

THE ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS LESSON

“Woman”

By looking closely at the literal meaning of the Wedding at Cana account, we can see that Jesus didn't intend to distance himself from his mother. But what did He intend? The key to discovering that lies in the way Jesus addressed his mother—as “Woman.” Jesus often addresses women that way in the Scriptures. In every instance, He is being polite and respectful to those women (See Mt 15:28; Lk 13:12; Jn 4:21, 8:10, 20:13). It is unusual, however, for Jesus to address his mother that way. Nowhere else in either the Bible or the literature of that time is there an example of a son calling his mother “woman.” This suggests that the word, as it's used here, has symbolic value. That idea gets further support from the fact that “Woman” is the only way Jesus addresses Mary in John's Gospel (See Jn 19:26).

The “Woman” Of Genesis And Revelation

Here again, we need to read this passage in light of John's framework of a new creation. In the first creation, “woman” was the name Adam gave Eve. And in the second creation, the new creation depicted by John in his Gospel, “woman” is the name Jesus gives Mary. A “woman” also figures prominently in another one of the books written by John, the Book of Revelation. As in John's Gospel, the Book of Genesis lies behind the scene depicted in Revelation 12. By comparing the promise God made in Genesis 3:15 with the dramatic fulfillment of that promise played out in Revelation 12, we can see that the “woman” depicted in both is the “woman” we meet in Cana—Mary.

The New Eve

Both Revelation and Cana share the same “back story”: The creation story from Genesis. In both Revelation and Cana, Mary is called “woman” and in both is described as the Mother of Jesus, the Messiah. It's also important to note that she is associated with Jesus' other disciples. Through setting up those parallels, John depicts Mary as the New Eve. He shows us that just

as Adam was a type of Christ, so too was Eve a type of Mary. The original mother of man foreshadowed and illuminated the role the mother of Jesus would play in salvation history. And at Cana, the New Eve radically reverses the decision of the first Eve.

The Messiah's Wedding

Once we recognize Jesus as the New Adam and Mary as the New Eve, we can also recognize the wedding at Cana as a sign of the New Covenant. As the Sabbath was the sign of God's first covenant with creation, the wedding feast at Cana—with its faithful servants and miraculous abundance of wine—is the sign of God's New Covenant with creation. In the first covenant, we witness the marital union of a man and a woman—Adam and Eve. And in the New Covenant, we have a man and a woman present at a wedding. Mary, of course, is Jesus' mother, not his bride. But as the "woman," Mary becomes the locus of a host of biblical symbols and expectations. She is, simultaneously: A daughter of Israel, the mother of the new people of God, and the bride of God, the one who conceives and bears his Son. That Son is also the heavenly Bridegroom, come to fulfill his promise to wed his people in a new and everlasting covenant.

The Promised Bridegroom

We see this promise of "messianic nuptials" in the writings of the prophets, in certain Psalms, and in other Old Testament writings like the Song of Solomon (Jer 2; Ezek 16:32; Is 54:4–8; Hos 2:20–21). In Hosea and elsewhere, the messianic blessings of the New Covenant are accompanied or symbolized by "new wine" (See also Joel 2:19, 24; Zech 9:16–17, 10:7; Is 25:6; Amos 9:13–14). That same type of imagery appears in the Song of Solomon, which symbolically depicts God's wedding to his people (See 1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:9; 8:2). At Cana then, John presents Jesus as the promised Bridegroom, the one who will provide new wine at the wedding feast of the New Covenant. Again, our interpretation is helped by looking at John's Revelation, which concludes with the "wedding feast of the Lamb," the marriage supper celebrating the union between Christ and his bride, the Church (see Rev 19:9; 21:9; 22:17). There too, this feast marks the pinnacle of a new creation. Likewise, at Cana, John reveals that Mary is the "bride" of the New Adam, the mother of the new creation.

WHAT WE'LL COVER IN LESSON FIVE

Marian Apparition: Our Lady of La Salette

Themes Covered

- » The background of the original Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament
- » Luke's parallels between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant
- » Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant

Scripture Verses Read By Cardinal Donald Wuerl In This Lesson

- » Numbers 10:33
- » Joshua 3:3–4
- » 2 Maccabees 2:4–5
- » 2 Maccabees 2:6–8
- » Revelation 11:19
- » Revelation 12:1–2

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LESSON

- » Hail, Holy Queen, Chapter 5 (pp. 89–113)
- » Matthew 1:18–25
- » Matthew 12:46–50
- » Catechism of the Catholic Church 88–90, 496–501