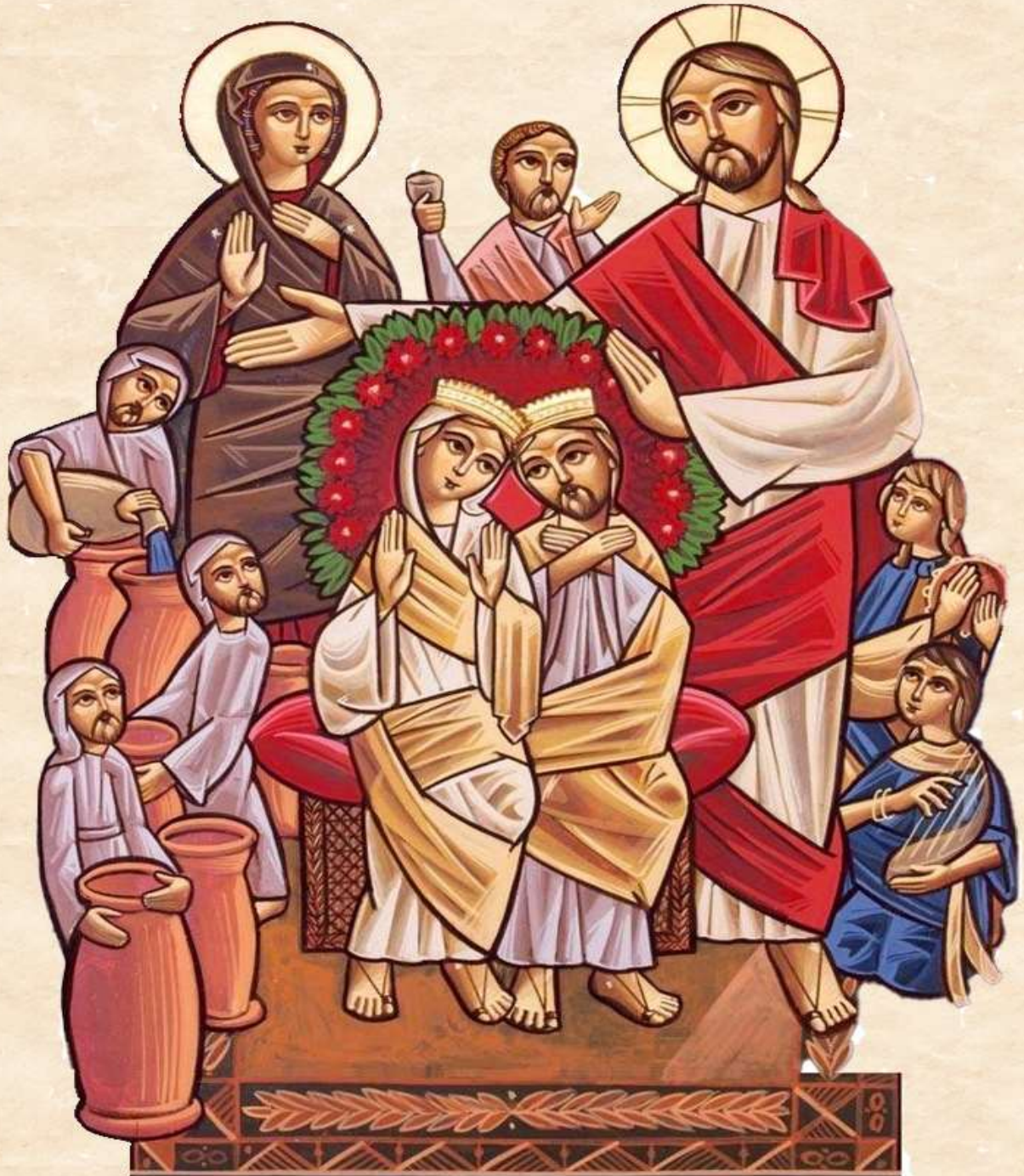




# *Christ Begins His Ministry At the Wedding of Cana of Galilee*



*According to Saint Jacob of Serugh and the Church Fathers*



*Preparation and Commentary  
Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty*

# **Our Christ Begins His Ministry At the Wedding in Cana of Galilee**

According to Saint Jacob of Serugh  
& the Church Fathers

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Preparation and Commentary

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## Table of Contents

The Groom who Rejoices the Souls .....	3
The Wedding in Cana of Galilee and the Messianic Wedding.....	3
Where did this miracle occur? .....	7
Why was it said: “Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding” (John 2: 2)?.....	8
Saint Mary's motherhood and her concern for our needs.....	11
Did Saint Mary believe that her son was able to miraculously provide wine for the wedding? .....	12
Jesus' wine is superior in quality to the natural wine .....	14
Why did he call her ‘Woman’?.....	15
Saint Mary invites us to obey the Lord .....	19
What is behind the six waterpots? .....	20
“Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” (John 2: 7).....	23
Then he said to them: “Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it.” (John 2: 8). .....	25
“When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.” (John 2: 9).....	25
“ And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” (John 2:10).....	25
“ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:10).....	26
The Almighty Christ works like the Father and with the same power....	28
Where is he who denies the divinity of the Son?.....	29

# The Groom who Rejoices the Souls

## The Wedding in Cana of Galilee and the Messianic Wedding

We previously talked about the baptism of Christ, the lover of mankind, in the Jordan River. After that, Christ allowed Satan to tempt Him and He returned victoriously from this war for the sake of His bride, the Church. Now His service begins! St. John the Evangelist presents to us the first sign that Christ performed, the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. A new Messianic era started, in which the water of cleansing according to the old law was transformed into wine of a new kind.

