

BEHOLD THE LAMB: SESSION 3

The First Sign

John 2: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of John

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that Jesus' first sign and his first public act in Jerusalem are two halves of one announcement: the water of the old purification becomes the wine of the messianic feast, and the temple of stone gives way to the temple of his body. Along the way they meet two phrases that will govern the rest of the study: my hour has not yet come, and do whatever he tells you.

Catholic Touchstone: Mary's intercession and the sacramental imagination. At Cana the mother of Jesus states a need, directs the servants to her Son, and the first sign follows: the Church has always seen here the pattern of her intercession (CCC 2618). And the sign itself, ordinary water made the bearer of glory, is the shape of every sacrament.

What You Need to Know

John 2:1 opens on the third day, completing the week of days your group spotted last session and ringing a bell every Christian ear should hear. The first creation account crowned its week with man and woman, whom Genesis 2 places in a garden; John's new-creation week ends at a wedding. Weddings are not incidental scenery in Scripture. The prophets promised that God would espouse His people (Hosea 2:19-20, Isaiah 62:4-5), and the messianic age was pictured as a wedding feast overflowing with wine (Isaiah 25:6, Amos 9:13-14). When the wine runs out at a wedding in Israel and someone quietly supplies the best wine in impossible abundance, a reader formed by the prophets knows what hour is striking, even though, as Jesus says, the Hour has not yet come.

That word deserves your full attention. My hour has not yet come (2:4) plants the single most important time-word in this Gospel. The Hour recurs like a drumbeat: they could not arrest him because his hour had not yet come (7:30, 8:20), and then the drum changes rhythm: the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:23), Jesus knowing that his hour had come (13:1), Father, the hour has come (17:1). Track it with the group from tonight forward on the Thread Watch, and resolve nothing. When they finally see what the Hour is, in Session 13, the whole Gospel will snap into focus.

Jesus addresses his mother as Woman, and the exchange in 2:4 reads abruptly in English. Handle it with precision, because the steelman chain lives here. The idiom, literally what to me and to you, does signal distance or a divergence of concern elsewhere in Scripture, and the address Woman, while respectful, is highly unusual from a son to his mother; no clear parallel is attested in the surviving ancient evidence. But John has composed with a long horizon: the mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in this Gospel, here at Cana where the Hour is announced as not yet, and at the cross where the Hour arrives, and in both scenes Jesus calls her Woman (19:26). The evangelist who opened his Gospel rewriting Genesis knows what the word Woman means in Genesis 3:15. Many Fathers heard the new Eve here. The Church has not defined the exegesis of this verse, so keep your language honest and hedged, but do not let the group miss that the pairing of the two scenes is deliberate.

Mary's two sentences are a school of prayer in miniature. They have no wine: she does not instruct, she presents the need. Do whatever he tells you: her last recorded words in all of Scripture, and they point every servant, and every reader, away from herself to her Son. There is an old echo here worth knowing: when Egypt starved, Pharaoh told the people, go to Joseph; what he says to you, do (Genesis 41:55). Mary speaks with the same grammar about the true provider.

The six stone jars are for the Jewish rites of purification, holding twenty or thirty gallons each: run the math with the group, roughly a hundred and twenty to a hundred and eighty gallons. Jesus does not conjure wine from nothing. He takes the water of the old covenant's washing and makes it the wine of the wedding feast, in staggering excess, and the steward's astonished line, you have kept the good wine until now, is John winking at salvation history itself. Note also John's vocabulary: this, the first of his *signs* (2:11). John never borrows the Synoptics' usual word for mighty works, *dynamis*; he speaks of Jesus' works, *erga*, and for the miracles; he says *sēmeion*, sign, a thing that points beyond itself. Tonight your group starts a running tally. John numbers the first sign here and the second at 4:54, then stops counting and lets the reader keep the tally. Most readers across the centuries have counted seven before the cross. Your group hunts for them from now on; do not give them the list.

