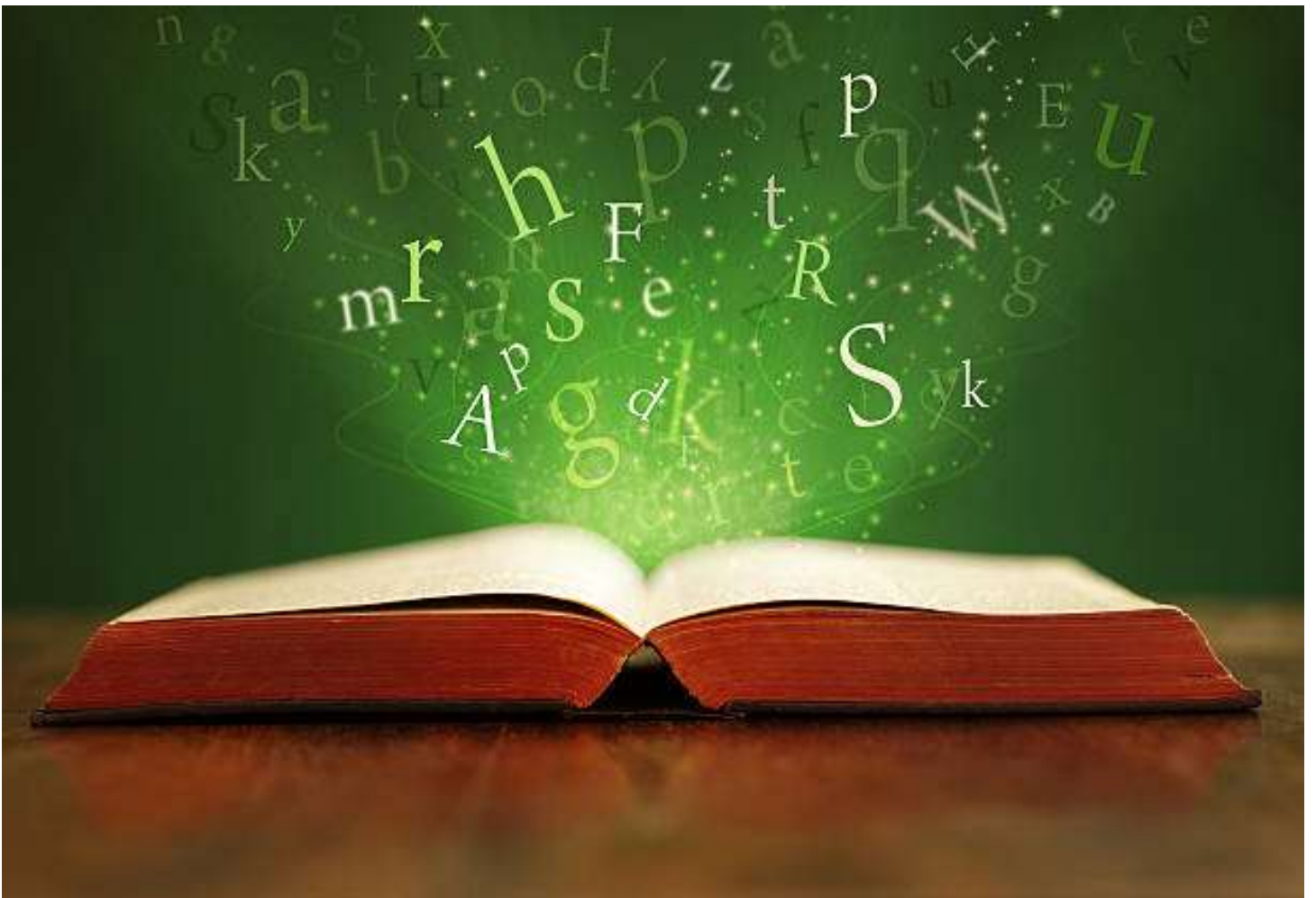


Messages, Monologues & Midrash



LLWL Spring Learning Event

Saturday, April 29, 2023 10am to 3pm

Agenda

Refreshments

Welcome/Introductions

Worship – The Widow's Coins – Mark 12:41 -43

Messages, Monologues & Midrash – A Presentation

Emmaus Road & The Art of Breaking Bread – A Monologue

Lunch

LLWL Network Meeting

Table Group Activity – Building Characters

Final Questions/Comments/Updates from ECORC

Closing Prayer

Thank you for joining us for this LLWL learning event
sponsored by ECORC.