The Jews awaited the Messianic era, which is marked by an overflow of good things, accompanied by tremendous joy. This was expressed in an allegorical manner that showed our inability to speak of this Messianic era in any human language, as it says in the book of Second Baruch 29: "There are a thousand branches on each vine and every branch carries a thousand clusters and every cluster carries a thousand grapes, and every grape contains a Cor (approx. 120 gallons) of wine...this will be for those at the end of the world." Papias in the second century spoke about this idea, when he envisioned the coming of Christ on earth to reign for a thousand years and the imaginary vineyards contained in His kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

In Saint Mark's Gospel, Christ's ministry was introduced by saying: "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." (Mark 1:14). Here, the Evangelist tells us about the beginning of this gospel by Christ attending the wedding in Cana of Galilee and turning water into wine. He preached by His presence and brought joy to the newlyweds, their families, and friends. Christ likened the kingdom of heaven to "ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." (Matthew 25:1) and "like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son," (Matthew 22:1). Christ considered His dwelling among His disciples, a transformation of their lives into a wedding. The Lord was asked: "Why do the disciples of John and of

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<sup>1</sup>Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty: The Apostolic Fathers, 1993, p. 137.

the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.'" (Mark 2:18-20). The Apostle says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The invitation of our Lord Jesus to the wedding was not meaningless. If Christ is the heavenly bridegroom, then those invited to the wedding are the firstborns of the New Testament Church, the spiritual bride. The wedding in Cana of Galilee was done according to the law and the Jewish tradition, but it carries in its depths a hidden wedding that no one realized, the marriage of Christ to His Church, which does not just extend for a week as in the Jewish rite (Gen 29:27; Judges 14:12), but rather for eternity until it is revealed in great glory on the great day of the Lord (Rev. 21: 2).

### **Concerning the wedding in Cana of Galilee, the Bible confirms the following facts:**

1. Our Lord Jesus began His work in the wedding, in order to reveal His love for mankind and to carry them to His heavens as to a bridal chamber where they will enjoy a heavenly joy and reflect the splendor of His glory upon them. He confirms that He came into the world to transform our lives into a joyful wedding, by transforming the water of our life into wine which resembles eternal spiritual joy (Isaiah 55: 1; Ephesians 5: 18-20).
  - ❖ The word of God descended from heaven in order to become the Bridegroom of the human nature, so He took it as a dwelling place for Him, in order to betroth her to Himself and lead her towards Him and thus bear the fruits of spiritual wisdom.

#### **St. Cyril the Great**

- ❖ For He who made wine on that day at the marriage feast, in those six water-pots, which He commanded to be filled with water, the

self-same does this every year in vines...it has lost its marvellousness by its constant recurrence.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ What wonder if He came to that house to a marriage, having come into this world for a marriage? For indeed, if He did not come to marry, He would not have had a bride here. But what does the apostle say? "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2)...Thus, He has a bride here whom He has redeemed by His blood, and to whom He has given the Holy Spirit as a pledge. He has freed her from the bondage of the devil: He died for her sins and is risen again for her justification. (Romans 4:25) Who will make such offerings to his bride?

The bridegroom who was told: "As for you, you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10) represents the person of the Lord. Because good wine - I mean the scripture - Christ has preserved until now.<sup>3</sup>

### **St. Augustine**

Saint Jacob of Serugh takes us from the wedding in Cana of Galilee to a wedding in the depths of our souls. Our Christ offers us the new holy wine, which is His practical and sacred teaching, where He was hung on the cross, offering Himself as a sacrifice of love and a sacred cradle to his bride. Our souls drink from this wine and become filled with love that increases unceasingly. Christ reveals to us His divine mysteries which cannot be expressed in any human language and leads us into His eternal glories.

- ❖ Son, increase the good wine at the feast! Give me to drink of the overflowing sweetness in Your teachings...

O Son of the Kingdom who was invited to the banquet, do not delay Your coming when I am in need.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 8:1*

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 8:4.*

I have invited you not to Cana but to my mind. My Lord, place in me the sweetness of Your hymns.

Your church is greater than the banquet to which You were invited, so multiply the wine that intoxicates and fills her.

They invited You and You went to the table of worldly things, come to me for I have invited You to a spiritual banquet,

There, You sat at the banquet like a poor one and they did not know You, pour your gifts here (on Your Church) because they will know it ...

You abounded wine among the deniers, but they were not worthy because they drank and marveled but did not glorify You as they should.

Help me to speak about this wonderful miracle so that I may water your church with the wine of Your new teachings.

Draw close, O hearers, and suck from the sweetness of these teachings, and thank God's grace as befitting.

How disgraced are those who drank and did not praise, because they only heard the news of the miracle and admired it.

The clear vision was nothing to the deniers. How strange that only hearing made you believe!

Those who saw yet did not comprehend the miracles. Blessed are you, because you offered praise, and you did not see.

### **St. Jacob of Serugh**

2. He turned the water used for cleansing into wine, so the beginning of His ministry is to take us away from the literalism of the law, where the cleanses are, to spiritual joy in a new era with a new beginning. He began working with the young newlyweds to affirm Christ's interest in youth and His wish to become their friend to grant them uninterrupted joy and satisfy their needs that no one else could provide to them.

