

12 January 2011
Epiphany 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Unwrapping Jesus, the Perfect Bridegroom”

Text: John 2:1-11 (Ephesians 5:22-33; Exodus 33:12-23)

In Jesus' day, when there was a wedding, the bridegroom was responsible for providing the wedding feast - including, and especially, the wine. That's why when Mary tells Jesus about the problem that has arisen at the wedding they were attending, at Cana, that **“They have no wine,”** Jesus says to her, **“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”** It is not His wedding feast. He is not the bridegroom . . . yet.

But Jesus *will be* a bridegroom. For this is the reason He has come. He has come for His bride, the Church, as St. Paul said. To take her to be His own, and to take her to His home in heaven. He has come to give Himself up for His bride, to lay down His life for her. This He would do on the cross, where after leaving His Father in heaven, He would also leave His mother and hold fast to His bride. He would not forsake her. He would not come down from the cross. . . . But it was not time for the cross yet. That hour was coming, but had not yet come.

But still, Jesus was willing to help this poor bridegroom. This man was not a perfect bridegroom - Jesus is the *only* perfect bridegroom. But that the joy of this wedding may go on, Jesus miraculously provides wine. And not just any wine, but good wine, better wine than they had before.

This, also, gives us a picture of Jesus and His love for us - not only for eternity, but even now. For no bride and bridegroom on this earth are perfect. No marriages are perfect. And there comes a time when *all* marriages run out of wine - when the honeymoon is over, the joys are less and the sins are more. When that happens, the answer is not to end the marriage and move on, but to receive from Christ and give to one another the forgiveness we need and that makes the love and joy of marriage deeper.

Yet not just in marriages, but in all of Christian life - where we live as the bride of Christ - is this true. There comes a time when you run out of wine - when joy and happiness are fleeting and trials and troubles are many. And it will be so because just as there are no perfect bridegrooms, so we are no perfect bride. We are spotted and stained by sin. We hurt and are hurt. We are not yet at the wedding feast of heaven, that perfect feast with the best of food and wine, and where the joy will never end. That feast is coming, but is not yet.

But just as Jesus helped that poor, imperfect bridegroom that day in Cana, *even more* does He come to help you, His bride. For you, He does not simply turn water into wine, but turns wine into blood for you - the blood of the new covenant, the blood of the Lord's Supper, which washes away the sin of us imperfect brides, that we might be holy and without blemish, and gives us a foretaste of the feast to come. A picture of the heavenly wedding feast which will have no end. Jesus comes to us now to restore our joy with His forgiveness and to raise us with His life. For there is nothing this bridegroom won't do for His bride. *For you.*

And the result was not only that the joy of the wedding continued, but with this sign, Jesus ***manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*** Was it a perfect faith that they had? By no means! Just as there are no perfect brides or bridegrooms or marriages, so there is no perfect faith on earth. The disciples would continue to have doubts and struggles, just as we do. We do not and cannot see God face-to-face . . . yet. Instead, like Moses, like the disciples, we see His glory manifested in Jesus. The glory of His coming to earth in His incarnation. The glory of His coming to bear our sin and be our Saviour. The glory of His ascending the cross in our place. The glory of His resurrection. The glory of all His work for us and for our salvation. And so we believe in Him. That He is our bridegroom, and that He is coming for us, for His bride, to take us home, forever.

For some, He has come already. *Thanks be to God!* For the rest of us, He comes to help us in our troubles, like at Cana. To give us forgiveness for our sins, to give us His love when our love runs cold, to be our light in the darkness, our hope when things seem hopeless, our joy in sadness. As He was with Moses, as He was at Cana, so He is with you.

That is the Jesus unwrapped for us this day; the gift given to us at Christmas. That the Son of God is given to you to be your bridegroom - your perfect bridegroom, to make you His perfect bride. In His incarnation, He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and the two - God and man - became one flesh in Him. And what God has joined together, no man can rent asunder. And baptized into Jesus, you are one with Him and He with you. For you He lives, for you He dies, for you He is coming to take you to your wedding feast.

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