

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Meta

Date: May 18, 2025

Location: Apostles Anglican Church

Readings

Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18

Psalm 145:1–9

Revelation 19:1–9

John 13:31–35

Opening

‘If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.’¹ When alleluias return to our liturgy on Easter Sunday, this calling from Colossians 3 are some of the first words we hear from Scripture. It’s a refrain that persists throughout Eastertide as an opening verse to begin Morning Prayer. It’s our calling in Eastertide: seek the things that are above where Christ is.

The first half of Eastertide, we’ve focused on the resurrection appearances of our Lord to his apostles. Throughout this season, though, we’ve been reading St. John’s vision in the Book of Revelation. It’s like the Church says to us: seek the things that are above, and I will lead you to the visions of the things above by reading Revelation throughout these Fifty Days.

There’s a crescendo in the second half of Eastertide that’s guiding us to focus on this heavenly vision in the days leading up to our Lord’s ascension. Before we celebrate Christ’s enthronement in his ascension, we’re called to seek the things above. So this morning I want to look more closely at our reading from Revelation 19, where St. John glimpses the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let the things to come, the ultimate things, like the marriage supper of the Lamb, shape your vision, stir your desires, and fill you with hope. (Return in pew Bible, page ###)

I have preached on Revelation a handful of times in past years, but I don’t recall exploring the marriage supper of the Lamb in a past sermon. That this image appears in Revelation means I ought to say a few words about interpreting Revelation generally. And I’ll do so by borrowing the words of the theologian Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon who said in jest:

We should not think of the believers at Sardis and Pergamum as saying among themselves. “Why has our beloved John suddenly taken to speaking in riddles? We haven’t the foggiest idea what all this stuff means.

¹ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:1.

*But just to be safe, let's make lots of copies of this book and send it out to the other churches. Maybe somebody out there will have a clue. Who knows? There may be someone able to figure out this puzzle over the next two thousand years. Perhaps in the twentieth century or so, when world history really does go to seed, some truly wise person will sit down and write a commentary to explain it all. Heaven knows we have no idea what it means."*²

Reardon's absurd parody of Revelation's original readers helps us. They *did* have an insight to the meaning of these mysterious images and events. They understood that the vision of Revelation—the veil of heaven pulled back—was the consummation of the Old Testament prophecies and the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. It revealed their vocation as the Church, the Bride of Christ, in the midst of their suffering. These visions called them to devotion. They breathed encouragement, hope, and beauty into their embattled souls. That's what Revelation is for. That's how we approach the marriage supper of the Lamb.

A Wedding After the Fall of Babylon

The marriage supper of the Lamb comes at the end of history, which is significant itself. Human history began with a wedding in Eden, when the Lord God created Eve from Adam's side, bringing Adam to behold Eve. The end of history will usher in a wedding, too. The Church was created from the open wounds of Christ's side when blood and water flowed from his cross. She was created to be the Bride of Christ. She will be brought into his presence, brought into his house.

The marriage supper of the Lamb is announced with the word 'Hallelujah!' but it's the fourth time we hear Hallelujah in this episode of John's vision. Hallelujah is that Hebrew word that means 'Praise the Lord.' Interestingly, this Sunday in Eastertide is known as Cantate Sunday which means 'Sing praise.' It's why we sing Psalm 145, which comes from the final section of psalms known as the Hallel psalms.

Hallelujah and the Hallel psalms are especially sung at Passover. When Jesus celebrated the Passover in the Upper Room with his disciples, the Gospels say they went to the Mount of Olives singing a hymn. Holy tradition believes they would have been singing one of the Hallel psalms, a song for Passover.

What happened at the first Passover in Egypt? The Lord descended upon an evil, cruel, murderous kingdom—Egypt—with the judgment of death. He passed over Israel with his judgment, looking for the sign of a lamb who had been sacrificed above the doorposts of every Israelite home. God spared them the judgment that fell on an evil kingdom, then led his people to a place where they would be safe in his presence—Mount Sinai.

What happened in Egypt was meant to be a warning to all future empires, whether it be Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, Babylon, or any other empire with world conquest on their minds. Be warned kings, rulers, and merchants who reject the Kingdom of God. If you establish your nation, your empire, and your economy on cruelty, sexual immortality, greed, idolatry, and the bloodshed of the saints, a day of tremendous judgment is coming. The saints will be safe and passed over when that

² Patrick Henry Reardon, *Revelation: A Liturgical Prophecy* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 13–14.

judgement day comes. And when the Lord brings the downfall of these evil kingdoms, the saints will cry out ‘Hallelujah.’

I know this sounds strange to us. Perhaps it does because we live and enjoy the blessings of such tremendous freedom in this nation of ours. But imagine living in a world that imprisons and terrorizes Christians and churches.

