

1-1-2004

# The Wedding

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## Recommended Citation

Paul, John Steven, "The Wedding" (2004). Soul Purpose Liturgical Drama. Paper 31. [http://scholar.valpo.edu/soul\\_purpose/31](http://scholar.valpo.edu/soul_purpose/31)

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The Wedding  
 A liturgical drama written for the wedding of  
 John Lofgren and Mary Boeger  
 Based on John 2: 1-11  
 A play for actors and singers by John Steven Paul  
 Developed in workshop by Soul Purpose,  
 The Liturgical Drama Troupe of the Valparaiso University Theatre

## Introduction

### The Wedding in the Church Year

*The Wedding* is based on John 2: 1-11, the Gospel designated to be read on the second Sunday after Epiphany in the third year of the three-year cycle of readings in the Revised Common Lectionary. Thus, *The Wedding* is a play for the Epiphany season, the season of manifestation.<sup>1</sup> The readings for Epiphany and subsequent Sundays tell the story of God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus. From "The Visit of the Magi" to the "Transfiguration," the Epiphany stories are about God's showing the divine incarnation to humans. Liturgical theatre artists might take heart at the idea that God presented Jesus Christ to the world through this series of salutary shows! Conversely, the dramatic question for Epiphany plays is whether human beings will be able to see what God is manifesting to them.

### The Context

The first performance of *The Wedding* was not in the Epiphany season, but at the marriage ceremony of one of our actors, which took place on June 7, 2002. I had originally thought that John and Mary wanted Soul Purpose to perform for their wedding *reception*. We had several plays, already in the repertoire, which would have been appropriate for such an occasion. When they asked us to perform for the marriage *ceremony*, I knew that we would want to create a new play. What more perfect New Testament story to bring to a Christian wedding could there be than "The Wedding at Cana"? The wedding sermon, and a play that serves as the sermon, must proclaim Jesus Christ's presence in the midst of the assembly and it must lift up this personal exchange of vows for recognition and affirmation by the Christian community.

But a wedding play must also bless and address the bride and groom *personally*. So *The Wedding* is a play for John Lofgren and Mary Boeger's wedding. As such, there are some very personal references in the play. For example, John and Mary wanted breakfast food at their wedding reception – eggs, bacon, cinnamon rolls, etc. For John and Mary breakfast represents beginnings: the beginning of a new day, of a new family, of a new life in Christ. The references to breakfast may make this play too particular to use for a general

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<sup>1</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980) 61-62, 69.

congregational audience. On the other hand, the symbolism is not so personal that it is obscure or mysterious, especially if you insert some of the lines given to JOHN in this edition of the play. You can further generalize by using more common last names, such as Johnson or Schmidt, or you might omit the family names completely. You will also want to substitute a mythical town for Spring Lake, Michigan where John and Mary were married.

### The Relationship of *The Wedding* to John 2: 1-11

The most memorable moment in John's story "The Wedding at Cana" is Jesus's miraculous transformation of water into wine. Jesus would seem to have performed this miracle at the behest of his mother who says to him: "They have no wine." Here we see Jesus, then, obeying his mother and helping a bride and groom in need. But, if we pull back the lens of our camera to take a wider view, we see that this story is part of a series of events through which Jesus's disciples are drawn to him. Andrew leaves John the Baptist's fellowship for Jesus and then brings along his brother Simon. The next day, Jesus asks Philip to follow him (1:43) and Philip goes to find Nathaniel and urges him to "come and see." (1:46) When Jesus tells Nathaniel that he saw him before Philip called him, Nathaniel is moved to confess "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" (1:49) It is the next day, according to the Evangelist, that Jesus *and his disciples* go to the wedding in Cana.

In Soul Purpose's version of the story, disciples Philip and Nathaniel have speaking roles. We have reserved Nathaniel's confession, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" for the end of this play after the prospective disciple has seen Jesus's miracle changing water into wine. The last sentence of John's story takes on particular significance in the play. "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." In *The Wedding* it is Philip and Nathaniel, specifically, who believe in him.

### The Staging of *The Wedding*

As actor number 3 says, "we have two stories to tell." In this play there are three levels of reality. The first level is that of eight actors who have been invited to perform the sermon at the wedding ceremony of a friend. The action on this level takes place in a church. The first story that the actors tell is that of a contemporary bride and groom in the very last stages of preparation for their wedding. This story unfolds in a variety of specific locations that can be set in the central staging area we have called "the crossing."<sup>2</sup> No furniture is required except, perhaps, a chair. The second story is John's "The Wedding at Cana." This story can also be played out on the horizontal axis of the cross.