What Is Midrash?

These writings, which fill in gaps in biblical texts, falls into two categories: halacha and aggadah.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING

[HTTPS://WWW.MYJEWISHLEARNING.COM/ARTICLE/MIDRASH-101/](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/midrash-101/)

MIDRASH

Midrash (מדרש) is an interpretive act, seeking the answers to religious questions (both practical and theological) by plumbing the meaning of the words of the Torah. (In the Bible, the root d-r-sh [דרש] is used to mean inquiring into any matter, including occasionally to seek out God's word.) Midrash responds to contemporary problems and crafts new stories, making connections between new Jewish realities and the unchanging biblical text.

Midrash falls into two categories. When the subject is law and religious practice (*halacha*), it is called *midrash halacha*. *Midrash aggadah*, on the other hand, interprets biblical narrative, exploring questions of ethics or theology, or creating homilies and parables based on the text. (Aggadah means "telling"; any midrash which is not halakhic falls into this category.)

Midrash Halacha

It is often difficult to determine, simply from reading the biblical text, what Jewish law would be in practice. The text of the Torah is often general or ambiguous when presenting laws. Midrash halacha attempts to clarify or extend a law beyond the conditions assumed in the Bible, and to make connections between current practice and the biblical text. It made possible the creation and acceptance of new liturgies and rituals which de facto replaced sacrificial worship after the fall of the Second Temple, and the maintenance of continuity by linking those practices to the words of the Torah.

Midrash halacha from the two centuries following the fall of the Temple was collected in three books — the Mekhilta on Exodus, the Sifra on Leviticus, and the Sifrei on Numbers and Deuteronomy — known as the tannaitic midrashim. (The tannaim were the rabbis from the time of the Mishnah, edited in approximately 200 C.E.)

Midrash Aggadah

The type of midrash most commonly referred to (as in, “There is a midrash which says...”) is from the collections of midrash aggadah, most of which were compiled between about 200 and 1000 C.E. (Many midrashim circulated orally before then). Midrash aggadah may begin its exploration with any word or verse in the Bible. There are many different methods of interpretation and exposition.

Written by rabbis both steeped in Bible and absorbed by the Jewish questions of their time, works of midrash aggadah often occupy the meeting ground between reverence and love for the wording of the fixed text of the Torah, and theological creativity. Midrashic writings thus often yield religious insights that have made Torah directly applicable to later Jewish realities, especially the concerns of its authors. Some of what midrash aggadah yields is insight into the burning, sometimes time-bound questions of those who wrote it. Still, the interpretations produced often have more universal and timeless application to our, or any, generation.

In addition to works devoted to midrashic compilations, midrash aggadah also appears throughout the two Talmuds. Midrash Rabbah, the “Great Midrash,” is the name of the collections linked to the five books of the Torah and the “Five Scrolls” (Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes) read on holidays. Some of these works read like verse-by-verse commentaries. Others may have originated in sermons linked to the weekly Torah reading.

Scripture: Mark 12: 38 – 44 The Widow's Coins monologue

(written by Cheryl McMurray)

The scripture today from Mark is often called the Widow's Mite. It is a simple story. A story that illuminates the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the wealthy and the poor, the important and the insignificant. Jesus redefines the meaning of wealth and poverty though, doesn't he? He redefines what is important and what is unimportant, what is significant and what is insignificant in the kingdom of God. It occurred to me that though the story is titled the Widow's mite, we never hear from the widow. Today we will. I invite you back in time with me....

Shalom. I see you. These old eyes are still able to recognize friend from foe. I see you, as clearly as I see them. Bah! I see them at temple.

The Pharisees. The Sadducees. The Herodians. The teachers of the law.