3. He enters us into His eternal wedding, which takes place in His holy temple, so He cleansed the temple (John 2: 13-17). The Jews asked for a sign (John 2:18) but He offered the sign of His death and resurrection (John 2:19), which His enemies could not comprehend and tried to distort but His friends understood it after His resurrection (Matthew 26:61; 27:40; John 10: 18). The Evangelist took us from the wedding to the Passover, to see our Christ cleanse the temple from the sellers and money changers. He confirms the establishment of a new temple in three days (John 2:19), shifting our eyes from the stone temple to the temple of the inner soul, where God establishes His kingdom within us. Thus, in the new era, we have a new temple that never gets old.

### **Where did this miracle occur?**

The Lord began His work in Cana of Galilee, in a remote corner of the state, far from the capital “Jerusalem” to declare that He had come to serve and not to seek glory from people. He came to serve the simple and those who would not resist Him like the scribes, the Pharisees, the chief priests, and other religious leaders did.

Saint **Jacob of Serugh** believes that the Savior would have gone to Cana, whether or not He was invited. He instructed the wedding organizers to invite Him, because He wanted to deliver a message to humanity concerning the church and the heavenly wedding.

- ❖ His will descended and urged those who are inviting to invite Him too... His command urged them and woke them up to approach Him and after they invited Him, He did not delay in going. He would have gone even if they did not invite Him, that He may perform the sign and declare His divinity to the world... He had been invited by His own will before He went and then those coming from the groom's house invited him ...

They invited Him like a needy, and He went because He was ready to pursue His great path.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**



**Bede** believes that “Cana of Galilee” means the “Zeal of Emigration” as though the spiritual wedding is achieved by those who have the zeal of migrating themselves from vices to virtues, and from the earthly to the heavenly, through hope and love.

- ❖ The wedding was not held in Jerusalem but outside of Judea, as it were, in the country of the Gentiles – Galilee of the Gentiles, as the prophet said. It is, I suppose, altogether obvious that the synagogue of the Jews rejected the Bridegroom from heaven and that the church of the Gentiles [gladly] received him.<sup>4</sup>

### **St. Cyril the Great**

This is the first Christian marriage that took place in the world, as it was according to the will of God. Otherwise, the organizers of the wedding would not have invited Jesus and his disciples. As for the presence of the Virgin Mary in the wedding, it shows that she was a living example of the pure bride who lovingly opens her heart for every person. “The mother of Jesus was there” (John 2:1). Most probably, she was not one of the guests but was one of the family members, so she realized that they ran out of wine, something that the guests would not realize except for the wedding organizers.

This did not happen without meaning. If this wedding was the first sign Jesus made to link the Old Testament with the New Testament, then the mother of Jesus who is from the tribe of Judah, a member of the Old Testament family, intercedes to her Son to restore the lost joy of salvation, because the wine of joy ran out and there were no prophets for a long time, so grief and bitterness reigned over the people.

### **Why was it said: “Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding” (John 2: 2)?**

Christ and His disciples did not leave the wedding, which reveals the spirituality of the newlyweds, their families, and their friends. They were all

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<sup>4</sup> COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

acting according to the commandments of the Lord. They did not invite Jesus for a while and then asked Him to leave when the wedding would turn into an immoral party.

- ❖ He came to the wedding to work miracles rather than to feast with them, and yet more to sanctify the very beginning of the birth of man: I mean so far as pertains to the flesh. For it was fitting that He, Who was renewing the very nature of man, and refashioning it all for the better, should not only impart His blessing to those already called into being, but also prepare before grace for those soon to be born, and make holy their entrance into being. By sanctifying marriage, he removed the old sorrow of childbirth.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ The woman was told by God: “In pain you shall bring forth children;” (Genesis 3:16). How then was it not needful that we should thrust off this curse too, or how else could we escape a condemned marriage? This too the Saviour, being loving to man, removes. **For He, the Delight and Joy of all, honoured marriage with His Presence, that He might expel the old shame of childbearing.** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

### St. Cyril the Great

St. Jacob of Serugh sees in this wedding, Our Lord Jesus the True Light taking us away from corruption to holiness and from darkness to heavenly light, as pours His beauty on the human soul as His holy bride. As for those invited to the wedding, they are the heavenly ones, who are amazed by the marvelous love of the Savior.

The Holy One raised the Gentiles, that used to worship idols and relish abominations, and made them an icon for their heavenly Groom, not tolerating the corruption in which they lived in for a long time. The Heavenly ones look to us and find us drunk by the salvific work of our Bridegroom, as we always pray to be in union with Him, so that we may live forever in inexpressible glories.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

- ❖ He came to betroth the bride of light by His crucifixion, so He went first to where the worldly bride was.

It was befitting of Him to reveal His victory in the wedding, so that all the attendees may become disciples by that miracle.

Christ was also a Bridegroom for old generations, and He came to betroth the church of the gentiles through His sacrifice.

**They invited Him and He went, so that when He invites them, they would go with Him, and He sat among them for them to accompany Him on His table.**

There, He showed that marriage is pure, and that marriage is revered by God...

If marriage itself and fellowship were impure, He would not have entered and partook in the banquet.

If marriage (and begetting children) was not beautiful, then He would not have dwelt in Mary in holiness...

He entered the wedding with a hidden gift and sat at the feast to bless the fellowship bed.

He saw that the marriage was well blessed by His Father, and that the bridal chamber of the worldly bride is pure.

He saw that the wedding was not blemished by impurity, so He desired to start His miracles from there.

He found that teaching would be perfect at the banquet, so He longed for His ministry to shine there.