The temple cleansing (2:13-22) is placed by John at the first of three Passovers in this Gospel; keep an eye on that word Passover, for reasons the sealed guesses will one day appreciate. Jesus calls the temple my Father's house, an ownership claim, and the disciples remember Psalm 69:9, zeal for thy house will consume me. Pressed for a sign of his authority, he answers: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. His hearers gesture at forty six years of Herodian construction; John hands the reader the key: he spoke of the temple of his body (2:21). Your tabernacle thread now runs tent (1:14), Bethel and its ladder (1:51), temple of his body (2:21). God's dwelling among men has been narrowing to a single human body for three sessions. The chapter closes on a caution (2:23-25): many believed because of the signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. Sign-faith is a beginning, not an arrival, and John will spend chapter 3 showing what must happen next.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Isaiah 25:6.** The feast the LORD will make on the mountain, of rich food and well-aged wine. Live discovery during the Cana half.
- **Amos 9:13-14 and Hosea 2:19-20.** Mountains dripping sweet wine; God espousing His people forever. Leader background for the wedding and wine symbolism.
- **Genesis 3:15.** The woman and her seed. Background to the address Woman at Cana and Calvary. Leader background, hedged language.
- **Genesis 41:55.** Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do. The old grammar behind Mary's do whatever he tells you. Optional quick reference.
- **Psalm 69:9.** Zeal for thy house will consume me. Cited by the disciples in the text itself; note the psalm is a suffering psalm, quoted again at the cross tradition.
- **Malachi 3:1-3.** The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and who can stand when he appears, for he is like a refiner's fire. Live discovery during the temple half.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Doctor of the Church, Tractates on

the Gospel of John, Tractate 8

Augustine defuses the skeptic's shrug with a single observation: the one who made wine that day in the six jars does the same thing every year in the vines. Water falling from the sky is turned into wine by way of the vine, and no one marvels, because it happens annually. The miracle at Cana is creation's ordinary wonder compressed into a moment so that our dulled attention would finally notice who has been doing it all along.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202), *Against Heresies* 3.22.4

Irenaeus, who tells us elsewhere (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4) that he learned from Polycarp, a hearer of John, draws the great parallel behind the word Woman: the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. What the virgin Eve bound through unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. Irenaeus is expounding Mary's fiat, not the wedding at Cana; 3.22.4 does not comment on this chapter. The Cana link is this study's application of his typology: the same obedient faith that untied Eve's knot speaks its whole rule of life at Cana in five words, do whatever he tells you.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Doctor of the Church, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 2*

Aquinas reads Cana as a portrait of Mary's way of interceding: she notices the need before anyone asks, she brings it to her Son with total confidence, and she presumes nothing about the method or the timing, telling the servants only to obey him. For Aquinas her words show mercy and faith working together: mercy sees that the wine has failed; faith knows exactly where to take the problem.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 2618.** Mary's intercession at Cana: her prayer of faith obtains the first sign, and at the hour of the New Covenant she is present at the cross.
- **CCC 1613.** The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana: the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the announcement that marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.
- **CCC 547-548.** The signs of Jesus: works that bear witness to who he is and invite belief, while refusing to be mere spectacle.
- **CCC 586.** Jesus identified himself with the temple by presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling place among men; his body, destroyed and raised, is the true temple.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

The Hour (NEW, major thread). Planted tonight at 2:4, my hour has not yet come. It recurs at 7:30 and 8:20 as a shield (they could not arrest him) and turns at 12:23, 13:1, and 17:1 into the hour has come. Track every occurrence with the group from tonight on; resolve nothing until Session 13.

The seven signs tally (NEW mechanic). Start a visible tally, a whiteboard corner or a page in

someone's notebook. Sign 1: water into wine (2:11, numbered by John himself). John numbers only the first two, then hands the count to the reader. Do not give the group the traditional list of seven; let them argue about what counts as the study proceeds.

Woman at Cana, Woman at the cross. The mother of Jesus appears exactly twice in John, both times addressed as Woman, once when the Hour is not yet and once when it arrives. Plant quietly tonight; the far end is 19:25-27, Session 13.

Tabernacle and temple. Big advance: tent (1:14), Bethel (1:51), and now the temple of his body (2:21). Name the progression aloud when the group discovers 2:21; this thread is now visible enough to trace on the tally board.

The Lamb (sealed) and Passover. The word Passover appears at 2:13, the first of three in this Gospel. Say nothing. Simply make sure the group notices the word is there. The sealed guesses are quietly gaining interest.