Aristocrats they are, wealthy, well connected. Most of them are related to the temple

priests. They come to temple most days at the busiest times so they can be seen in their fine, flowing robes, placing their gold coins in the treasury. In fact, I have heard they send their servants ahead, just for the purpose of letting their masters

know when the temple is busiest, just so the most people will see them as they enter, in all their humility. Bah!

They consider themselves well respected. They command the most important seats in the synagogue. They demand the places of honour at the banquet halls. They don't see me. No (shaking head). A widow, without husband or children, I am nothing in their eyes. Do you know what it is to be in plain sight, yet not seen? It is one such as these that will take my home from me in a few short weeks. The money my husband left me is all but gone. I have only a few copper pennies left. I do not know what to do, where to go. So I come to the temple, to pray, to beg for God's mercy.

A few days ago, as I sat in silence at the temple, I watched as a young man entered with his companions. I heard of their arrival in Jerusalem from a young couple who lives down the street. They moved to the city not long ago.

Loving parents to two young children, and she expecting her third any day now.

I walk with her to the village well sometimes, and keep an eye on those busy boys of hers while she fetches water.

She told me of seeing this man, Jesus is his name,
come into Jerusalem riding on a colt. Of all things! The people gathered,
shouting: 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

She has told me stories about this man, Jesus. On their journey to
Jerusalem, they came across a crowd gathered to listen to his teachings. She said,
they sat on a hillside all that day, that his words opened their hearts and their
minds. She said it was as if she had been blind and now could see, had been deaf
and now could hear. And then she told me that at the end of day he refused to
send the crowd home hungry. He gathered the few loaves and fishes people had
brought along, and blessed them. His companions began to pass around the
basket and somehow, no matter how many hands reached in there was always
something to pull out. Everyone ate their fill, and there were even baskets of
food leftover. How is that possible? I could not help but wonder if she had made
more of the story than what really happened.

But then she told me of a second time she and her husband and children had crossed his path on their journey. How they came across Jesus and his companions at the edge of a village. Parents were bringing their children to him to be blessed. His companions refused to allow it. But Jesus became indignant. He said to his companions: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

(Mark 10:13-16)

I'm not sure what to make of it, really. That he would speak, that he would believe, that he would teach that children hold a place in God's kingdom? More so, that a man must become as a child to enter the kingdom of God. Bah! That would be like saying the Sadducees must become as a poor widow to enter heaven! I can imagine the outcry that would bring...

I have seen him since at the temple. That which sits high on the hill, shining in the sun. It's walls, it's gates, it's colonnades and porticos! The temple is "covered with so much gold that one can scarce look directly at it in bright sunlight. All not overlaid with gold is of pure white stone like the snow on the mountaintop." ¹ His companions were awestruck at the sight. Well, rightly so. It is magnificent. Jesus seemed less impressed. I saw him watching the parade of the Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians and Teachers of the law – the important and worthy. He understood what was happening.

And I saw... I saw him look at me. Not like the others, who look past me, but to actually look at me. I cannot explain how it is that in that one glance, I believe he understood my plight. His eyes radiated compassion and care. It was as if I had received a loving hug, and heard a reassuring voice say, "It will be alright." How fanciful I am getting in my old age... But then.... well... you won't believe it. When I walked towards home, the young couple who live down the street, met me at my door step. They asked if I would move in with them.

Her mother lives so far away. They want me to be a grandmother to their children. To help them with the children, and the baby soon to be born. Do they know that this is an answer to my prayers...

It has been a few days since I have been to the temple. I have been busy packing up what little I have, moving into the cottage down the way – becoming a part of the lives of my new family. How joyous it is to say those words – my family! When I reached the temple, I saw him, Jesus, there again sitting with his companions across from the treasury. I watched as the Sadducees paraded to the treasury to make their offerings. I followed and put in my last two copper coins.

As I turned to leave, I heard Jesus say to his companions: “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.” (Mark 12: 43-44)

I turned to him at these words, and he smiled at me. Perhaps he knew. I had indeed given my all, in terms of coin. But I did not give everything.