Even then, one never rejoices in the death and downfall of human beings, for every person is made in the image of God. ‘The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of anyone,’ said the prophet Ezekiel.³ Let’s clarify the reason for rejoicing then: the saints rejoice that evil governments have fallen that had been the instrument of Satan—its empire, its economies, its offices—no more to terrorize the Church. That’s the reason for the Hallelujah, *not* the death of human beings.

The Bridegroom’s House, the Bride’s Fine Linen

This is the Passover before the Wedding. The cosmic Passover comes before the cosmic wedding Feast. Since that is the progression in heaven, let’s pass over to the more pleasant topic of the day—the beauty of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

As engagements and betrothals mean a long preparation for a wedding, so our Lord has long prepared his Bride for the marriage supper. Think of the wedding at Cana, think of the parables he told about weddings in the Gospels. And then Revelation. The Bridegroom exhorted his bride at the beginning of Revelation, speaking to the church of Ephesus, ‘you have abandoned your first love.’⁴ Christ called his Bride to repentance, but he spoke encouragement over her, too. To his churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, he told them of coming trials and tribulations, but also the promise of the crown of life at the end. We associate wreaths with an athletic contest, but brides were crowned with wreathes on their wedding day, too. In all these things, Christ was preparing his bride for the marriage supper of the Lamb. She was destined for garments of fine linen, so her heart had to be clothed first with complete love for Christ alone. Her love would be forged through the heat of trials for her Beloved. This is how we can understand all conviction and repentance, all testing and trial—it is *all preparation for the wedding feast to come*. When all rival loves have been vanquished; when all trials and testing have come to a complete end.

The vision of the Church before the wedding feast commences in the image of a Bride who is clothed with fine linen. She is presented to the Lord in her beauty as Eve was presented to Adam. The loud voice of heaven announces in verse 7: ‘the marriage of the Lamb has come, *and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.*’⁵

The Bride is radiant, bright and pure. Not only for having renounced all evil, but for having *put on* the love of God. When Christ prepared his church for his departure in the ascension, he commanded them to love one another as they had been loved by Christ. How does one do this? We hear it in the Lord’s words to Israel from Leviticus. Share your wealth with the poor and the immigrant. Show no partiality to the poor or the rich, but show justice and fairness to all. Never take vengeance into your hands or bear a grudge against the one who wrongs you. Never speak slander against your neighbor. Love your neighbor as yourself. These actions make the Bride radiant. Her compassion, her patience,

³ Ezekiel 18.32

⁴ Revelation 2.4

⁵ Revelation 19.8

her endurance, her kindness—these are the qualities that adorn the Bride with fine linen, bright and pure, ready for her wedding day, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Baptism & Spiritual Marriage

So we have a vision of the end of all things. What does this mean for you? Where does your story, your history, your future intersect with the end of history, the marriage supper of the Lamb?

Let us keep things simple. Remember the beginning of your story in Christ. Remember your baptism.

Have you ever wondered why newborn sons and daughters wear white on the day of their baptism? Does it represent being washed and cleansed from sin? Yes. Does it symbolize being clothed with Christ? Yes. But it means yet more. Our early church fathers, St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom, taught ancient catechumens that the day of their baptism was the day of their spiritual marriage to Christ. The white garment of baptism represents the fine linen of the Bride of Christ, for all who are brought into the Church become his Bride. *Baptism is the marriage of your soul to Christ.*

What is the mystery of marriage? When two become one. This is the heart of the marriage: when the Church becomes one with Christ, just as he and the Father are One. When earth and heaven become one, when the New Jerusalem descends to this world.

But this is not *only* a matter of waiting. It is a matter of *seeking*. Our church fathers were enamored with the mystical meaning of these words from Song of Solomon 2.4, when a bride says to her Beloved: 'He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.' St. Gregory of Nyssa turned it into a command for his soul, to pursue his beloved Lord in prayer: 'Bring me into the banqueting house. Spread over me the banner of love.'

Origen of Alexandria hears within these mystical words the soul's calling to scripture, too. He asks himself, if the Lord wants to bring me to his banqueting house, why have I have been standing outside so long? He continues by saying

*The Word of God is still saying 'bring me in' today. It is to you he is saying 'Bring me in'—not just into the house but into the banqueting house—that your soul may be filled with the wine of joy, the wine of the Holy Spirit; and thus you may lead the Bridegroom, the Word, Wisdom, Truth, into your house.*⁶

So each day, go out to him. Seek the Bridegroom within the banqueting house of your soul. Seek the One your soul was made to love when you were baptized. Pray that his mind would be your mind; his will would be your will; his heart would be your heart. Set your minds on these things, not the things of earth that are passing away. When the loud voices of heaven sang 'Hallelujah,' they said the Bride has made herself ready. So that is what you are called to do: make yourself ready for this day of unending, unsurpassed beauty—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Go to him, adorn yourself with love, and desire his presence above all things—in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁶ *Origen of Alexandria, Homily on the Song of Songs*