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<sup>2</sup> The Soul Purpose plays have been designed to be staged in the shape of a cross. This *cruciform staging* establishes the principal playing area at the point where the vertical and horizontal arms of the cross intersect. We can call this crossing area "stage center." It may actually be at the foot of the chancel or altar platform. Stage left, from the actor's point of view, extends along one arm of the cross to the end of the area visible to the audience. Stage right extends along the opposite arm of the cross. Below the crossing, the vertical line of the cross extends down the center aisle of the area where the congregation sits. Above the crossing is a comparatively shallow area extending to the top of the vertical line of the cross at the base of the altar or table.

The bridge between the two stories is the scene in which JOHN and MARY rehearse their friend NATE in the reading of the Gospel for the wedding ceremony. NATE is to read John 2: 1-11. As he reads from the Bible “The Wedding at Cana” comes alive before us, with all the actors who had roles in the story of John and Mary’s wedding, now taking corresponding roles in the Gospel story. The bridge scene, the rehearsing of NATE takes place in the church where JOHN and MARY are to be married. The chancel and the seating area should be deployed, as they would be in an actual wedding ceremony.

The climax of “The Wedding at Cana” is Jesus’ miraculous transformation of water into wine. Since six thirty-gallon stone water jars – or even their theatrical approximation – would be impractical accoutrements for a play to be performed in place of a sermon, six actors will do instead. At the appropriate moment, the actors appear with stoneware bowls in their hands. The audience sees the water changing into wine in the eyes and faces of the actor, who are, clearly, much more expressive that massive water jars could *ever* be.

The character of NATE/NATHANIEL in *The Wedding* is the bridge between liturgical actors and the congregational audience. NATE/NATHANIEL is like some of us, skeptical of but susceptible to the Gospel message. If we will come and see with the eyes of faith; if we will read the story in faith, (perhaps aloud, in church) we may, by God’s grace, find ourselves saying again, with Nathaniel, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.”

Characters:

Actor #	In <i>The Wedding</i>	...and later in “The Wedding at Cana”
1	John	<i>The Groom</i>
2	Mary	<i>The Bride</i>
3	The Minister	<i>Jesus</i>
4	The Caterer	<i>The Wine Steward</i>
5	Nate	<i>Nathaniel</i>
6	Mom	<i>The Mother of the Bride</i>
7	One of John’s friends	<i>Philip</i>
8	Aunt Mary	<i>Mary, Jesus’s mother, the Bride’s aunt</i>

*The actors enter THE CHURCH from various parts of the room and gather at the front.*

8.

This is it!

5.

We’re here!

6.

Welcome to John & Mary's wedding!

7.

John Lofgren

3.

...and...

6.

Mary Boeger.

2.

Mary Boeger

3.

...and...

1.

John Lofgren

2.

I love you, John, and I want you to be my husband from this day forward; I want to join with you and share all that is to come, and I promise to be faithful to you until death parts us.

1.

Promise?

2.

Promise.

1.

I love you, Mary, and I want you to be my wife from this day forward; I want to join with you and share all that is to come, and I promise to be faithful to you until death parts us.

2.

Promise?

1.

Promise.

8.

Don't you just love weddings?

6.

I do...but they make me cry.

8.

Why?

3.

*(to 8 & 6. Not scolding, just reminding.)* Ahem! We have a story to--

6.

Tell you later.

3.

We have a story to tell.

4.

Actually, it's two stories and we'll each play two parts.

1.

We'll play the bride and groom and friends and family

2.

all attending a wedding today in...

8.

a little town on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan (*winks*)

7.

and we'll also play roles in a story that took place a long time ago in Cana of Galilee

6.

in that story, we'd like you to play some roles as well

5.

the disciples of Jesus

3.

We hope that won't be too much of a "stretch" for you, as they say in the theatre.  
Anyway...

All.

Welcome!

*[Pause]*

3.

From the moment they woke up

4.

John and Mary had the feeling that this day was going to be a special day

3-8.

Maybe even *their* special day

John, Mary.

What do you mean "maybe"?

7.

Of course it is.

4.

It's your special day!

6.

Your wedding day.

5.

No "maybe" about it.

4.

It's your special day, your special hour, your special ... MOMENT!

3.

*My hour has not yet come.*

4

Well, theirs has.

Mary

Wait...wait...no...it's not the day yet is it? (*waking up from a dream*) Mom?

Mom

Mary, what is it?

Mary.

Mom, I was dreaming again that we were getting married and—

Mom.

Mary, you *are* getting married.

Mary.

