

The Church of the Transfiguration  
The Second Sunday After the Epiphany  
John 2:1-11

## Light to the World

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January 19, 2025

Over the years, our parish – the Little Church Around the Corner – has been known for a number of things. One of these is our Anglo-Catholic heritage and our love for liturgical traditions. Another is our ministry to actors and those who are involved with the performing arts. Still another is our wonderful music program and our gifted musicians.

But if you asked somebody in the first half of the 1900s what the Little Church was known for, the answer would likely have been different. Chances are that person would have talked about our wedding ministry.

The Little Church was featured on the cover of the June 2, 1934, issue of *The New Yorker*. Here's a copy of that cover [Figure 1]. Those of you who are here today can take a closer look at this image during coffee hour.

Interestingly, not a lot has changed in the past 90 years. On the cover, you can see a bride and groom standing in front of the lych-gate on East 29<sup>th</sup> Street. The bride is holding a bouquet of flowers, and the groom is wearing a black tailcoat. There is a matronly woman, perhaps a mother-in-law, standing next to them.

Now, it's not a surprise that our parish's wedding ministry was featured on the cover of *The New Yorker*. In the 1930s and 1940s, numerous couples would line up in our garden on weekdays and Saturdays and wait for their turn to be married in the Holy Family Chapel. In fact, the rectors from that era sometimes married seven couples a day!

Some of you may know that Fr. Platt has written a wonderful history of our parish. In that book, Fr. Platt cites a number of amazing statistics about the Little Church and its weddings. For example, did you know that there were some 15,000 weddings that were celebrated during the first fifty years of our parish's existence? 15,000 weddings. That's almost one wedding per day for five decades!

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I suppose it's appropriate, therefore, that today's gospel passage is about a wedding. And not just any wedding. Today we hear about the wedding at Cana, which is where Jesus performed his very first miracle of turning water into wine.

You know the story. Jesus, his mother, and his disciples were guests at a wedding when the wine ran out. Now, running out of wine would have been a highly embarrassing thing for the families of the newlyweds. The guests would have viewed that as a sign of inhospitality. It also would have called into question the financial standing of the families.

Not surprisingly, Jesus' mother tells him that the wine had run out. Jesus' response was borderline rude: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" (It sounds a bit like how I react when my mom tells me to do something. My mom is watching this online, by the way. Hi mom!)

But behind the scenes, Jesus *was* concerned. He tells the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. And when the chief steward later tasted what was in the jars, all of that water had turned into wine. In fact, the new wine was even better than the wine that had been served earlier.

Interestingly, however, Jesus kept quiet about the miracle. Did you notice that? All this happened out of sight of the wedding guests. Only the servants knew about the transformation that had occurred.

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For me, the significance of today's gospel story is not just about the supernatural powers of Jesus. Of course Jesus can turn water into wine! The significance is about the *transformation* that occurs whenever Jesus is present. Sometimes this transformation might be hidden – as was the case with the wedding at Cana – but it does happen.

For example, weddings transform the people who get married. They are changed by their vows to stay together for better or worse, for richer or poorer, and in sickness and health. But the broader community is also transformed by a wedding. I can think of no better example of this than the wedding that occurred here on July 28, 2012. That was the day on which our beloved fellow parishioners Peter and Rob were married right here by Bishop St. John in the first legal same-sex wedding in the Diocese of New York.

It was only four days earlier that same-sex marriages had become legal in New York State. And it was only five days before that when the Diocese of New York said that same-sex weddings could be celebrated within its churches.

Rob and Peter's wedding transformed this community – a community that at one time had refused to let women celebrate at its altar, and that had also refused to sponsor women for the priesthood, including Bishop Cathy Roskam, the first woman bishop in this diocese. Even though Bishop Roskam had been an active member of the parish – including founding an acting troupe called the Joseph Jefferson Company – she had to go elsewhere to seek ordination to the priesthood.

Peter and Rob's wedding also transformed the parish's relationship to LGBTQ+ people. I just learned this morning that, at one time, this parish also refused to sponsor openly-LGBTQ+ people for ordination. The fact that our parish now hosts the diocese's annual Pride reception each June would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago.

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If you think about it, transformation happens not only at weddings, but also with all of the sacraments and sacramental rites of the Church. For example, transformation occurs during Holy Baptism when we die to our old life and take on a new life in Christ. During the Holy Eucharist, we also experience transformation through the gifts of bread and wine that become for us the body and blood of Christ. Similar themes of transformation occur in all of the other sacramental rites.

As you may know, we are currently in the liturgical season of Epiphany – when we celebrate the revelation of Christ’s light in the world. And it is through the church’s sacraments and sacramental acts where we can see Jesus’ light and transformative power at work in the world today.

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Things have been pretty tough during the past few weeks. Some of you might have friends or loved ones who were impacted by the Los Angeles fires. My friend Fr. Mel, who is a priest in the Diocese of Los Angeles, lived in Altadena, and he and his husband lost their house and virtually all of their belongings in the fire. One of the only things that Fr. Mel grabbed before he evacuated his house was the Bible that was given to him upon his ordination as a deacon. The sheer magnitude of loss in that part of the country has been unfathomable.

Others of you might be terrified of the incoming administration, especially if you have friends or loved ones who are undocumented immigrants. A recent headline in the *New York Post* read: “ICE Officers Prepping for a ‘Big F-king Operation’ Across Sanctuary Cities. . . .” Many Episcopal churches – in this diocese and across the country – have been making plans on how to respond if there are raids on our ministries such as food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters for the unhoused, and the like.

Still others of you might be struggling during this Martin Luther King Jr. weekend with the stark inequalities that remain within our society today along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and economic status. It’s been over a half century since Dr. King was assassinated, and yet his vision of an equal and just society often still feels like just a dream.

Now all of this seems pretty bleak. But, as Christians, we must always live in hope. We must keep in mind what the season of Epiphany means. Epiphany is an affirmation of the incarnation that we celebrated at Christmas. Epiphany affirms that the Word *was* made flesh and dwelt among us, as we hear in the prologue to the Gospel of John. Epiphany affirms that God *is* with us – “Emmanuel” in the Hebrew. Jesus is with us, right here and right now. We are not alone.

Jesus was present at the wedding at Cana, and he transformed the lives of those who were there by turning water into wine – even though most of them didn’t know it at the time. Similarly, Jesus is with us today. Jesus transforms us through the sacraments and sacramental rites of the Church, even if we might not be aware of it at all times.

I’d like to close with the words of the psalm that was appointed for today:

How priceless is your love, O God!  
Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings. . . .  
For with you is the well of life,  
*And in your light we see light.*

May the light of Epiphany shine in your hearts. May you recognize the light of Christ that transforms the world. And may you also *be* a light to the world. To paraphrase the Collect of the Day: Almighty God, grant that we thy people, illumined by thy Word and Sacraments, may share with the radiance of Christ’s glory.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord – and our neighbors. Because the world desperately needs it. Right here and right now.

Figure 1

