



## Ib. The Bride in Scripture

~ *I will take you for My wife in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord.* (Hos 2:20)

### The Bride in the Hebrew Scripture

How important is the theme of marriage in the divine plan of the Creator as revealed in the Holy Scripture of both Old and New Testaments? I would say that this is the end game, the eternal purpose of the Father, to conform us into the image of His Son so that we might become bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh, and together as Bridegroom and Bride reign over a New Heavens and a New Earth. (Gen 2:23, Rom 8:29, 2 Tim 2:12, Rev 21). In this chapter we will examine the evidence in Scripture of the centrality of what Saint Paul calls a great mystery, that is, the marriage between the Church and Christ. We will see that this mystery does not originate in the New Testament, but has its origin in the revelation and promises that God gave to His Chosen People, Israel. In the three essays that follow we will consider how an understanding of the Jewish Wedding Tradition during the time of Jesus can shed light on this mystery, hidden in plain sight, in the Gospels.

#### In the beginning....

Theologians describe God as un-necessitated Being, that is to say God's existence and actions are fully free, and not necessitated by anything other than Himself; He is complete in Himself. Human beings, although made in His *image* and *likeness* owe our physical, spiritual, and psychosocial existence from Him, and other human beings. This is evident from the first few chapters in the book of Genesis:

*<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." <sup>19</sup> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; <sup>22</sup> and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,*

*"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."*

*<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

*<sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.* (Gen 2:18-24)

The solution to our human contingency and self-insufficiency we find in the other and Him Who is wholly Other, God. God's solution to our existential inadequacy is the sacrament of love, marriage, whereby male and female may find their wholeness through self-giving with one another and in relationship with their Creator.

The serpent lied to our first parents telling them that they could become un-necessitated and self-sufficient, *like God*; offering them an alternative pathway to self-giving love. The first family fell and the proto-marriage shattered.

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’”<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;<sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die.<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. (Gen 3:1-6)*

God would not leave humanity broken and alienated from Himself. He would take up the mantle of Adam by becoming the Second Adam being the Son of the Father and “the seed of the Woman”, the New Eve, and through Him humanity would be restored, reconciled, and espoused to her Creator. But, this would not occur until the “fullness of time.”

<sup>14</sup> *The LORD God said to the serpent,*

*“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all cattle,  
and above all wild animals;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.*

<sup>15</sup> *I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:14-15)*



The New Eve, Mary, is both the Mother of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and the Mother of the Bride (the Church). Yet, the serpent has its seed also, and she too is known by many names: the antichurch, the anti-bride, but mostly Babylon the Harlot! In later essays, we shall see that the serpent’s bride is always nipping at the heels of the “seed of the Woman,” but together with her Lord and Bridegroom they shall crush the head of the serpent.

### **The Seed of the Woman Passes Through Israel:**

The promised “seed” of the “protoevangelium” (the passage quoted above Gen 3:14-15) would pass through many generations before the Holy Spirit would overshadow the Woman, the handmaiden of Bethlehem. Many of the names of people through which this seed would pass in the ancient times recorded in Genesis are not familiar to many of us, but some are such as Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, and Shem, and one in particular which we will briefly focus on now because of a promise made to Abraham and Sara.

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Elie’zer of Damascus?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.”<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:1-5)*



The seed passed from Abraham and Sara to Isaac who married Rebekah and through them to Jacob. And in an amazing twist of events the seed of the Woman found its way into Egypt because of Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel. It came to pass that over many years the “seed of the Woman” were enslaved by the Egyptians and they cried out to the Lord for

deliverance and to this end God chose Moses. After many signs and wonders performed by Moses by the power of God Israel was delivered from her oppressors.

*Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment,'<sup>7</sup> and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exo 6:6-7)*

Israel was “brought out, delivered, and redeemed” for a purpose to become the people of God thereby demonstrating magnanimity of God as He expands His promise from a couple (Adam and Eve), to a family (Abraham and Sarah), and now to a nation, Israel.

*<sup>2</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. (Exo 6:6-7)*

The Orthodox Jewish Bible translates “a people for his own possession ...” as “the Lord has chosen thee to be a *treasured people* unto Himself.” To what extent would Israel be treasured? They would be God’s bride!

*No more shall you be called “Forsaken,”  
nor your land called “Desolate,”  
But you shall be called “My Delight is in her,”  
and your land “Espoused.”  
For the LORD delights in you,  
and your land shall be espoused.  
<sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a virgin,  
your Builder shall marry you;  
And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride  
so shall your God rejoice in you. (Isa 42:4-5)*

In spite of all the good things that God had done for His people, Israel would prove herself to be an unfaithful spouse. Time and again, she would be beguiled by foreign gods and break her vows to her God.