When?

Mom.

Today.

Mary

No, on Saturday.

Mary.

Today's Saturday.

Mom.

But, I'm afraid that I haven't done everything on the list.

Mom.

What are you afraid of?

Mary.

I don't *know*, but I feel like there's something.... Just let me go over the list one more time.

### **The List**

*In the is section, the CHORUS becomes THE LIST and Mary checks off each item; JOHN makes it obvious that this is not his favorite part.*

3.

Talk to the pastor.

Mary.

Check.

8.

Announce your engagement.

Mary.

Check.

3.

Reserve the church.

Mary.

Done.

7.

Choose and book a reception site.

2.

Did it.

6.

Hire a caterer.

Caterer.

That's me!

John.

Oh, brother...

5.

Choose and hire a photographer.

Mary.

Check.

Caterer.

Reserve additional items for the ceremony & reception.

John.

Like what?

Caterer.

Tents...tables...chairs and linens...dishes...glasses...utensils...arches...balloons...additional decorations...and, a strolling violinist.

John.

All this for breakfast?

Caterer.

What did you say? Did you say—

John.

Breakfast. The reception is going to be a breakfast.

Caterer.

You're not serious! Why?

John.

Breakfast has been a very significant meal for us. It symbolizes--

Caterer.

Oh, never mind. Uh, Bride....Bride-y, dear...could we speak for a moment?

Mary.

*(entering)* The beginning of a new day, a new family, a new life together.

Caterer.

Oh. *(He rushes off.)*

8.

Make honeymoon plans and reservations.

Mary.

Check.

7.

Order your invitations and thank-you notes.

Mary.

Done.

7.

Finalize your invitation list.

Mary.

That's it; it's the invitation list. *(She begins to think about this – to worry about it – on her own.)*  
I know we haven't invited...who?

5.

*(The LIST continues.)* Buy your wedding rings?

John.

Got 'em.

7.

Check marriage license requirements.

John.

Did it: blood tests, medical exams, birth certificates.

Pastor.

Got the marriage license, John?

John.

Got it, Pastor.

Mom.

*(Realizing Mary has dropped out of the conversation).* Mary, have you forgotten something?

Mary.

It's the invitations; I mean it's not the invitations; it's the people we might have forgotten to invite.

John.

*(He's on the phone with MARY)* What about them?

Mary.

It can make a big difference who's at the wedding, and who's NOT at the wedding.

John.

I know, Mary, but we thought the invitation list through very carefully – three times. Besides the wedding's only six hours away. We can't worry about this now.

Mary.

I know, I know. But can't we just check the invitation list one more time?

John.

*(sighs and gives in)* OK, but you make it sound like there's never been a wedding before. People have been getting married all the way back to Adam and Eve.

Mary.

But they didn't have a wedding. Did they? OK...the Andersons: Bill and Courtney.... *MARY continues ad lib*)

### **The Wedding at Cana**

7.

There *have* been other weddings.

1, 2.

Other Johns and Marys

6.

Other mothers

3.

Other guests and ministers, and caterers

4. *Wine Steward*, if you please.

*Enter NATE, #5*

Nate.

You called?

John.

Nate, my nephew got sick and can't come. He was supposed to read from the Bible. Could you take his place?

Nate.

Well, I guess so, sure. (*MARY nudges JOHN*)

John.

Could we just run through it once?

Nate.

You mean you want me to practice it...in front of you?

Mary.

(*to herself*) "Rehearse Scripture reading with -- Nate." Check! Yes, please Nate. Stand over there and read loudly and clearly.

Nate.

(*reads aloud*) On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee--

Mary.

Could you start with “The reading is from the Gospel of John, Chapter 2, verses one through eleven”?

Nate.

*(Having major second thoughts now)* Mary, I don’t know why you guys picked me to read this. I’m not the most religious person, you know and—

John.

Nate, you’re my-- *our* best friend.

Mary.

Please, Nate.

Nate.

*(gives in, but not happily)* “The reading is from the Gospel of John, Chapter 2, verses one through eleven.... On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee

Mary.

and the mother of Jesus was there

Nate.

Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

Nathaniel.

Philip, I haven’t got time for a wedding today. It’s Wednesday, a work day, you remember work don’t you?

Philip.

I will be serving there as a waiter. And, there will be too many people there for me to do it alone. I need your help. Besides, Jesus – the one I told you about -- will be there. Just come and see him.

Nathaniel.

You've said that to me before.<sup>3</sup>

Groom.

Who?

Bride.

He's one of my mother's friends. I mean, his mother is a friend of my mother.

