

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
JANUARY 18, 2004
Isa 62:1-5, 6-7; Ps 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 9-10; 1 Cor 12:4-11; John 2:1-11**

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Marriage as the most wonderful and joyful union forms the main theme in today's readings, as an image for the greatly awaited time of salvation, one of intimacy with God. The first reading is from the kernel of "Third Isaiah," who after the Babylonian Exile announced Israel's salvation in terms of the marriage between Yahweh and his people, who, though punished, had never been divorced and sent away for good (see Isa 50:1). Then Jerusalem will be vindicated, will be reborn with a new name, shall no longer be scorned, but respected as a woman with a husband: the very Lord! This divine marriage imagery in the Bible goes back to Hosea 2:4-25.

The Gospel of John depicts the fulfillment of this hope. Jesus and his mother go to a wedding, and a great abundance of excellent wine is produced. This is Jesus' first sign or "miracle." Abundance of wine was a sign of the final age of salvation (Amos 9:13; Joel 4:18). Jesus is the bridegroom; John 3:28-29; Mark 2:19-20; Matt 25:1-14; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-33; Rev 19:7 etc.). A wedding is a time of great joy, symbolized by the fine wine and banquet. Marriage is a sign of unity, of harmony and new life. Jesus' mother in John's gospel is addressed as "Woman," here in the beginning and also at the end, in John 19:26-27. This recalls the first mother, Eve, the first woman, who along with Adam disobeyed and brought condemnation into the world. Now Jesus' mother, obedient and faithful, is the new Woman and Mother who cooperates in bringing the final age of salvation into the world.