*<sup>8</sup> “When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. <sup>9</sup> Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. <sup>10</sup> I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with leather, I swathed you in fine linen and covered you with silk. <sup>11</sup> And I decked you with ornaments, and put bracelets on your arms, and a chain on your neck. <sup>12</sup> And I put a ring on your nose, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. <sup>13</sup> Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered cloth; you ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful, and came to regal estate. (Ezekiel 16:8-13)*

*<sup>32</sup> Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband!  
<sup>33</sup> Men give gifts to all harlots; but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side for your harlotries. <sup>34</sup> So you were different from other women in your harlotries: none solicited you to play the harlot; and you gave hire, while no hire was given to you; therefore you were different. (Ezekiel 16:32-34)*



**God instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. The love and pain Hosea experiences with Gomer is a living prophecy of God’s experience with Israel.**

Yet, we know that while humankind is unfaithful God is always faithful, for as St. Paul says, *“If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself,”* (2Tim 2:13) and elsewhere he says, *“For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”* (Rom 11:29) And through His prophets God proclaimed this to His unfaithful spouse, Israel.

<sup>16</sup> *“And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me, ‘My Ba'al.’* <sup>17</sup> *For I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more.* <sup>18</sup> *And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.* <sup>19</sup> *And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy.* <sup>20</sup> *I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.* (Hos 2:16-20).

## The Song of Songs

The Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint, which is used by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, contains several apocryphal books that were omitted during the Protestant Reformation. One of the apocryphal books is the Song of Songs (also known as the Canticle of Canticles or the Song of Solomon). It is the last book of the *Tanakh*, or Hebrew Bible and if there can be comparisons made between this book and any other book in the bible it would be the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse. The Song of Song is a revelation of the love and intimacy between the bridegroom (Solomon) and the bride (the Shulammitte woman) and the Book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, and the *apocalypsis* (unveiling) of the Bride, the Church.

The Song of Songs is a beautiful love poem between the bridegroom and his bride. Jewish tradition interpreted this book in the context of a marriage relationship between God and Israel. Christianity understands the Song of Songs as an allegory of the intimacy between Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Bride, the Church. The following are just a few excerpts from this beautiful and evocative love poem between God and His people.

**Bride:** *I am a flower of Sharon,  
a lily of the valleys.*  
<sup>2</sup> **Bridegroom:** *Like a lily among thorns,  
so is my friend among women.*  
<sup>3</sup> **Bride:** *Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods,  
so is my lover among men.*  
*In his shadow I delight to sit,  
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.* (Songs 2:1-3)

**Bridegroom:** *You have ravished my heart, my sister, my  
bride;  
you have ravished my heart with one glance of your  
eyes,  
with one bead of your necklace.*  
<sup>10</sup> *How beautiful is your love,  
my sister, my bride,  
How much better is your love than wine,  
and the fragrance of your perfumes than any spice!*  
<sup>11</sup> *Your lips drip honey, my bride, honey and milk are  
under your tongue; And the fragrance of your garment is like the fragrance of Lebanon.* (Song 4:9-11)

**Bride:** *Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; For Love is strong as Death,  
longing is fierce as Sheol. Its arrows are arrows of fire, flames of the divine.* <sup>7</sup> *Deep waters  
cannot quench love, nor rivers sweep it away. Were one to offer all the wealth of his house for  
love, he would be utterly despised.* (Song 8:6-7)



**Song of Solomon**  
**William Russell Flint (1880-1969)**

## The Bride in the New Testament

### Zachariah and Elizabeth:

The New Testament begins with two married couples, Zachariah and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary. Neither have children; Elizabeth is barren, and Mary is a virgin who has consecrated herself to the God of Israel. We begin with Zachariah and Elizabeth and the son they will have who will “prepare the way of the Lord.”

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechari'ah, ...and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God.... But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

*Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty.... And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechari'ah was troubled when he saw him.... But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechari'ah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.... And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Eli'jah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*



*And Zechari'ah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.... And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.*

*After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, “Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.” (Luke 1:5-25, abbreviated)*

So who is this son of Zachariah and Elizabeth? Well, he is known by many names, but we in the West know him primarily as John the Baptist, but in the Eastern Church they mostly know him by John the Forerunner. Jesus certainly thought highly of him, so much so that He said of him:

*<sup>24</sup> When the messengers of John had left, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. “What did you go out to the desert to see—a reed swayed by the wind? <sup>25</sup> Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine garments? Those who dress luxuriously and live sumptuously are found in royal palaces. <sup>26</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is the one about whom scripture says: ‘Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, he will prepare your way before you.’*

*<sup>28</sup> I tell you, among those born of women, no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:24-28)*

I’m sure you will agree that a person could not get higher praise than what Jesus gave His cousin John. John the Prophet, John the Baptist, John the Forerunner, John the greatest among those born of women—all of these names can be applied to Saint John the cousin of our Lord, but how did John described himself?