Sign-faith versus real faith. Planted at 2:23-25: many believed because of signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. Develops immediately next session with Nicodemus, and runs through 4:48, 6:26, and 20:29.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain what the wedding, the wine, and the third day would signal to a reader formed by the prophets.
2. Participants hear the strongest version of the claim that Jesus rebukes Mary at Cana, and weigh it against the full Johannine frame.
3. Participants register my hour has not yet come and begin tracking the Hour thread.
4. Participants do the math on the jars, articulate the movement from purification water to wedding wine, and start the seven signs tally.
5. Participants discover that the temple saying is about the temple of his body and can recite the dwelling-place progression: tent, Bethel, body.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Opening prayer and Win, 15 minutes. Build, 55 minutes. Send, Live It This Week, and closing prayer, 20 minutes. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: the Genesis 41:55 quick reference in Build question 3, the Dig Deeper box on the three Passovers, and the second Send question. Do not cut the steelman chain, the jar math, or the Malachi 3:1 live discovery. The Hour must be named and put on the board even if you are sprinting.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Father, at a wedding in Galilee your Son turned the water of washing into the wine of joy. Tonight, take what is plain in us, our attention, our questions, our ordinary hour together, and change it into something that gladdens your heart. Mary, mother of Jesus, you noticed what was lacking before anyone asked; notice what is lacking in us, and tell us to do whatever he tells us. Amen.

Win (open the conversation)

1. What is the best wedding you have ever been to, and what single detail made it unforgettable?
2. Tell about a time something ran out at the worst possible moment, money, food, gas, time, and it became a story you now enjoy telling.

Transition: John has spent a week of days introducing Jesus with titles. Tonight Jesus finally acts, and his first act is not a sermon or an exorcism. It is a rescue at a party.

Build (inductive discovery)

Have someone read John 2:1-5 aloud. Then ask:

Question 1. Look at Mary's two sentences in this passage. What does she actually say, and just as important, what does she never say? What kind of asking is this?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

She says, they have no wine, and to the servants, do whatever he tells you. She never instructs Jesus, never proposes a method, never even phrases a request. She presents a need to the person she trusts and then removes herself from the middle. The Church has always seen in these two sentences the whole anatomy of intercession: notice the need, bring it to him, point others to him, presume nothing about how or when. And note the small astonishment: do whatever he tells you are the last recorded words of Mary in all of Scripture. Her final word in the Bible is an arrow aimed entirely at her Son.

Steelman: Does Jesus Rebuke His Mother?

BUILD THE STEELMAN FIRST: present this at full strength

Verse 4 sounds harsh, and many Protestant readers say Catholics refuse to hear it. Build their case properly. Jesus answers his mother: O woman, what have you to do with me? The underlying idiom, literally what to me and to you, appears elsewhere in Scripture, and almost always to mark distance or a clash of concerns: Jephthah uses it against an aggressor king (Judges 11:12), the widow of Zarephath uses it against Elijah in grief (1 Kings 17:18), and the demons hurl it at Jesus (Mark 5:7). Add the address Woman, which scarcely any son in surviving ancient literature uses for his mother, and the plain reading, the argument runs, is a gentle but real rebuke: Jesus is marking that his mission runs on his Father's clock, not his mother's suggestions, and Catholic devotion to Mary's intercession is built on a verse that actually pushes the other way. Give this its full weight. The

idiom evidence is real, and the tension in the verse is really there.

Question 2 (press from the text). Grant the idiom its distance and grant that the address is strange. Now read the scene to the end. What does Mary do immediately after this supposed rebuff, and what does Jesus then actually do? And one more thing: this Gospel shows us the mother of Jesus in exactly one other scene. If anyone recalls where, what does Jesus call her there?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Take verse 4 at full strength as a real check, a distancing, and watch what it does not do: it does not close the door. Mary responds not by withdrawing but by confidently mobilizing the servants, and Jesus responds not by abstaining but by performing the most lavish miracle of supply in the Gospels. Whatever the idiom marks, it does not mark a no; the story itself refuses that reading. The distance in the verse is real but it is temporal: my hour has not yet come. Jesus is saying that what she is nudging into motion belongs to a timetable larger than a wedding, and then, astonishingly, he moves anyway, at her faith. The other scene is the cross (19:25-27), where the Hour has come and he again says Woman. The evangelist who rewrote Genesis 1 in his first sentence has placed the Woman at both ends of the Hour, and many Fathers heard Genesis 3:15 underneath it, the woman whose seed crushes the serpent. The Church has not defined the exegesis of this verse, so hold the typology with open hands, but hold it: John does not spend words by accident, and he spent Woman twice.

