

There's a book that was popular a few years ago called *The Secret: a Treasure Hunt*. It contained lovely and fantastical pictures with rhymes by each one. On the surface they were just amusing stories told in verse.

But if you went deeper—they were a treasure map. If you could figure out the meanings of each story, each story would lead you to a gem worth a fortune. The book sold millions of copies because everyone loves decoding secret messages to find a treasure.

This is very much like the reading from John's gospel this morning. On the surface it looks like a lovely story about a wedding, a mom, and lots of fun wine. From this reading, many have suggested that this proves Jesus loves a good wedding—and he approves of drinking wine more than water.

Ok.

But this story from John's gospel is more like *The Secret*—on the surface, it's one thing, but if you go deeper you will find a treasure.

And like *The Secret*, the words in this passage from John have secret meanings.

You see, John was writing a book not just about what Jesus did—like Matthew, Mark and Luke. He was writing a book about who Jesus was. But that was a more dangerous thing to do. Speaking so openly about Jesus was the sort of thing that could get a person killed. So, John wrote this first book about the theology of Jesus in metaphor. He wrote about Jesus in CODE.

So let's crack that code and find the treasure, shall we?

Let's start with the character of Mary. Up to the time of John's writing, what did we know about Mary? Let's start from the first writings about her.

Paul—whose writings predate any of the Gospels, never once mentioned Jesus' family. Not the Angel visit, not the virgin birth—nothing. The only thing he seems to know about Jesus' early life was that Jesus had a brother named James, whom Paul had met. He also mentions that Jesus was “born of a woman”, and “born under the law”—which means that Jesus was born like every Jew was—to a human mother, under God's Hebraic law. That is the sum total of what our *earliest* writings about Mary contained.

Mark wrote the first gospel between the years 60-70 in the first century. His references to Mary were not flattering. Mark notes that Jesus' family thought his ministry was embarrassing—that Jesus was “beside himself”—which is a polite 1st century way of saying Jesus was mentally ill. Mary and Jesus' brothers come to take him away after they heard him speak. That's Mary's only appearance in Mark.

It's amazing to think that this is the sum total of what the world knew about Mary---until the 9th decade of the first century when Matthew and Luke developed the nativity stories we are so familiar with in about 85 or 90. It wasn't until decades after Jesus' death, that Mary has finally become a larger than life figure: the Theotokos, the God bearer.

And so John begins to write his gospel—and we're now probably somewhere in the years between 100 and 120 CE— the dawn of the second century. John begins his journey into Jesus' life, but he's not just telling the who, what, and where of the story of Jesus—he is determined to answer the question, “Why is Jesus so important?”

But the trick is how he can couch the truth in a way that will bring this message to the people, but will also keep everyone safe from arrest? How can he describe the secret of Jesus' life, so all can find the treasure?

He begins with a story of a wedding. Weddings were commonplace and hardly worth the worry of the Roman authorities if they were to read his book.

Many scholars call John's Gospel the *Book of Signs*—and this story tells us about the very first sign.

Now it's important to notice that Jesus' mother is never named in this story. It's never *Mary*—it's "the mother of the Lord" or "Jesus' mother". That's our first clue. This isn't the woman Mary he's talking about-- the "mother of the Lord" is a symbol—but of what? Let's think about that. Who "mothered", formed, and nourished Jesus from birth to death?

OK let me be more specific—what on EARTH does his Mother represent?

The one who nourished him and raised him up—is his faith community. The community that gave birth to Christianity. The mother= Israel.

Next:

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.." That should already sound familiar to you, but let's start at the very beginning. You couldn't have noticed that the prior three paragraphs to this reading began with "on the next day" because we read such short snippets of the bible you wouldn't know that.. But this reading begins, *on the third day....*

John is hoping that any authorities reading this just assume John's merely taking the days in sequence but read more carefully. John has said "on the next day", three times already—and so – he really should say "on the fourth day"—for this passage. But he doesn't.

Why does "on the third day" sound familiar to us? What do we know of that happens on the 3rd day? Resurrection. *Rebirth*.

There are 6 stone jars full of water—which would have been ready to be used for the rituals of purification, according to the law. But they are not what the wedding needs.

Jesus' mother asks him to act in this crisis, and he tells her his "hour has not come" *yet*. Clearly it is the correct time for a "sign" but not for the "big finale".

So what do all these things mean when we put them together? What is the secret message, the metaphor of this passage?

Jesus is the bridegroom, and he is calling his bride, Israel, to a new beginning. A new marriage, if you will. The wine of the Spirit has replaced the waters of purification. The transition which will take Israel to Christianity, will come, but not until the hour is at hand. But the signs begin to appear-- with this one being the first one.

Jesus has begun to change the way the Jews see God, and the way they see themselves. He is transforming a religion from one under the law, to one where Love is the law.

John sees Jesus not only as a figure in history, but as the Messiah who will challenge us with new ideas, transforming not just wine, but US from who we are to who we can be, as the Spirit carries us into the new Kingdom where power does not have the final say, and where Love changes us, resurrects us, into new life.

Imagine that kind of marriage, where God and humanity is wedded, and then transformed into a radically new life. This is the secret John tries to tell, and this is the treasure that we will find if we look: that we are being offered no less than a radically new existence where everyone is whole and holy. And it all begins with this first sign.

Amen.