

9 December 2009
Advent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Royal Wedding: The Preparation”

Text: Matthew 25:1-13; Isaiah 64:1-6; Galatians 3:23-29

Last week, as we began our Advent meditations on “A Royal Wedding,” we considered the fact that God has betrothed - or promised - Himself to us, and how wondrous that is. That even at your sinful worst, God wants you to be His bride, so great is His love for you.

Tonight, we take up the time between the betrothal, or engagement, and the wedding itself. This is the time for preparations to be made. And in our day and age, this has become quite a big deal. The guest list, invitations, plans for the reception, food, photographer, attendants, registries, flowers, family issues, and more. And for the bride, there is the dress. Usually white, and it must be just right.

Well for the Royal Wedding, between Christ and His bride, the church, there is a special wedding garment for His bride as well. Jesus taught about that in the parable we heard tonight. A king gave a wedding feast for his son, and when the hall was filled with guests, one was found without the proper wedding garment, with the result that he was tossed out - and not *just* tossed out, but tossed out in chains, bound hand and foot, into the weeping and gnashing of teeth and outer darkness which is hell. The point being this: when it comes to the wedding feast of heaven, what you're wearing must be just right.

Now, at first, that may seem terribly judgmental. After all, that poor guy in the parable maybe didn't have anything better to wear. Why should he be punished like that just for what he was wearing? What you need to know is that at wedding feasts like that in those days, the guests were *given* a special wedding garment to wear. Therefore by not wearing it, the man was making a statement; he was being rebellious and defiant against the king. He considered what he chose to wear to be good enough, maybe even *better* than what the king provided. He didn't need the king's garment. But he was wrong. You either wear what you are given to wear, or you are not welcome at the wedding feast.

So what does that mean for you and me? Certainly we don't want to be cast out - so what do we wear? Well, very simply, what we are given to wear. What we choose to wear, what we have on our own, is not good enough. The prophet Isaiah put it this way: **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** So what we are wearing, our goodness, our

righteousness, is not good enough. In fact, it is not good at all. All we have to wear is a **polluted** garment. Yet many people in the world are like the man in the parable, and think that they're not so bad, that they're doing pretty well, and wearing what they think are their good deeds and righteousness, they will be able to have a seat in heaven on their own. Maybe we even slip and fall into that way of thinking from time to time, taking pride in ourselves and our progress. But it is not so. If that's what we try to wear to the wedding, we too will be tossed out and into hell.

But there is a wedding garment for us to wear. A garment provided by the king, that is not polluted, but holy, pure, and white, and which covers our pollution and sin. And of this garment we also heard tonight, from St. Paul, who told us: ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** And so in Holy Baptism, you were given your wedding garment: the righteousness and perfection of Jesus. His righteousness and perfection which wash away all your sins, all your pollution, all your unworthiness, and gives you a place at the Royal Wedding. And that is so because Jesus didn't come in righteousness and perfection to show us how to achieve those things for ourselves, but to go to the cross and provide them for us. That in the shedding of His blood, His blood wash us clean. That in offering Himself to death in our place, we be given His life. And that in being tossed out with the garbage, bound hand and foot on Calvary's cross, we be given His seat of honor at the wedding feast.

Jesus is the faithful Bridegroom who didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up, but who came and laid down His life for His bride - for you and me - to cleanse us and make us pure and holy brides. That we might have something to wear to the wedding feast.

Yet Jesus has done even more than that, for the reality is that we keep getting our wedding garment dirty. We keep rolling around in the sin and dirt and filth of this world, and making our nice, white, holy wedding dresses polluted again. And so while we are baptized only once, Jesus has provided us with a way back to our baptism, back to His cleaning and life, and that is in repentance. That coming to Him in confession, He washes us again with His forgiveness. As often as we need it. For the promises He made to us in baptism are not just for the past, but for the present and for the future. That repenting of who we are and what we have done, we be always clothed with Christ and what He has done for us. And so be pure, holy, radiant brides once again. For He has done it, and in His Word we can be sure.

And so repentance is how we prepare for the Royal Wedding feast. Repentance is how we prepare for the coming of our Saviour. Putting off the old and putting on the new. Putting off ourselves and putting on Christ. And so wear what we've been given to wear.

And so when Christmas comes, we rejoice, for the King of the universe has sent His Son to both call and prepare us, His bride, for the wedding. He sent His Son to become "one flesh" with us by taking on our flesh and blood, and to lay down His life for us. *Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness, My beauty are, my glorious dress.* (LSB #563 v.1) What wondrous love. What a wondrous Bridegroom we have. Who came, who comes now, and who is coming again. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.