Question 3. Do whatever he tells you. If you wrote those five words on a card and made them your only rule for one week, what would they cost you? If time allows, glance at Genesis 41:55 and enjoy the echo: whose words is Mary's sentence built on, and who was the Joseph of that story?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Let the personal question breathe; it is a Send question smuggled into Build, and it should sting a little. The echo: when Egypt starved, Pharaoh told the people, go to Joseph; what he says to you, do, and Joseph opened the storehouses. Mary speaks with the same grammar about the true provider, whose storehouse is about to open six jars wide.

Question 4 (live discovery). Read 2:6-10. John gives us an oddly specific inventory: six stone jars, for the Jewish rites of purification, holding twenty or thirty gallons each. Do the math out loud. Then ask two questions: why tell us the volume, and why tell us what the jars were for? Finally, send the group to Isaiah 25:6 and read what the prophets said the LORD would one day serve.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The math lands between one hundred twenty and one hundred eighty gallons, on the order of seven hundred modern bottles, for a village wedding already days along. The volume preaches superabundance: when the messianic age arrives, God does not ration. The jars' purpose preaches transformation: this was the water of the old covenant's washing, the endless purification that addressed ritual purity, hands and vessels, while awaiting the cleansing of hearts the prophets promised, and Jesus turns precisely that water into wedding wine. Isaiah 25:6 promised a feast of well-aged wine on the LORD's mountain for all peoples; the steward's bewildered compliment, you have kept the good wine until now, is truer than he knows. It is John's one-line theology of salvation

history.

Question 5. Read 2:11-12. John calls this the first of his signs, and says Jesus manifested his glory. Two small words to interrogate: why sign rather than miracle, and where has this Gospel used glory before?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John never uses the ordinary Gospel word for mighty works; he says sign, a thing whose whole job is to point past itself. A person who stops at the wonder has missed the sign, a theme John will hammer in chapter 6. And glory: we have beheld his glory (1:14), the tabernacle word. The glory that filled the tent of meeting flickered into view at a wedding table. Start the tally now: Sign 1, water into wine. Tell the group John numbers this one and one more, then stops counting and hands the reader the pen. Their standing assignment for the rest of the study: keep the tally, argue about what counts, and see how many signs they find before the cross. Give them nothing further.

Have someone read John 2:13-22 aloud. Then ask:

Question 6 (live discovery). What does Jesus do in the temple courts, and, listen closely to his words, whose house does he say it is? Then send the group to Malachi 3:1-3. Who did Malachi say would suddenly come to the temple, and what would he do when he arrived?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He makes a whip of cords, drives out the sellers and the animals, pours out the coins, and says: you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade. My Father's house is an ownership claim; no prophet ever talked that way about the temple. Malachi promised that the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, like a refiner's fire, purifying until offerings are pleasing again. The group discovered at Isaiah 40:3 that the Baptist was preparing the way of the LORD. Here is the arrival Malachi described: the Lord, suddenly, at his temple, refining. The zeal the disciples remember from Psalm 69 belongs to a psalm of a righteous sufferer, and that detail is a shadow falling forward.

Question 7. Read 2:18-22 again. Asked for a sign of his authority, Jesus says: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. His hearers scoff about forty six years of construction. What does verse 21 tell the reader that the crowd could not know? And connect the thread: where has this Gospel already located God's dwelling among men?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He spoke of the temple of his body. The pattern of misunderstanding begins here and will recur all Gospel long: Jesus speaks on one level, hearers land on a lower one, and John quietly hands the reader the key. Now say the thread out loud and put it on the board next to the sign tally: the Word pitched his tent among us (1:14); at 1:51 the angels of God ascend and descend on the Son of Man, so Jesus himself now stands where Bethel stood in Jacob's dream, the place where heaven and earth meet; and now, the temple of his body (2:21). For three sessions God's dwelling place has been narrowing, from a tent, to a ladder touching heaven, to a single human body. Ask the group where they think the thread is headed and accept all answers without confirming any.

