

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are many miracles in the Bible. Some stand out more than others. In Matthew 21, Jesus curses a fig tree and it withers and dies. (18-22, also Mark 11:12-14, 20-24) **“Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered...”** (21:19)

It is unique because this is the only miracle of destruction that Jesus performs in his ministry. It is full of significance. This miracle was performed at the time that Jesus’ cleansed the Temple. The cursing of the fig tree served as a lesson to the disciples. Just as the tree promised fruit, but did not deliver, so the Jewish people thought themselves to be very fruitful but were empty of spiritual fruits. Cursing of the fig tree pointed to the outcome if the people did not repent and produce fruit.

Today we are going to hear about a miracle that was also destructive. It occurred in the days of Moses when the Israelites were slaves in the country of Egypt. The people of God longed for freedom. The Lord uses a series of 10 miracles called **“The 10 Plagues”** to help the Israelites.

In this process God reveals his glory and rescues the Israelites. Jesus also reveals his glory and rescues a newly-wed couple in the Gospel reading.

This is important because it is through a water miracle that God reveals his glory and rescues us. So today, **A Water Miracle Reveals God’s Glory and our Rescue.**

1. At the waters of the Nile

The Lord God directs Moses and Aaron to go meet Pharaoh, King of Egypt, while he is walking along the bank of the Nile River. This is a time of worship for the king. The Nile River was a god to the Egyptian people. The Lord uses the occasion to reveal his glory as the true God through a powerful water miracle.

A. We might wonder why God would use a miracle of destruction against anyone. The answer is that this is a warning to us. The King of Egypt would not listen to the Lord. Before the miracle God had Moses ask Pharaoh to let the people go. He refuses. After a devastating miracle, he still refuses to let

the Israelites go. In fact we are told that he turns his back on Moses and walks back to the palace. The Lord describes the King's heart as unyielding. He has a heart hardened by unbelief. This is remarkable considering the miracle.

B. God reveals his glory by turning the Nile River into blood.

1. When Moses staff strikes the water, it begins to turn to blood. Some scientists have said that red silt or dirt merely made the water red in color. The Bible says "blood." What is amazing is that it isn't just the river, but all the wells and cisterns or tanks that they had for holding large amounts of water turned to blood. It appears that only the people's personal water jars in their home were spared. It was a dire situation.

2. The Pharaoh would not change even though the Lord performed eight more miracles of destruction. Finally the Lord had his people put the blood of a one-year-old lamb on their doorposts. He sent an angel of death through Egypt to put to death first born males wherever the blood was not found. Pharaoh lost his son and he let the Israelites go. God had rescued his people.

2. At the waters of Cana

As we think about this water miracle, we will want to consider the miracle involving water in the city of Cana in the Gospel reading.

A. In this miracle God's glory is revealed in Jesus.

A couple celebrating their wedding ran out of wine. It was embarrassing to the couple and disappointing to the wedding guests. As we heard in the reading, Jesus changed the water into wine. People want to discount this incident as a hoax. However, Jesus did hundreds of miracles in his ministry including raising the dead. He showed beyond a doubt that he was God's Son in the flesh. This is important.

B. Only God could rescue us from our predicament.

1. If our only problem was running out of wine, we might be able to help ourselves. However, we are more like unbelieving Pharaoh than we might admit. Every time trust in the things of this life more than God, we are like Pharaoh trusting in the Nile rather than the Lord. When we sin we are turning our back on God just as Pharaoh turned his back on Moses. When Egypt ran low on water, undoubtedly people worried. "*What if we die of thirst?*" Every time we worry about not having enough food or drink, we are doubting God's ability to provide. The problem is that we are born into this

world as sinners. We are slaves to sin and we need to be rescued from sin death and Hell.

2. In our rescue we see the glory of God shine brightly in Jesus. He is our Passover lamb. Jesus blood dripped and painted the cross he was fastened to. By that blood our sins are forgiven. Eternal destruction passes over us. We are free from sin death and Hell. We have been rescued to life with God.

3. At the waters of Baptism

There is one more water miracle that we need to talk about today. There is a miracle that takes place in the waters of Holy Baptism. This is where God personally rescues you and me.

A. The miracle of Holy Baptism may not have the sizzle and pop of turning a major waterway into blood or turning ordinary water into the best of wines. You most often see in a Baptism a man putting water on a baby and the baby sometimes cry. Never-the-less this is a powerful miracle and a deeply personal one.

1. Martin Luther in his Small Catechism explains, *“Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word. Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”* (1st and 2nd of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism)

2. The reason Baptism works is because it is connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus won forgiveness of sins and life for us at the cross. In Baptism we become connected to Jesus. St. Paul writes in Galatians 3, **“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ.”** (27)

B. So this water miracle carries amazing blessings for you and me.

King Louis the Pious of France said, *“Three handfuls of water that were poured over my head in Holy Baptism are worth more than the crown I am wearing.”* (Oswald Riess *“What does the Bible Say?”*) Louis was a wealthy man, but he saw Baptism as having more value. He was right.

1. First, you and I sin often in our life. We have God watching our every move. That can be unnerving. However, we are sorry for our sins and we look to God for forgiveness. Will he forgive me? The answer found in our Baptism is, “yes”! God has washed away my sins. In his Pentecost sermon Peter tells the crowd that had gathered, **“Be baptized everyone one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins.”** (Acts 2:38)

So I have peace. I can go on with my day. I can sleep at night.

2. Second, I am assured I am a child of God. In Galatians 3 where St. Paul speaks of us being clothed with Christ in Baptism, he also says, **“In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”** (26) This is so important when you and I feel lost and alone. We are not lost or alone because God is always with his children. There isn't a day when he isn't providing for and protecting us. When you doubt, go into the Bible and see how God took care of the Israelites in the days of Moses and the disciples in the New Testament.

3. We also have the assurance of the blessing of life eternal. As we age and life ebbs away we want assurance that we will live in the newness of heaven.

Baptism promises that. Jesus himself said, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”** (Mark 16:16)

Conclusion: In the introduction I mentioned the miracle of the fig tree. There is more to that miracle than destruction. Jesus goes on to tell his disciples something positive. **“I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.”** (Matthew 21:21) When their ministries did not produce fruit, he wanted them to have faith. God would reveal his power, often through their preaching and teaching. Great things would happen, not the withering of trees and the moving of mountains, but souls coming to faith in Jesus.

Satan will do everything he can to get you and me to doubt God's power and his ability to bless the church or our personal service to Christ. All we have to do is to look at these miracles in the pages of Scripture. We see the glory of God revealed in the waters of the Nile and the waters of Cana. Our God is not only powerful, but he saves. This is especially true as we look to the waters of Holy Baptism. We see a very personal miracle. God revealed his glory when he washed away our sins in Jesus. He made us his own and promised to take care of us. As you live and serve in the New Year don't forget these miracles. Don't forget God's glory shining in your life. Amen.