

Introduction

Many schools are increasingly interested in exploring Christianity as a world faith in their religious education and collective worship. In [Where in the World?](#) (BRF, 2018), we sketched out some of the many ways Christians around the world express and live out their faith. The study of church buildings provides another useful window into understanding this multicultural and international phenomenon followed by roughly one-third of people on the planet.

Church buildings reflect a country's history, its human geography and the beliefs and traditions of that branch of the Christian world that uses them. Across the world, many churches of a similar tradition ('denomination') will show international similarities in design and usage, while others reflect their local cultures and communities. Each has a story to tell that reflects something of the Jesus story that has affected billions of people through the centuries.

Each of the churches in this series supplements others that can be found in [Churches from around the World](#) (BRF, 2019).

As with the collection of [crosses from around the world](#), the overall aim remains the same:

- to enable children and adults to see churches through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why they continue to be significant places for so many communities;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived out their faith together using buildings like this.

Props

- Images of Cana Baptist Church - [exterior](#) and [interior](#)
- Wedding pictures
- Trays for 'food' and 'drinks'
- Long table at front with chairs for your main actors

Preparation: a mystery picture

I've got a mystery picture for you to look at first. (*Show the interior of Cana Baptist Church.*) With somebody next to you, discuss what can you see in the picture? (*Discuss, then feed back.*) We'll come back to that picture later.

Have you ever been to a wedding? How many people were there? If you were in charge of planning a wedding, what would you need to remember to do?

Discuss, then feed back. You might want to list and display pupil answers such as:

- *Send out invitations*
- *Book the venue(s) for the ceremony and the reception*
- *Menus for the food and drink at the meal or 'wedding breakfast'*
- *Choose helpers such as bridesmaids, best man, ushers*
- *Transport*
- *Honeymoon hotel*
- *Wedding dresses and suits*

There's a lot to organise, and sometimes a lot to go wrong as well! One of the first Bible stories about Jesus is all about a wedding that was about to go seriously wrong.

Development

I want you to imagine we're all sitting down in a large hall, after the ceremony, everyone is having something to eat. We'll need some servants to take plates of food around... and to serve drinks. (*Appoint pupils to walk around handing out imaginary nibbles, etc.*) And, of course, there might be a top table where the bride and groom and their parents are sitting. (*Appoint these from volunteers; expect giggles for whoever is made the bride and groom.*)

But there is a problem. One of the waiters comes over to the groom to say, 'We're running out of drinks.'

'What?'

'After this, there'll be no more wine.'

'They've drunk it all?'

'Yes.'

You see, it was the bridegroom's special job to make sure there was enough drink for everybody. And weddings like this could go on for days.

'I've got some money here! Go and buy some more!'

'The shops are shut.'

'Oh no! On my wedding day! What am I going to do?'

Can you imagine the embarrassment? The wedding that ran out of drinks. What an excellent start to a marriage... Not!

But nearby, an older woman turned to her son, who was sitting next to her, and said, 'Do something.'

'What?'

'Do something to help.'

'Mother, now is not the time.'

'Yes it is.' The woman went to one of the servants, pointed to her son and said, 'Just do what he tells you.' Because, if you don't know, the woman's name was Mary, and her son was Jesus of Nazareth.

So what did Jesus do? Sit back and sigh? Get grumpy? No, he got up, and went to see the head waiter.

'See those six stone water jars over there?' Jesus said. 'The big ones. They need filling up to the brim with water.'

'Yes, sir.'

It was done.

'Now,' Jesus said. 'Fill a glass with what's in there, and take it to the bride's father for tasting.'

'Er... Yes, sir.'

It was done.

The bride's father took a sip, then shook the hand of the bridegroom. 'Well done, my boy!' he said.

'What? Why?'

'You've saved the best wine until last! Nice one! Not many people do that! How generous! You will be an excellent son-in-law!'

'I did that? Oh... yes! Great! Yes! Of course I did!' He was probably also thinking 'Phewwww! How did that happen?'

Now, of course, today we can have all sorts of questions about this story. Jesus turning water into wine - how? That's impossible, isn't it? But Christians believe Jesus did it, although it can't be proved to have happened. (How could you prove it? It was 2,000 years ago.)

But I wonder. Why this is one of the first stories we read about Jesus as a grown up? Why, of all the things he could have done, was his first miracle performed at a wedding? And when there was a problem with wine, why did he make so much? Altogether, those jars held about 120 gallons - 545 litres!

In Israel today, there's a Christian church that meets for worship in Cana, near to where this story happened. They've got a modern building.

(Show pictures of the exterior and the interior again.) Look at this picture again. Can you see anything in the picture that's got something to do with that story? *(Discuss, then feed back.)* Yes, the stone jars - although these are smaller than the others would have been. I wonder what this story tells Christians today about Jesus? Could it be...

- that Jesus was generous, and liked making things better for other people?
- that Jesus loved making a party go with a swing?
- that Jesus loves to change disasters into miracles, to change really bad times into really good times?

Can we think of any people or places that are going through a bad time? Let's think about them and pray for them.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, it's a strange story, but it shows you being generous and caring for people in trouble who didn't know what to do. We remember the many people in our world now who don't know what to do.

Help them to ask you for help. Remind us to ask you for help too, when life gets difficult. And help us to remember that you care for us deeply, whatever trouble we're in. Amen

Information for teachers

Archaeologists differ as to where the events took place, but the biblical account of the miracle at Cana in John 2:1-11 is generally known as the story of Jesus' first miracle.

It's possible the six large stone jars were intended for ceremonial washing, marking out this family as Levites, members of a religious elite, some of whom might have been employed in the temple at Jerusalem. Some commentators suggest the gospel writer is introducing the symbolism of new wine for the completely new approach that Jesus is bringing to the faith of his people. He is preparing the way for God's Holy Spirit, the new wine, to be poured out on humanity, revitalising their relationships with God and each other.

Today, Cana Baptist Church is a young Palestinian Arab Christian congregation who meet regularly for worship, following the modern Baptist tradition of 'total immersion' when it comes to baptising new believers. You can see one such ceremony [here](#), taking place by the river Jordan in Israel.