Question 8. Read 2:23-25. Many believed in his name when they saw the signs, and Jesus did not trust himself to them. That sounds almost cold. What is John distinguishing, and why end the chapter of the first sign with a warning about sign-faith?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

John distinguishes belief that follows spectacle from belief that entrusts the self. Sign-faith is a beginning, not an arrival. John does not tell us these believers were insincere; he tells us Jesus did not entrust himself to them, and he will press the point again at 4:48, 6:26, and 20:29. Jesus knew what was in man, and what is in man is a heart that must be remade, not merely impressed. John ends the chapter here on purpose, because the very next verse introduces a man, Nicodemus, who comes impressed by the signs, and Jesus will tell him that being impressed is not enough: he must be born again from above. That is next session, and the group should leave tonight feeling the question: is my faith sign-faith?

DIG DEEPER

Three Passovers. John 2:13 is the first of three Passovers John marks in his Gospel (2:13, 6:4, and the final one from 11:55 onward). The other Gospels compress the ministry into one journey to Jerusalem; John's three Passovers are why the Church has traditionally spoken of a roughly three-year public ministry. Keep an eye on that feast. This study is named Behold the Lamb, and John keeps checking the Passover calendar. Draw no conclusions aloud.

Synthesis question. Put the two halves of the chapter side by side: water made wine, and the temple claimed and reinterpreted. What is the one announcement both scenes are making?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Both scenes announce fulfillment by transformation: the purification water of the old covenant becomes the wedding wine of the new, and the temple of stone gives way to the temple of his body. In both, something good and God-given is not discarded but raised into what it was always pointing toward, and in both, the full event is dated to a timetable no one else can see: my hour has not yet come, and in three days I will raise it up. The chapter is one claim in two keys: the age the prophets promised has walked in the door, and it is a person.

Send

1. Mary's method was to name the lack: they have no wine. If you named your life's current they have no wine to Jesus tonight, what would it be?
2. Jesus drove out of his Father's house what did not belong there. St. Paul calls your body a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). What would he drive out of yours, and would you hand him the whip?

Live It This Week

- **Pray Cana-style.** Once this day, every day, bring one need to Jesus in Mary's grammar: no instructions, no proposed solutions, just they have no wine, and trust. If you pray with Mary, ask her to present it with you.

- **One act of whatever.** Pick one thing you already know he is telling you to do, the one you have been deferring, and do it this week. Do whatever he tells you begins with the whatever you already know.
- **Watch the water.** At Mass this Sunday, watch the priest add a little water to the wine in the chalice and remember the six jars. Ordinary matter, an ordinary hour, and glory arriving quietly through it: that is Cana, and it lights up the whole sacramental principle.

Closing Prayer

Leader prays aloud: Lord Jesus, your hour had not yet come, and still you gave the best wine because your mother asked. We bring you our empty jars, our routines, our purifications that never quite make us clean, and we ask you to change what we cannot. Cleanse the temple of our hearts; overturn what needs overturning. And keep us watchful for your Hour. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MEMORIZE THIS WEEK: John 2:5

His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you. (RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in Session 3, in order of appearance. Flag these in your Bible before the session.

- **John 2:1-5** · opening reading, the third day, they have no wine, do whatever he tells you
- **Judges 11:12, 1 Kings 17:18, Mark 5:7** · steelman texts, the what to me and to you idiom; cite verbally
- **John 19:25-27** · leader reference only, Woman at the cross; do not read in session, resolves Session 13
- **Genesis 3:15** · leader background, the Woman and her seed; hedged typology
- **Genesis 41:55** · optional quick reference, go to Joseph, what he says to you, do
- **John 2:6-10** · the six jars, the math, the steward's compliment
- **Isaiah 25:6** · live discovery, the feast of well-aged wine on the mountain
- **Amos 9:13-14, Hosea 2:19-20, Isaiah 62:4-5** · leader background, wine and espousal in the prophets
- **John 2:11-12** · the first of his signs, manifested his glory; the tally begins
- **John 2:13-17** · the temple cleansing, my Father's house, zeal for thy house (Psalm 69:9 cited in text)
- **Malachi 3:1-3** · live discovery, the Lord suddenly coming to his temple as refiner
- **John 2:18-22** · destroy this temple, forty six years, the temple of his body
- **John 2:23-25** · sign-faith, Jesus knew what was in man
- **1 Corinthians 6:19** · Send question 2, your body a temple of the Holy Spirit
- **CCC 547-548, 586, 1613, 2618** · Catechism connections