The wise wanted to make a wonderous sign using wine, so that there would be an overflow of teaching during the banquet.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

- ❖ The Savior came to the marriage not of His own accord; for He was being bidden by many voices of the Saints. But wine failed the feasters; for the law perfected nothing, the Mosaic writing sufficed not for

perfect enjoyment, but neither did the natural law implanted within us save us.<sup>6</sup>

### **St. Cyril the Great**

- ❖ I said before that He was best known in Galilee; therefore, they invite Him to the marriage, and He comes; for He looked not to His own honor, but to our benefit. “but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. “ (Philippians 2:7), would much less disdain to be present at the marriage of servants; He who sat down with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:11), would much less refuse to sit down with those present at the marriage.

Assuredly they who invited Him had not formed a proper judgment of Him, nor did they invite Him as some great one, but merely as an ordinary acquaintance; and this the Evangelist has hinted at, when he says, ‘The mother of Jesus was there’, and His brethren. Just as they invited her and His brethren, they invited Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

### **St. John Chrysostom**

## **Saint Mary's motherhood and her concern for our needs**

The Evangelist says: "And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”." (John 2: 3) The Evangelist did not mention that Saint Mary was invited to the wedding, but Jesus and his five disciples (at that time) were invited. She was present as a family member.

Just as Christ is invited to attend by prayer, He came with His saints (disciples) to transform the wedding into a holy church and to shower the newlyweds and all those present from His heavenly joy. Even in his private room, the believer feels the divine presence, just as he feels that heaven is not far from him and that death is unable to separate the striving church in the world from the victorious church in heaven. We do not cease to pray for

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:1.

the sake of the dead just as those in heaven do not cease to pray for the salvation of all humanity.

- ❖ The blessed Mary saw that they ran out of wine, and she knew that the time for preaching had come...

The smart one only said: "They have no wine," but in her mind such things were said:

"Show Your power by miracles for You are the Son of God. Now is the time for the world to see Your power,

You are the Son of God, so reveal Your real power and call on the earth to believe that You are God,

How long will You hide Yourself when you are God? Arise and reveal Your power to the world,

O You, who enriches people, why do You walk in poverty? Open your treasures and distribute Your wealth among the needy,

Reach out with your tenderness to the bridegroom whom You are sitting on his table, lest the feeling of need spread in the house that invited You."

This purpose was in Mary's mind when she said to her son: "They have no wine."

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Did Saint Mary believe that her son was able to miraculously provide wine for the wedding?**

Christ had not previously performed a miraculous act in public before, but Saint Mary, knowing His divine capabilities, goodness, and kindness for others, expected that He would definitely do something to provide for the need in the wedding.

- ❖ How then, asks some one, came it into the mind of His mother to imagine anything great of Him? He was now beginning to reveal Himself, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and

manifested His glory;" (John 2:11). And before all this, the Conception itself and all its attending circumstances had inspired her with a very great opinion of the Child; for, said Luke" but His mother kept all these things in her heart."<sup>8</sup>

### St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ **"They have no wine."** This was Israel's case. They had no prophets for 300 years and were deprived from the joy of salvation. As the Prophet Joel says: "Awake, you drunkards, and weep; And wail, all you drinkers of wine, Because of the new wine, For it has been cut off from your mouth." (Joel 1:5)

The Prophet asks them to wake up from their drunkenness for they drank the wine of the world which corrupted their minds and destroyed their true wisdom. It is fitting for them to wake up from drunkenness to weep and wail over the poverty they reached and to enjoy the wine of divine love that would fill their depths with true divine joy! Let the old Israel weep and wail because the new heavenly wine has been cut off from their mouth when they rejected the indwelling of the Spirit in them and let the new Israel - the believers of the New Testament - rejoice because they rejected the wine of the world, that is, the works of the old man, so that they would enjoy the wine of the living Spirit and the righteousness of Christ! The Apostle says: "so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:21)

The mother of Jesus, the daughter of Israel, discovered what had befallen her people, so she cried to the heavenly Bridegroom, who alone is able to make "the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil." (Joel 2:24). In the name of all humanity, she repeated the words of her father David the Prophet: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." (Psalm 51)

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<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.

During her experience of the new spiritual wedding, which she experienced when she bowed her head and accepted the incarnation of the Word of God in her womb, her depths became an inexpressible wedding ceremony. Thus she chanted saying: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47).

This is the wine of God which rejoices the soul, restores glory and splendor, so that the believers may live in an uninterrupted wedding. “And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” (Isaiah 62:5). Saint Mary’s saying reveals the feeling of motherhood that the believer has and his concern to meet the needs of others and not his own. He resorts to the true fountain to obtain from it an overflow of gifts that is beyond nature. He should humbly present his request where he presents the situation without putting the solution for God as if he were wiser or more loving to others than God.

- ❖ God who is so generous does not despise us who are striving, hungry for His goods.<sup>9</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great**

### **Jesus' wine is superior in quality to the natural wine**

Saint Jacob compares the wine of this world, which makes the soul drunk and makes it lose its consciousness, balance, and spiritual beauty, to the new heavenly wine that has a wonderful heavenly taste. Any human language cannot express its sweetness and potentials as it fills the bride with supreme love and makes her live in astonishment as the Bridegroom prepares her to sit at His right-hand. At that time, the heavenly ones will bless her because although she was living in corruption, she turned to a sublime and heavenly life adorned with eternal glory.

- ❖ They ran out of the natural wine that was not useful, to make way for Jesus' wine that is more useful.

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<sup>9</sup> Exposition on St. John PG 73:278

The simple substance produced by the vines ran out, so that the Creator could reveal the glory of His working power.

The drink ran out from the hands of the servants, so that the crowd would drink the wine of the gospel of the very generous Son of God ...

The water that became wine was fitting, and they embarrassed the bridegroom and rebuked him because of Him.