I am no longer poor. I am wealthy beyond coin now. I have good people to care for and who care for me. They are not my blood, but they are my family just the same. I have truly, been blessed.

And I pray blessings for you as well. Shalom.

1 Temple, Jerusalem, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, R-Z, 553.

Mark 7: 24 – 30 Syrophenician Woman's Friend Monologue
(written by Cheryl McMurray)

I invite you to travel back in time with me to the city of Tyre, and to a place where Jesus met a Syrophenician woman.

Shalom. My name is Chana. I am a friend of the woman about whom you speak. The one who came before your Jesus to ask for the health of her daughter. But perhaps you do not know the whole story. I have a little time.

Let me share it with you.

We live in the city of Tyre. It is a port on the eastern shores of The Great Sea – the Mediterranean. More than a few days travel north and west from the Sea of Galilee. We live simply, my friend and I and her daughter. Our husbands sail the Great Sea. We take in mending. We manage to feed ourselves and keep our homes – they are small but they are ours.

Travellers we are not, but as always, word travels faster than the body needs to.

We had heard of this Jesus.

A Jew he was, come to the children of Abraham. He teaches and he heals. We have heard the stories. Are they to be believed? That with his hands and words he caused a blind man to see, a deaf man to hear, a lame man to walk?!

That he cast out demons and gave life to the dead?!

That he spoke in defense, even praised, widows and children?! Truly. Miracles. All.

They say he comes from God. Not of the Gods of the Romans and Greeks, but of the one true God of the Jews. We know some of this God.

For even though Tyre is a Greek city, there are Jews here.

They call us Gentiles. Outsiders. Heathens. Pagans.

But my friend and I follow them to their synagogue and listen

outside as their sacred words are spoken. We have heard the stories of their prophets, Moses and Elijah and Isaiah. We have heard the stories of their great kings, David and Solomon. We have heard them sing the songs of their Psalms.

We have heard them give praise to their God, call on their God for comfort in their times of distress. We have seen how they support each other – how they act as if they were all of one family, making sure each has enough.

That is how my friend and I chose to live as well. Helping each other, making sure each has enough. And we have heard them talk about Jesus. About how he has come for the poor and the meek, the grieving and the hungry. About how he looks into their souls, sees their joys and miseries, understands their plight, and lifts their spirits.

He must have been tired, to have travelled so far, from Genesareth.

To come to Tyre, to a Gentile city. Perhaps he thought it would be quiet here.

That he could be alone. That no one would recognize him. Ask of him. Need him.

It was not to be. My friend's daughter is a lovely child. Bright eyed, cheerful, a blessing to be sure, even as she is only a daughter. But lately, she has taken ill.

It is as if an impure spirit has come to reside within her. She falls to the floor and thrashes about. Often harming herself, harming my friend as she runs to gather her child into her arms.

Do you know... the love a parent has for their child? Do you know... the feelings of hopelessness, of desperation, of unceasing prayer that they will recover and be healthy and whole again? That is the love my friend has for her daughter. That is what took her to his door. She fell to her knees in supplication as we had seen the Jews do at their synagogue when they pray to their God.

She begged Jesus to send the demon from her daughter. And her breath caught and her heart stopped, as did mine as I watched from a few paces back, when we heard his reply.

“First, let the children eat all they want,” he told her,

“for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

The children? The children of Abraham? The children of Israel? And their bread? We also had heard that story. Of how he had taken five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand who listened to him on the hillside that day. Was that bread, that plenty only to be for the children of Abraham? And Yes, we have also heard the Jews refer to us as dogs. It is ignorance, it is an insult. To hear those words come from Jesus’ mouth was almost too much to bear.

to see the lines of weariness on his face, his shoulders stooped in exhaustion.

But then... then his words were as an arrow piercing my heart. It was the same for my friend. She did not remain silent in the face of his words. She has always been quick witted. Some would say she has a sharp tongue. From her place... from her knees, she spoke.

“Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

If I was taken aback at her audacity, it was clear Jesus was as well.