Groom.

How did he make the list?

Bride.

I said, his mother is—

Groom.

--a friend of your mother, I know. And who are those roughnecks with him? (*Looking out at the audience.*)

Bride.

They're friends of friends...of friends. That's the way they do weddings in Nazareth—everybody comes!

Groom.

But this is Cana, not Nazareth, and we have a small house with limited resources. Besides there were those I was not allowed to invite.

Bride.

Who?

Groom.

My sister's husband.

Bride.

Sweetheart, he's a felon.

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<sup>3</sup> John 1:46

Groom.

Accused, not convicted.

Bride.

I know, but still.... He scares me.

Groom.

You hardly know him.

Bride.

Neither do you.

Groom.

He's my brother-n-law.

Bride.

John, I love you. *(This is her way of settling little disputes)*

Groom.

*(It's settled)* Me too. And sometimes I can't wait 'til this is all o--

Bride.

Shhhhhh....

*Her mother, #6, enters with #8, MARY, the mother of Jesus*

Sarah.

John, I'd like you to meet my friend, Mary. She is from Nazareth where I grew up.

Mary.

*(to BRIDE and GROOM)* May God shower blessings on your union and grant you healthy children.

Bride.

Thank you and may God bless the friend of my mother.

Groom.

Good morning, Madam. If you'll excuse me, I must see to the wine. *(I exits; there is a pause)*

Bride.

Aunt Mary, I must apologize for my...

Mary.

No apologies, please, dear. I have known many bridegrooms. They are always anxious on the wedding day. Especially the young ones.

Sarah.

*(Changing the subject)* Your son, Jesus, has created quite a stir. I mean, people say remarkable things about him. Preaching in the streets. Prophecy...!

Bride.

And, so young, for a rabbi.

Mary.

He has just begun his teaching. I am so proud of him. He has a gift. I *so* want him to be safe.

Bride.

With companions like those, I don't think you have much to worry about.

Sarah.

Mary!

Bride.

I'm sorry mother. As the hour grows closer, I am also anxious. Please forgive me. I would like to speak with the musicians, if I may. You understand, Aunt Mary.

Mary.

Of course, dear. This is your special day. Please don't mind me.

Sarah.

What can I say? Children...

Steward.

*(entering)* Madam, may I speak with you?

Sarah.

Of course. Please excuse us, Mary. *(MARY nods and 6 & 5 move away to speak)*. What is it, Reuben?

Steward.

It is JUST as I predicted, Madam. We are nearly out of wine.

Sarah.

Oh, Reuben, no. How could that be?

Steward.

It could be because there has been no control of the invitations. People simply come. Invited or not. It is outrageous. And I would like to warn you right now, as with the wine, so with the grapes and the olives. We will most certainly run out of them as well! This is impossible. My reputation will be ruined!

Sarah.

Please calm down. Come, let us go and speak to John.

Steward.

It Who?

Sarah.

The groom.

Steward.

Oh, him. This *breakfast* was his idea. Who's ever heard of breakfast at a wedding? It doesn't make sense. It was nearly impossible to choose the proper wine to complement--

Sarah.

Come along, Reuben. Excuse us, Mary. Details, details, details.

Mary.

Bye, bye.

*#7 enters.*

Philip

*(serving as a waiter)* Would Madam care for something to drink?

Mary.

Uhm, just water, please.

*JESUS (#3) enters.*

Jesus.

*(Greeting her)* Mother. *(They embrace)*

Mary.

Are you and your friends *(indicating the audience)* enjoying the wedding?

Jesus.

Are we? *(He looks at the audience as if to seek consensus)* Yes, we are! I love weddings. I love to share in the joy and the rejoicing.

Mary.

Good. Welcome. All of you...

Jesus.

Mother, you look worried.

Mary.

The wine is nearly gone.

*#7 and #5 (now NATHANIEL) enter. #7 gives #8 a cup of water.*

Jesus.

*(Laughing)* Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? I am just a wedding guest...

Mary.

And I am the bride's dear Aunt Mary. *(She looks at her son, but he says nothing. Then...)*

Jesus.

Mother—

Mary.

Haven't you been talking for more than a year about creating a new community?

Jesus.

It is my mission. You know that.

Mary.

Well, then, here is an opportunity. A small one, perhaps, but nevertheless, with the marriage of these two young people a new community begins. And look at all of these *(indicating the audience)*. Before today, some of them had people and interests in common, but most did not. Many did not even know one another. But today they are all here to share in the joy of this union. Beginning today, these many individuals are as one. Do you want them all to remember this as the day the wine ran out and the hospitality came to an early end?