<sup>26</sup> So they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him.” <sup>27</sup> John answered and said, “No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves can testify that I said [that] I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him. <sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the **best man**, who stands and listens to him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete. <sup>30</sup> He must increase; I must decrease.” (John 3:26-30, emphasis added)



John the Baptist saw himself as Jesus’ “best man” because he recognized Jesus as the “Bridegroom” and that his ministry as “best man” was to announce His coming and to prepare the Bride to receive Him. In the Jewish Wedding Tradition the best man (*Shōshbēn* in transliterated Hebrew) had very specific responsibilities as we shall see in a future essay, but let it suffice to say here that John the *Shōshbēn* has and will fulfill these responsibilities before the Marriage of the Bride to the Lamb. So, right at the beginning of the New Testament we are being introduced to the idea that Jesus is the Bridegroom by the man who Jesus said was a prophet and the greatest among those born of women.

### Joseph and Mary:

The next couple the Luke the Evangelist introduces us to are Joseph and Mary. I will let Luke tell the story known to all of us.



**Mary of the Protoevangelium**  
Antonio Ciseri (1821-1891)

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, <sup>33</sup> and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup> But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” <sup>35</sup> And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; <sup>37</sup> for nothing will be impossible for God.” <sup>38</sup> Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

If John was the greatest among those born of women, then without doubt Mary is the greatest woman among those born of women. She is *the* Woman of the *protoevangelium* for it is through her seed that the head of the serpent would be crushed. She is the New Eve who, unlike the Eve of Genesis, would become *like God* through obedience: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” And in so doing, the Holy Spirit came to her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her and the Son of God became incarnate in her womb. It is for this reason the Church has rightly called Mary the “eternal spouse of the Holy Spirit.” Mary is also Mother, mother of the incarnate *Logos* and mother of the Church, the Bride. It can be truly said, that Mary is both the mother of the Bridegroom and mother-in-law of the Bride. While of this is true, Mary is also the first disciple, the first member of the Church, and here she too is the Bride therefore fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah:

*For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you.... (Isaiah 62:5/RSVCE)*

*For as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you.... (Isaiah 62:5/NABRE)*

Note that I have included two different translations of the same verse which translates the Hebrew word, *bānāyik*, as either “sons” or “Builder.” In this particular case where the son is the incarnate *Logos* of the Father both is appropriate for as the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) declared Mary as the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, she can be rightly said to have married her son and her Builder, that is, her Creator for as the Council of Nicea (325 AD) declared of the eternally begotten Son of the Father, “by Whom all things were made.”

### The Marriage of Cana

Perhaps it is just a coincidence that Jesus’ first miracle occurred at a wedding, I doubt it though as it is very hard to imagine the Creator of the Universe leaving anything up to chance. Let’s just focus on the exchange between Jesus and His mother.

*<sup>1</sup>On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” <sup>4</sup>[And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” (John 2:1-4)*

What does Jesus mean when He says, “how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come”? I believe our understanding of Jesus’ response to His mother hinges on what He means by “my hour.” Most of the interpretations that I’ve read or heard generally understand “my hour” as the time of His performing of miracles. If this is true then Jesus is essentially saying, “Mom, this is not the time for me to do miracles yet.” It certainly could mean that, but it could mean more than this especially given the fact that Jesus uses the phrase “my hour” elsewhere in the Scripture where it has a very different meaning. In fact, when Jesus refers to “my hour” He is describing His passion, death, and resurrection (John 7:30, 12:23, 13:1,17:1), and in John 5:28 when Jesus says “my hour” He is referring to His coming in glory (or His Second Coming in glory). If in His response to His mother Jesus is referring to one or both of these events then He is actually referring to elements of the Jewish Wedding Ceremony, specifically the Betrothal (*Eyrusin*) and Marriage (*Nissuin*) ceremonies, respectively. Given this, Jesus might actually be saying, “Look Mom, this isn’t my wedding so their running out of wine does not affect me. The hour of my betrothal and wedding hasn’t come yet.”



But as it is, Mary “forces” His hand. “Do whatever He tells you.” And in the process of obeying His mother the Marriage of Cana becomes a foreshadowing the miracle of the Last Supper, but instead of transubstantiating water into wine as He did at Cana, Jesus transubstantiates wine into His sacred Blood, the Blood of the New Covenant between the Lamb and His Bride, the Church. This, as we shall see, is the Betrothal ceremony of the Bridegroom and the Bride.

### Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus told two parables during Holy Week and both pertained to Weddings and one to the return of the Bridegroom for His Bride.