He had already begun to turn away from her, to close the door. But when she spoke those words, he stopped and he stilled. After a moment, he turned back to her, looked at her, held out a hand to lift her to her feet. And he said, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

And it was then, in the lines of weariness I saw on his face, I also saw understanding, kindness that I have never seen before, and doubt I will ever see again. Tears filled my eyes, and hope and joy flowed from my friend as she left Jesus and ran home to her daughter. And I could hear their laughter – my friend and her beloved child - as I arrived at their doorstep. All was well.

It may be that Jesus came first to the Jews, the children of Abraham.

But we believe he came also for us. There will be a time, in the not-so-distant future, when we will say that there is no such thing as Jew or Gentile, as slave or free, even as woman or man, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are all one in God.

You have listened well, but I have taken too much of your time.

Chores await and I must go now. Shalom.

**Monica the Monarch - An Easter Story
For Intergenerational Holy Humour Sunday**

(written by Cathy Gradante)

Notes: *Monica "flutters" down the aisle, stretching and preening in her new wings. (I ordered the wings online - lots of options!)*

Oh, that feels wonderful! *(as she raises her arms overhead)*

I've been stuck in that cocoon FOREVER!

Well, it seemed like forever, anyway!

But it was worth it! Because look at me now!

I'm a beautiful butterfly! *(spread wings and spin around)*

Do you know what I was before I was a butterfly?

(wait for responses)

That's right! I was a caterpillar.

Now I was cute as a caterpillar - but now I'm beautiful as a butterfly! *(spread wings and spin around)*

But it took a lot of hard work to get my wings.

I started out at first as a tiny egg, clinging to the underside of a leaf and then when I hatched - I was a wiggly caterpillar.

And once I was a caterpillar - my job was to eat and eat and eat all the leaves I could reach (*pat tummy*) - and once I got big enough - that's when the magical part began.

First, I had to form myself into a chrysalis - some of you may call it a cocoon - and then I had to stay inside that tiny space for 2 whole weeks while I transformed. And as my wings started to grow - let me tell you! - it got pretty cramped in that tiny cocoon.

(wrap wings around yourself)

And then FINALLY - after what seemed like FOREVER -

I burst out of my cocoon and I was free! (*spread wings*)

And the morning sun shone on my new wings and they unfurled and I was a whole new being - re-born into a beautiful butterfly.

It's a miracle, really! Don't you think?

Now, I understand that you're celebrating a miracle, too - right?

The Easter Story - is a miracle story.

And I've heard some people compare what happened to me
to what happened to Jesus at his resurrection - they call it
a "metaphor" - whatever that is!

Anyway, it got me thinking - is my story really like Jesus' story?

Let's think about that idea together -

First, in order for my transformation to start - I had to go into my
cocoon - it was dark and it felt like I was dying - and I guess in a way,
I did - I was no longer a caterpillar that's for sure.

And Jesus - well, after he died - his friends put him in a cave -
a tomb that was gloomy and they sealed the opening with a big stone
and he was shut up tight in there just like I was in my cocoon.

And his friends were very sad - because they thought he was gone
FOREVER - just like I thought I would be in my cocoon FOREVER!

But I wasn't! And Jesus wasn't either!

Because just 3 days later, his friends came back to the tomb - and it
was empty!

Just like my cocoon was empty after I was transformed into a butterfly
- except it took me a bit longer than 3 days!

Jesus was transformed - resurrected!

He was changed and his friends didn't recognize him at first.

Now, he didn't have beautiful wings like mine - (*spread wings*)

but they say that his face and his clothes glowed with a golden light!

WOW! That must have been beautiful, too!

And his friends were so excited that they ran to tell everyone the

Good News - because they had witnessed a miracle!

Just like I'm a miracle!

And you want to know something else?

You're a miracle, too!

Because we are all created in the image of God - we are all beautiful
miracles!

And even when we think we're going to be stuck FOREVER!

- in a tomb, or a cocoon - in a time of trouble, or sadness, or pain -
God is there in the gloom with us - holding and comforting and
waiting to celebrate with us that moment of light -
of transformation and new life.

And isn't that a miracle, too?

