

16 December 2009  
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“A Royal Wedding: The Feast”

Text: Song of Solomon 2:8-16a; Revelation 19:6-9; Matthew 25:1-13

When people think of the end of time and Jesus' return in glory, the image that often fills the mind is one of judgment. It is not only the Last Day, it is Judgment Day, the day of reckoning, a day to be feared. You will have to stand before your God as your judge and give an account.

Now, certainly, the Scriptures speak of judgment. But through the ages, Christians did not always fear the Last Day and think of judgment. That was really more a development of the Middle Ages. Before that, thoughts of Jesus' return invoked joy and anticipation and excitement - the joy, anticipation, and excitement of a *wedding*. That the Royal and Holy Bridegroom was, at long last, coming for us, His bride, and the time for the Feast that has no end had come. And so Christians with much eagerness looked forward to Jesus' return, and cried *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly. Come now. We can't wait for the wedding feast.

And you know who else will be filled with joy that day? Our Lord! Solomon describes him as ***“leaping over the mountains, [and] bounding over the hills”*** as He comes to us. And as He comes, He says: ***“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, for behold, the winter is past.”*** For yes, when Jesus returns the winter of our sin will finally be over, and the eternal spring of righteousness begun.

That's an amazing picture, isn't it? To think of God and His love for you in that way. Perhaps too good, too amazing. For what about the judgment? Well, the good news for us is that the judgment has already taken place . . . on the cross. All your sins, all your guilt, all your judgment your Bridegroom has already taken from you. You are free! Without the cross, you should fear the Last Day! But with the cross, you have nothing to fear. Your sins have been forgiven; they have been separated from you as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12); the judgment of forgiveness you hear here every Sunday is the judgment you will hear in the end, for as we learn from the Small Catechism: *these words are just as valid and certain as if Christ, our dear Lord, spoke them Himself*. And so because of Christ, because of His death and resurrection, because of His life and salvation, because of His Word and Sacraments, what awaits us is not an awful day, but a joyful day - a wedding day!

But there is even more rejoicing too, for St. John reveals to us that on that day, all heaven will also be rejoicing, ***“for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His***

***Bride has made herself ready.***” This is the day all of heaven has also been waiting for, when the unity of the church in heaven and the church on earth is finally manifest again, and barriers of time and space are overcome in the One for whom there is no time and space. Who cannot be excited for that day?

And so for that day we watch and wait, as the eager, faithful virgins, for the Bridegroom to come. But how do we do so? Well, there are many ways, but one of the best ways to get ready for a wedding is the wedding rehearsal - and your Bridegroom has provided this for you as well. For He is already coming to you now in anticipation of the Last Day. The end is already breaking into the present as your Lord comes to you in His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. That's why this Supper is often called *a foretaste of the feast to come* - for as we come to the altar, the Last Day is already starting. Your Lord joyfully leaps and bounds over time and space and gives you here the body, blood, life, and forgiveness of His death and resurrection. You are filled *with* the One you are waiting for. You are filled *by* the One you are waiting for. And so when He comes, fully and finally, on the Last Day, you will be ready.

And so whenever we gather in this place, at this altar, it is with a view to the end, for ***blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*** And you have been invited. Your Lord has betrothed Himself to You in Holy Baptism, He is preparing You in Holy Absolution, and He is already coming in His Holy Supper. ***Your beloved is yours, and you are His.***

So as the Advent season draws quickly to a close, we are reminded again of the great love of our Lord, who comes to us in our flesh and blood at Christmas. That though we are sinful, unfaithful brides, that is the very reason why He comes - to be faithful for the unfaithful, that through His blood and forgiveness, we be washed clean of our sins and be radiant, holy brides again. And so you are.

And so Advent reminds us that Christmas is about more than just the birth of Jesus as the babe of Bethlehem - it is that His birth provides new birth for us and His life provides new life for us. For our Bridegroom comes and lives not for Himself, but for His bride. For you. For you are His beloved. And so the choir of angels that sang at His birth is just the prelude to the great chorus of heaven that will sing at the Royal Wedding - the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. And that day is coming. We know not when, but neither does it matter. For you will be ready when it comes - when *He* comes. For He is coming for you

What wondrous love. What a wondrous Bridegroom. *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus! Come, and take us home.

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