They were so baffled by the new drink because of its taste that they blamed the first (drink) saying: it was nothing.

The value of the natural wine that the bridegroom possessed diminished, and Jesus' wine triumphed at the feast,

The wine of the vines became a mockery by the guests, and these waters that became wine amazed everyone.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Why did he call her 'Woman'?**

Jesus said to her: "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4).

Christ did not blame the newlyweds or their families because they did not have sufficient wine and did not blame his mother for interfering in the matter, but made it clear to her that every act has its own appropriate time.

Some wonder how Jesus calls his mother "woman", but this surprise disappears when we see him on the cross repeating: "Woman, behold your son." He talks to her at the beginning of His miracles, representing the sign of the beginning of carrying the cross, where His divinity is revealed, and the forces of darkness begin to revolt against Him to plot a plan to kill Him. He does not speak to her as His mother, because it is not her right to determine the hour of the Cross, as this lies within the Father's authority who sent Him. He came to fulfill His Father's will to offer himself for the salvation of the world.

Indeed, Saint Mary accompanied Him in the first miracle, not knowing that it was the beginning of the hour of the Cross, and she remained with Him



until the last moments of the Cross as a representative of the Church, the new Eve who accompanies the second Adam on the way of His suffering, until He pours out the splendor of His glory on her. It was said to her after the conception of the Lord Christ: “Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:35), and it began to pierce her at the wedding of Cana in Galilee to bear the wounds of love!

He did not say 'mother' but 'woman', because what His miracle of turning water into wine is not accomplished by being a man who took flesh from her, but by the work of His divinity. Truly, there is no separation between His divinity and His humanity, and whatever Christ does is Him being the incarnate Word of God. However, some works are specific to Him as the only Begotten Son of God and some as the Son of man.

Why did He say, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2: 4) and at the same hour He performed the miracle? He explained to her that His hour to perform miracles in public in front of everyone had yet to come, but He is always at work. He performed the miracle quietly after the servants had presented to Him the waterpots, so the master of the feast and the bridegroom did not know about it, but only the servants did.

- ❖ To prove that He greatly respected His mother, hear Luke relate how He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51), and our own Evangelist (John) declare how He had forethought for her at the very season of the Crucifixion. For where parents cause no impediment or hindrance in things belonging to God, it is our bounden duty to give way to them, and there is great danger in not doing so; but when they require anything unseasonably, and cause hindrance in any spiritual matter, it is unsafe to obey. And therefore, He answered thus in this place, and again elsewhere, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” (Matthew 12:48), because they did not yet think rightly of Him; and she, because she had borne Him, claimed, according to the custom of other mothers, to direct Him in all things, when she ought to have

reverenced and worshipped Him. This then was the reason why He answered as He did on that occasion.<sup>10</sup>

- ❖ For if He cared for others and used every means to implant in them a becoming opinion of Himself, much more would He do so in the case of His mother.<sup>11</sup>

### St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He said to her: "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?", while she is His mother, as though He is boldly saying: "Commanding power does not belong to you, for I am ready to perform the wonder this time even if you were silent, and without your word. Behold, I will reveal the power of my essence. The hour has not come to start the execution of the action. When I wish, I will perform miracles, my will does not need to prepare ahead of time. With a small blow, it is easy for me to act quickly, and when my order comes, there is no delay.

The blink of an eye is not as fast as my acting power, so why do you think of the miracle prematurely?

In her words, her faith shone brightly, and in His word His working power appeared.

**She knew that the Son who was born without marriage could produce good wine without vines.**

He was ready to perform the miracle during the banquet, and even if she remained silent, He would not have delayed in carrying out His miracle.

She knew that just as the Magi had come to honor Him, the miracle would be made of His own will,

She was certain that as He poured milk into her breasts, He could fill the waterpots with a new drink.

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<sup>10</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.

<sup>11</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.

Based on these matters, which Mary witnessed, she said to Him: “They have no wine” for Him to do the sign.

### St. Jacob of Serugh

**Saint John Chrysostom** believes that Christ wanted the request to come from those who needed it and not from His mother. Because if what He does is based on the request of a friend of His, even though it is a great matter, some people may question the matter, but if the needy asks for it, there would be no doubt about the miracle and the benefit would be greater. **Chrysostom** likens Christ to a skilled physician who entered a house with many sick people, if he spoke with their mothers or with their relatives and not with the sick, they would doubt Him and be upset.

- ❖ He wanted to show that He does all things at the right time, and does not do everything at once ... He is the one who established the seasons, as He is their creator. So He says, 'My hour has not yet come.' By this, He means that he had not yet revealed himself to many, and the chorus of His disciples was not yet completed ... Moreover, I must not be informed of this by you, you are my mother, they will doubt the miracle. It is fitting for those who want wine to come and seek it from me, not because I need that, but so that, they would all accept the miracle and not doubt me that I am the expected Messiah and deny my divinity. He who knows that he is in need will become thankful when he obtains help, but he who does not have a sense of need will not have a clear sense of the benefit that he has received.
- ❖ Though He was careful to honor His mother, yet He cared much more for the salvation of her soul, and for the doing good to the many, for which He took upon Him the flesh.

These then were the words, not of one speaking rudely to his mother, but belonging to a wise dispensation, which brought her into a right frame of mind, and provided that the miracles should be attended with that honor which was meet.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:3

## **St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ He does not want to rush to do something, because He does not want to appear as a miracle worker for those who do not ask for Him, but He waits until the needy, not the curious, call Him, for He gives grace to those who need it, not to those who want to enjoy watching.

