

**Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup> 2024. Epiphany 3**  
**Genesis 14.17-20, Psalm 128, John 2.1-11**

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We often enjoy hospitality, receiving people into our home or being invited elsewhere. After the service in church, it gives us the opportunity to talk and to get to know one another better, a chance to widen our circle of friends. In many ways, it is a blessing.

In the first reading, the battle-weary Abram is met with food and drink, bread and wine. Abram and his men pursue the retreating kings to the vicinity of Dan, rout them in a night attack and rescue goods and captives, including Lot. This portrayal of Abram as a military leader stands in contrast to other traditions about him.

Salem is considered to be an ancient name for Jerusalem, and the name Melchizedek may mean either 'king of righteousness' or 'my king is Zedek'. His name occurs again in Psalm 110: 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek', and it suggests that Melchizedek was priest and king of Jerusalem.

In today's extract, Abram is blessed by God. Abram, the friend of God, accepts the blessing of a Canaanite priest, the God of revelation, God of Abram, God of the universe, God of Melchizedek.

Psalm 128 was probably used as a priestly blessing on pilgrims arriving at the temple. It begins by stating that the blessing is given to those, who reverence God and live in obedience to his will. They will not be robbed of the fruits of their labour by crop failure. The wife will receive the gift of many children, who will stand around the table like young shoots at the base of an olive tree. Finally, prosperity of the individual rests on the welfare of the community and on God, who resides in Zion. Jerusalem radiates well-being to the whole land, and the prayer is that the pilgrim will live to be a grandfather and see Israel enjoying peace.

In the Gospel, John selects the first of Jesus' signs, which revealed his glory, as a result of which his disciples followed him and believed in him. The setting is Cana, which may be a link with Nathaniel in Chapter 1, being referred to as 'a true Israelite'. The story contains much symbolism, and it reveals Jesus, who shows us what heaven is like. It takes place on the third day, and points to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. It is a foretaste, with the good wine supplied by Jesus, of the 'marriage supper of the Lamb' in Revelation. The miracle of changing water into wine is one of blessing. Jesus takes ordinary water, and in

blessing transforms it into the wine of celebration. The host is not embarrassed, and the guests can continue celebrating the wedding. God's delight in people is revealed.

Wine is also a symbol of blood. In Exodus, the first sign of Moses leading to the deliverance from Egypt is the turning of water into blood. The Gospel writer stresses the life-giving water and blood, which Jesus will give to his disciples to drink, and when Jesus is crucified, water and blood flow from his side when his death is accomplished.

At a wedding, family and community meet, guests are offered fine food and drink, and there is a blessing for a new family, a new beginning. God, who feeds the wedding guests at Cana, who prepares the banquet in heaven, who brought more wine to the people in Cana, is waiting to feed us with bread and wine, with words and ideas, wanting to be involved with us, to give us his life in the Eucharist, and we are all invited to 'taste and see', as in Psalm 34:  
'O taste and see that the Lord is gracious; blessed is the one who trusts in him.'

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.