*And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, <sup>3</sup>and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore to the*

*thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’<sup>10</sup> And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

*<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; <sup>12</sup> and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matt 22:1-14)*

When we put this parable into the context of the confrontation that Jesus had just experienced with the religious authorities in Jerusalem one can understand why the King of the parable (Jesus’ heavenly Father) would be so furious with those who rejected the invitation to the wedding. The religious authorities had rejected Jesus, the Bridegroom, so they too would be rejected from the Kingdom of the God. So the King sent out his servants to fill the wedding hall with guest, the Gentiles. However it is not enough to be invited, neither is it enough to show up, one must be dressed in a wedding garment of baptism, repentance and grace.

In another parable probably told just a day later Jesus speaks of ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. These virgins are awaiting the return of the bridegroom, but he is delayed.

*“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup> But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt 25:1-13)*



**The Ten Virgins  
Eugene Burnard (1850-1921)**

In the first parable Jesus is describing the Wedding Feast (*Nissuin*) which, according to Jewish tradition, occurs in the father of the Bridegroom’s house. The second parable describes an event that occurs after the betrothal ceremony (*Erusin*) when the bridegroom returns to his father’s house to prepare a place for his bride and future family. After approximately a year the bridegroom will return unannounced with great shouts and fanfare to carry off his bride. Those who are part of the bridal party must keep watch for the return of the bridegroom lest they be caught unprepared. Hence, Jesus exhorts his listeners to “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Jesus referred to these aspects of the Jewish wedding tradition during the Last Supper with His disciples.

*<sup>1</sup> “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. (John 14:1-3)*

Jesus returned to His Father’s house when He ascended into heaven. He is now preparing a place for His Bride and He will come back to carry her away to His Father’s house for the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb. We, like the wise virgins, must be prepared and watch for His return for we do not “know neither the day nor the hour.”



## The Epistles:

Paul alludes to the Church as being the Bride of Christ in several passages in his epistles to the Ephesians and Corinthians. In his epistle to the Ephesians he is instructing the Church in Ephesus the proper order that is to exist in the Christian household.

<sup>21</sup> *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*  
<sup>22</sup> *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* <sup>24</sup> *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.* <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* <sup>26</sup> *that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,* <sup>27</sup> *that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* <sup>28</sup> *Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* <sup>29</sup> *For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,* <sup>30</sup> *because we are members of his body.* <sup>31</sup> *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* <sup>32</sup> *This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church;* <sup>33</sup> *however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.* (Ephesians 5:21-33)



The relationship between husband and wife is a pattern or type of relationship that finds its perfection in the relationship between Christ and His Church. It is a mystery. Christ gave Himself for the Church in His Passion and through these graces it is granted to her to become holy and without blemish, a bride worthy of her Lord.

## The Book of Revelation:

There are several passages in the Book of Revelation in which St. John describes the Bride, and several of these where he is very explicit in mentioning the Bride, herself.

<sup>9</sup> *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,* <sup>10</sup> *and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!”* <sup>11</sup> *And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,* <sup>12</sup> *saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.”*

<sup>13</sup> *Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?”* <sup>14</sup> *I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

<sup>15</sup> *Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.*

<sup>16</sup> *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.*

<sup>17</sup> *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* (Rev 7:9-17)

The next passage is very similar to the one above and they appear to both be describing the marriage of the Bride to the Lamb, Christ the Bridegroom.

*<sup>6</sup>Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup>Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready <sup>8</sup>it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

*<sup>9</sup>And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (Rev 19:6-9)*

And then finally, John is given a vision of the New Jerusalem, as beautiful as a Bride

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; <sup>3</sup>and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup>he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Rev 21:1-4)*

*<sup>9</sup>Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup>And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (Rev 21:9-11)*



**Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Rev 19:9)  
Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. (Rev 19:6)  
But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (Gal 4:26)**

**Conclusion:**

Sometimes when I hear people speak of heaven I'll hear things like, "Oh you can eat all the ice cream you want and never gain a pound," or "I'll be able to do all the things I wanted to do but never had the time to do them." It is only natural, I suppose, to think of heaven as all the good things that we can experience on earth except without the negative consequences of intemperance. But, when it comes to the marriage of the Bride to the Lamb of God, the eternally begotten Son of the Father, there can be no comparisons—although a good and holy marriage may give us a slight insight of our future reality with our Lord. It all seems too good to be true. Perhaps, I believe for too much. No. Jesus prayed for this. Jesus died for this. And so, I will leave you with one of the most impossible and wonderful passages in Scripture. Impossible for man, but with God all things are possible.

*<sup>20</sup> "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup> that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

*<sup>24</sup> "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. <sup>26</sup> And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* (John 17:20-26)