I guess Jesus' story and my story ARE a lot alike - just as your story is
like Jesus' story, too - because you are all following the One who brings
light and life to the world! FOREVER!

And doesn't it just make you want to shout - HALLELUJAH!!

(have everyone shout together...HALLELULJAH!!)

Time for me to fly on out of here! Happy Easter!!

The Caterer's Story – Monologue for Wedding At Cana

(written by Cathy Gradante)

(Costume/props – restaurant-style apron, clip board)

(option: set up a buffet table with an assortment of breads, cheese, olives, figs, dates, dried apricots, almonds, honey – for the “reception” to follow the service)

Phew! What a day! *(sitting down heavily into a chair)*

Catering these wedding feasts is definitely more like a marathon than a sprint!

Oh – my aching feet! *(take off shoe and rub foot)*

And this is only the third day!

Why anyone thought these wedding celebrations need to be **seven days long** is beyond me!

Maybe someday they'll figure out that one special day is plenty!

But for now, I still have four more days of food to prepare!

Oh – I have to remember to get the lamb on the spit

first thing in the morning! *(pick up clip board and make notes)*

And I'll need to pick up more pomegranates and figs from the market.

Well, at least I don't have to worry about a wine shortage anymore!

The most amazing thing happened earlier today...

We were right in the middle of serving the evening meal –

The fattened calf had just come off the spit – and it was perfect!

– a beautiful medium throughout – **succulent!**

– and the roasted quail stuffed with dates and herbs were tender

and golden (*gesture – kiss fingers*)

– the hummus was smooth and delicious – with just a **hint** of garlic

– and the lentils! – creamy and laden with the flavours of onions and cumin – a culinary masterpiece – if I do say so myself!

And then disaster strikes – halfway through dinner my wine steward rushes over to me and in an anxious whisper informs me (*lean forward*)

that we have run out of wine!

You have got to be kidding me!! (*sit back and then forward again*)

It's only the third day!

We ordered enough wine for a hundred people to drink 2 jugs each per day!

This is impossible! The bridegroom's family will be humiliated!

And I will never work again!

You have to understand – hospitality is crucial in our culture – it can literally mean the difference between life and death – if a traveler needs shelter or a relative needs support – your home is always open as a place of welcome and comfort – since you never know when you might find yourself in a similar situation.

So, for the groom to be hosting both his own family and his new bride's family – it would certainly bring dishonour to his bride and her family- as well as his own if he were to run out of either food or wine.

And so, one of the guests, I think her name was Mary, went up to her son and his friends – who were having a fine time at one of the tables in the courtyard – and asked him to help.

My wine steward wasn't sure of the details – only that the servants came to him with a jug of wine that tasted better than anything he had served so far at the wedding.

So, I went looking for these servants – and questioned them about the incident. They said this man named Jesus asked them to fill six jars with water and when they drew it out it had become wine!

Now party tricks and magic are certainly common at these wedding festivals – there is always someone brought in to entertain the guests – but this was no ordinary – rabbit out of a hat – kind of illusion!

And then there was this man's mother – she stood quietly off to the side watching this all going on with a small smile on her face – not the usual “that's my boy!” kind of prideful grin – but somehow a more knowing smile – like she had a secret – and yet she seemed almost sad at the same time.

The servants were whispering that it was a miracle – a true miracle – that Jesus had performed.

At first, I was just so grateful that the bridegroom's honour had been saved and I wasn't going to get fired – that I didn't pay too much attention to their whispers.

But now, as I think about this event – I wonder – why – why did he choose that moment to reveal who he is – what he's capable of?

What does it mean? The whispers are only going to grow louder now – rumours spread like wildfire in these small towns – and I'm sure people will question how Mary's boy came to have this gift – and I don't think it will be long before words like Messiah and Son of God are going to be bantered about as people watch closely for what his next move will be.

But for now – I'm just grateful that he chose to spare one new couple dishonour and shame and instead offered them and their families – joy – the joy of a perfect wedding celebration and the chance to share this wonderful occasion with the people they care the most about.

And for now – that's enough for me. Well, break's over! Better get back to work...

(slip shoes back on and exit)