Jesus.

Perhaps everyone has had enough wine. *(He looks out, hopefully)*

*(a purposeful silence)*

Jesus.

Do you want me to *show off*, Mother?

Mary.

I want you to save John and Mary and their family from humiliation.

Jesus.

My hour has not yet come.

*[pause]*

Mary.

Jesus, I am confident, you will transform this unhappy situation. *(To the servants.)* Do exactly what he tells you. *(She exits.)*

5.

Now standing there were six stout water jars placed in a row—

6.

--for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

*Numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, & 8 are lined up as a Chorus each has a cup. They drink and realizing it is only water, they express their disappointment and pour it out onto the ground.*

Jesus.

fill the jars with water.

*The chorus looks doubtful as #7 fills the cups with water again.*

1,2, 4-6, 8

And they filled them up to the brim.

Jesus.

Now draw some out *(all of the CHORUS except for #4 drink)* and take it to the chief steward.

5 & 7

So they took it.

8.

When the Steward tasted the water that had become wine

6.

and did not know where it had come from

7.

(Though the servants who had drawn the water knew)

Steward.

This wine...is FINE. And there I thought that man had no taste! (*He runs to look for Groom*)

Nathaniel.

Andrew, I can't believe it. I mean I can believe it because I saw it, but I...

Philip

Didn't I tell you to come and see? (*They look at JESUS.*)

Nathaniel

Rabbi, you are the Son of God!

Philip.

You are the King of Israel!

*The Wine STEWARD re-enters with the GROOM.*

Steward.

My dear sir, I must confess, I took you for a, uh, er, uh...

Groom.

A clod from Cana?

Steward.

Exactly. I mean. I ... no ... I -- What I mean to say is that everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.

The Point

Nate.

(reading) Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

*The reading is over and NATHANIEL (#5) is NATE again. He doesn't know how to end the reading, so JOHN (#1) says*

John.

This is the Word of the Lord.

John, Mary.

Thanks be to God. *(They embrace warmly, genuinely.)*

Nate.

*(impressed)* What was that all about?

Mary.

A gift. That story is a wedding gift.

John.

Thanks for reading it, Nate.

Nate.

Huh?

Mary.

I remember now whom I *thought* we forgot to invite.

Nate.

OK...? *(Still waiting for the punch line)*

John.

Jesus.

Nate.

*(clueless)* Jesus. Because...?

John.

Didn't you hear your own reading? That bride and groom had invited Jesus and his disciples to their wedding. And Jesus made the difference that day. He turned water into wine and saved the day from being an ordinary one where some things go right and others go wrong into a perfect day, a day all those people would remember as the beginning of a new life together.

Mary.

But, we didn't forget.

Nate.

*(uncertain)* You didn't.

Mary.

No. It was the first thing on our list.

John.

Invite Jesus.

Mary.

*(indicating the wedding guests)* And all his disciples.

John.

You reminded us by reading that story.

Nate.

Well...sure...of course. (*Persuaded that he is the hero now.*) I like that story. It's actually one of my favorites. Perfect for a wedding service. Obviously. Puts Jesus in a really good light, too. Makes you really ...interested... in him.

### Epilogue

3.

So that's the story.

6.

Stories?

7.

“The Wedding at Cana.”

4.

“The Wedding at Spring Lake.”

3.

They're stories about weddings ... and *more* than weddings.

6.

They're about parents and children.

4.

They're about asking for what you need

8.

and receiving abundance, super-abundance, in return.

1.

Who could drink 180 gallons of wine?

6.

They're about love.

5.

They're about signs:

3.

Signs of God's gracious love.

2.

They're about invitations.

7.

What happens when you invite Jesus to your wedding?

1.

He turns two into one.

3.

And makes one out of many.

4.

He turns water into WINE.

1 & 2

Amen!

**Coda: Prayers**

8.

*(to 6)* You were going to tell me why you always cry at weddings.

6.

OK, but this is just between you and me.

8.

Right.

6.

There is so much love and joy and hope at a wedding – it’s just *perfect*. But I know there’s going to be a lot of hurt and heartache ahead too; they’re not always going to be perfectly happy like today. There will be days of poverty of one kind or another, and sickness. That’s just the way life is. That -- the knowing of that truth -- makes me cry. And then...

8.

What?

6.

Why do you think they end each promise with the words, “until *death* parts us”?

8.

I pray they never forget -- never forget-- Jesus’ promise. “Remember I am with you always, to the end of the age” –

6.

Now that’s a promise.

3.

Amen.

All.

Amen!

**END**