## **St. Cyril the Great**

### **Saint Mary invites us to obey the Lord**

“His mother said to the servants: Whatever He says to you, do it.” (John 2: 5) She did not blame her son for His words because she understood (at least partially) the mystery. She also felt the signs of His acceptance, so she asked the servants to obey what He commanded.

The Evangelist used the Greek word for 'Deacon' to reveal that they are servants of the mysteries of God with whom Jesus works to serve and delight His people. And the Church of the New Testament calls the servants who serve the altar and the tables (i.e. attending to the needs of the poor, the sick and the imprisoned), Deacons.

Confident in Christ's love and zeal for service, she was certain that He would definitely act and satisfy every deficiency. She asked the servants to fix their eyes on Him and listen to Him. This is the role of Saint Mary and all the saints, to direct our eyes to our Christ and fully obey Him.

- ❖ At the same time, she approached and said to the servants: Listen and do quickly what he says.

The Wise One waited until they ran out of wine and everyone felt what was to be done, and when the people clamored and the groom was close to escaping, the Mighty One rose to do what He is capable of, like the One who commands all.

## **St. Jacob of Serugh**

**Saint John Chrysostom** sees in Saint Mary's behavior a practical lesson in perseverance that she presents to us. Despite what her son Jesus said to her,

she did not stop working diligently and presented to Him the servants and asked them to obey him.

- ❖ For she knew that His refusal proceeded not from want of power, but from humility, and that He might not seem without cause to hurry to the miracle; and therefore, she brought the servants.<sup>13</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ She began to work by preparing servants so that they may always obey what He commands.

**St. Cyril the Great**

### **What is behind the six waterpots?**

“Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece” (John 2: 6). Six waterpots were used according to the days of the week (Sunday to Friday), each pot was designated for a specific day for cleansing, while Saturday was a day of worship and rest in which a Jewish person cannot perform any work that needed cleansing. It is not surprising that Christ turned the water into wine, for He is the one who brings wine out of the earth (Psalm 109:14-15). He grants the earth to produce vines, whose grapes are squeezed and turned into wine.

Moses began his miracles in the Ten Plagues by turning water into blood that contains bitterness and death, because humanity broke the law and became under curse and death. As for Christ, He turned the water into wine and presented the joyful message of salvation. Christ came, not to judge the world, but to save it and to grant humanity inner fulfillment, joy, and glory. His evangelistic call was: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters...Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. (Isaiah 55: 1).

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<sup>13</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 22:1.

It was not permissible for the Jew to eat except if he is cleansed himself using the water in these waterpots (Mark 3: 7). This water was also used in some other cleansing rituals. The prevailing proverb among the Jews was: "He who uses more water for washing gets more health in this world."

These waterpots were usually filled with water only and no wine was ever placed in them. They were of stone so even if wine was put in them before, no trace of it would remain, unlike pottery that may soak up old liquids and spew out the new ones. Zechariah saw the stone placed before Joshua, having seven eyes (Zechariah 3:9), meaning that he had spiritual knowledge in Christ Jesus. And Peter the Apostle saw Him as a living stone from which the temple of the Lord would be built (1 Pet 2: 4-5).

**Saint John Chrysostom** sees that the Evangelist affirms that "according to the manner of purification of the Jews," so that everyone realizes that no wine was ever placed in it, and only water for purification. He also says that Palestine is a country known for its scarcity of water. Springs of water were scarce so they used to fill the waterpots with water, so that they would not rush to the rivers whenever they become unclean, but rather find the means of purification at hand.<sup>14</sup>

Some see the six waterpots as referring to the six eras of the world that humanity passed through until the coming of the Lord. The seventh seal in the Book of Revelation refers to the pure believers across all generations who enjoy the high Jerusalem and drink from the spiritual joyful wine. These ages, as **Saint Augustine** says, are: 1- From Adam to Noah. 2- From Noah to Abraham. 3- From Abraham to David. 4- From David to the Babylonian captivity. 5- From the Babylonian captivity to John the Baptist. 6- From John the Baptist to the end of the world.

**St. Augustine** says: [Moreover, God made man after His own image on the sixth day, because in this sixth age is manifested the renewing of our mind through the gospel, after the image of Him who created us; Colossians 3:10 and the water is turned into wine, that we may taste of Christ, now manifested in the law and the prophets. Hence there were there six water-

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Homilies on St. John*, Hom. 22:2

pots, which He bade be filled with water. Now the six water-pots signify the six ages, which were not without prophecy. And those six periods, divided and separated as it were by joints, would be as empty vessels unless they were filled by Christ..., Christ must be understood in that whole prophecy.]<sup>15</sup>

What does he mean when he says: “containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece” (John 2: 6)? **Saint Augustine** says that the word “gallons” (in Greek *metrou*) is a specific measure, and that the number two refers to the Father and the Son, and the number three refers to the Holy Trinity. For he did not say some of the waterpots contains two and the others three gallons but rather said that each one can accommodate two or three gallons. The prophecies came in the books of the Old Testament spoke about the Father and the Son (Christ), and implicitly mentioned the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son at the same time. **St. Augustine** also says: [Wherefore, whoever names the Father, and the Son ought thereby to understand the mutual love of the Father and Son, which is the Holy Spirit. So, therefore, when it says two apiece, the Trinity is not expressed but understood; but when it says, or three, the Trinity is expressed also.]<sup>16</sup>

We said that these six waterpots refer to the six eras that predicted the marriage of Christ to the Church of all nations.

1. The first waterpot begins with Adam who is united with Eve and they became one body (Genesis 2:24), like the union of Christ and His Church (Eph. 3:31). They are the grandparents of all humanity, and just not the Jewish people.
2. The second waterpot begins with Noah, the representative of Christ. He included animals and birds from all over the world in his ark.
3. The third waterpot refers to Abraham, whom in his seed all nations will be blessed.

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<sup>15</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:6.*

<sup>16</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:7-8.*

4. The fourth waterpot is, David the Psalmist: “Arise, O God, judge the earth for You shall inherit all nations” (Psalm 82: 8).
5. The fifth waterpot is the Babylonian captivity, in which the prophet Daniel saw Christ as a stone that was cut out without hands and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2: 34).
6. The sixth waterpot belongs to John the Baptist, the greatest of those born of women, about whom it was said that he was greater than a prophet (Matthew 11:11). He prophesied that Christ was sent to all nations as he says, “For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matthew 3:9). Thus **St. Augustine** sees that the sixth waterpot witnessed the wedding of Christ to the catholic church of the gentiles. [For of those nations are we come, but we should not have come of them had not God of the stones raised up children unto Abraham. We are made children of Abraham by imitating his faith, not by being born of his flesh.]<sup>17</sup>

**“Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” (John 2:7).**

He could have created wine out of nothing, but He turned water into wine, to confirm that He did not come to ignore the law or to destroy it but rather to fulfill it, so the Bible came as a spiritual extension of the law in a non-literal way. He did so also in order for those who drew water for themselves to be witnesses for the miracle and to testify that the miracle was not a fantasy.

**Saint Augustine** believes that water here refers to the Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the whole Old Testament that had a taste of water for those who did not comprehend it spiritually or discover the mystery of Christ within it. The Lord came to turn water into wine of happiness, with a new taste and new potency.

- ❖ [And how did He make of the water wine? When He opened their understanding, and expounded to them the Scriptures, beginning from Moses, through all the prophets; with which being now

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<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:16*



inebriated, they said: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). For they understood Christ in those books in which they knew Him not before. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ changed the water into wine, and that has now taste which before had not, that now inebriates which before did not...., He shows us that the Old Scripture also is from Himself, for at His own command were the water-pots filled. It is from the Lord, indeed, that the Old Scripture also is, but it has no taste unless Christ is understood therein.]<sup>18</sup>

In obedience to the Lord's command, the servants filled the waterpots to the fullness, to the upper edge. Thus, it is not appropriate for the servant to rest until he fulfills the commandment when he experiences in his ministry the work of Christ, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1: 23). "For God does not give the Spirit by measure." (John 3:34). What preoccupies the man of God is nothing but the enjoyment of every soul of the glory of Christ, and chants saying: "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." (John 1:16).

The One who turned water into wine and the One who sends rain to us was able to fill the waterpots with water, and then turn it into wine. In His love for humanity, He does not ignore our commitment to work with Him. As long as we are able to fill the waterpots with water (i.e. doing everything we can), He will do what is impossible for us. Thus, in many of His works, He gives us the honor of working with Him for the edification of His kingdom within us. He asks those present to remove the stone from the grave and orders Lazarus to come out. He grants life and resurrection and asks the disciples to loosen the dead from the graveclothes. For this we chant with the apostle saying : "[we are] working with God!"

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<sup>18</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 9:5*

**Then he said to them: “Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it.” (John 2:8).**

We did not hear that He summoned the name of God or prayed on the water, but He issued an order to fill the waterpots, and immediately He asked to offer what is in the waterpots. He did not even ask them to bring Him some in order to taste it.

He did not perform a miracle to reveal Himself publicly, but to satisfy their needs. He commanded the servants to offer the wine at once. He does not give the talent for us to bury it, but rather that we may use it and work with it, taking advantage of every opportunity to serve.

Christ was not the 'master of the feast', but a friend of the newlyweds and a servant to all. This is the true place of presidency when a person humbly offers himself with love for the sake of others.

**“When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.”  
(John 2: 9).**

The waterpots were so huge and their openings were wide, wine can only be poured out of them by pulling it with a long cone. It is appropriate for the servant of the mystery and the preacher of the Gospel to extend his hand to the depths and draw from the abundance God's gifts as one who draws from an inexhaustible divine fountain.

**“And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!” (John 2:10).**

Saint John Chrysostom says that in order for no one to say that the testimony was said by drunk people who do not know the difference between wine and water, the testimony came from the master of the feast. And inevitably, the master of the feast was careful not to get drunk as he was

committed to administering the wedding with dignity and wisdom.<sup>19</sup> The Evangelist was keen to say about the master of the feast: “And when he tasted,” that is, he did not drink this wine, but rather tasted it.

In Cana of Galilee, the Lord Jesus turned water into wine, bringing spiritual joy throughout the whole assembly, and in the Church of the New Testament, Christ by His Holy Spirit transforms wine into His blood that is shed for us, bringing heavenly joy to the lives of those who drink it.

- ❖ Christ not only turned water into wine, but He made exquisite wine, because the miracles of Christ have this characteristic, which is that they become much more glorious and better than the varieties formed in nature. From this point of view, when He reforms in people a limp organ of their body, He will show that organ better than the healthy ones. And the proof that the water turning into wine was of the highest quality wine, attested not only by the servants, but also by the master of the feast.<sup>20</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:10).**

Here is where the concept of 'glory' began to be revealed: 'the Divine Presence'. God glorifies us when He declares His presence within us, and we glorify Him when we announce His presence to the world. In this sign, the presence of the Father was announced in His Only Begotten Son, who reveals Him.

- ❖ He who made of water wine could also have of stones made bread. The power was the same; but then the devil tempted Him, therefore Christ did it not. For you know that when the Lord Christ was tempted, the devil suggested this to Him. For He was an hungered, since this too He vouchsafed to be, since this too made part of His

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<sup>19</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 22:2*

<sup>20</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 22:2*

Humiliation. The Bread (Christ) was hungry, as the Way (Christ) fainted, as saving Health (Christ) was wounded, as the Life died..... And He did not make bread of the stones, who of course could as easily have done it, as He made of water wine.... For no otherwise is the tempter overcome, but by being despised. And when He had overcome the devil's temptation, Angels came and ministered to Him (Matthew 4:11). He then who had so great power, why did He not do the one, and do the other? Read, yea, recollect what you have just heard, when He did this, when, that is, He made of the water wine; what did the Evangelist add? "And His disciples believed in Him." (John 2:11) Would the devil on the other occasion have believed in Him?<sup>21</sup>

### **St. Augustine**

- ❖ Now if any say that this is not a sufficient proof that it was the beginning of His miracles, because there is added simply in Cana of Galilee, as allowing it to have been the first done there, but not altogether and absolutely the first, for He probably might have done others elsewhere, we will make answer to him of that which we have said before. And of what kind? The words of John (the Baptist); "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." (John 1:31). Now if He had wrought miracles in early age, the Israelites would not have needed another to declare Him. For He who came among men, and by His miracles was so made known, not to those only in Judea, but also to those in Syria and beyond, and who did this in three years only, or rather who did not need even these three years to manifest Himself (Matthew 4:24), for immediately and from the first His fame went abroad everywhere. He, I say, who in a short time so shone forth by the multitude of His miracles, that His name was well known to all, was much less likely, if while a child He had from an early age wrought miracles, to escape notice so long. For what was done would have seemed stranger as done by a boy, and there would have been time for twice or thrice as

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<sup>21</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 73:2*

many, and much more. But in fact, He did nothing while He was a child, save only that one thing to which Luke has testified (Luke 2:46), that at the age of twelve years He sat hearing the doctors, and was thought admirable for His questioning.

Besides, it was in accordance with likelihood and reason that He did not begin His signs at once from an early age; for they would have deemed the thing a delusion. For if when He was of full age many suspected this, much more, if while quite young He had wrought miracles, would they have hurried Him sooner and before the proper time to the Cross, in the venom of their malice; and the very facts of the Dispensation would have been discredited.<sup>22</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **The Almighty Christ works like the Father and with the same power**

Saint Jacob believes that God the Creator, who made man from dust, raises him to a person bearing the image of God. God continues to work through His Word, the Only Begotten Son, to restore man's beauty, so he becomes the precious pearl that the Holy Trinity cherishes, and His work does not stop until the day when we meet Him on the clouds. If we have become water as the water that was in the waterpots, then He is constantly working by His Word to raise from us the heavenly wine full of joy and peace.

- ❖ Christ demonstrated the power of creation in these waters, because He is the Son of the Creator and has authority over all like his Father.

Whoever thinks the Son is less than His Sender should come and see that the power is one and indivisible?

“My Father has been working until now (as the Creator), and I have been working” (John 5:17).

One Power, One Command, One Action, One Symbol, One Will, One Authority ...

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<sup>22</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.*

That engineer, who built and erected the fruits in the branches, poured out a sweet taste contrary to nature ...

That miracle that occurred there was minor in relation to His hidden capability.

The Son's wonder was too small compared to His capabilities, and this first wonder was not according to His strength,

That mighty One did not raise the mass as He could have, but made a small command in the wedding to delight them...

**Using His strength, He bent a little on the waterpots and transformed it so that the waters would become good wine.**

One is the knowledge of the Father and His Son in relation to the creation, and One is the creative Power in all its forms...

The Father has always transformed the water in the vines for a long time, and His working power changes it to the substance of wine.

This is only completed in a few of months, but the true Son has fulfilled His will with a small symbol.

Water does not acquire the sweet taste from the vines, for the power of the Creator gives it taste.

The Son who wanted to transform it without taking time did not make it need the system of days and months.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Where is he who denies the divinity of the Son?**

The transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee is the first miracle that our Lord of Glory Jesus made, to assure humanity that He is the Creator, who created the first man from dust in His image and likeness. Now, the Creator Himself came to turn water into wine. He is the Almighty God who reveals His divinity in order to limit every person, no matter how corrupt and destroyed his life is, the Savior restores him to his original beauty and prepares him for eternal glory to sit on His right as the psalmist said: "At Your right hand stands the queen" (Psalm 45: 9).

❖ Where is he who wronged the Son (and said): He is not God? Let him come and see that His power is not less than His Father.

Whoever doubts the Only Begotten (and says) He is not God, let him see that the creative power appeared at the wedding.

He sat during the banquet, lest He disowns the race of His mother, and transformed the water to preach there to the race of His father.

He set up an image of His divinity and His humanity, and He was acting according to His greatness and humility (emptiness).

He humbly reclined and performed miracles like a strong One to prove that He was the incarnate God.

**He revealed the glory of His divinity with the wonder that He did.  
Blessed is He who by His wine gave taste to humanity.**

**St. Jacob of Serugh**



*The Virgin Mary knew that the Son who was born without marriage can produce good wine without vines.*

*She was certain that as He poured milk into her breasts, He can fill the waterpots with a new drink.*

*Based on these things which Mary saw, she said to Him "They have no wine" that He may perform the sign.*

*St. Jacob of Serugh*