

Evangelical Lutheran Worship
Volume 2
The Christian Life: Baptism
and Life Passages
Session 9: Marriage

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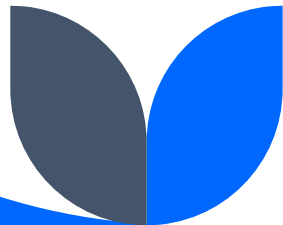
Martin Luther's Morning Prayer

(Make the sign of the holy cross and say:)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

The Christian Life: Baptism & Life Passages (ELW Vol 2) 3-3-3

- Baptism: Wellspring of the Christian Life (#1, Mar 5)
- The Place of Baptism in the Church's Worship (#2, Mar 12)
- The Shape & Practice of Holy Baptism (#3, Mar 19)
- No class Mar 26
- Welcome to Baptism (#4, Apr 2)
- Affirmation of Baptism (#5, Apr 9)
- Corporate & Individual Confession and Forgiveness (#6, Apr 16)
- No class Apr 23
- Healing (#7, Apr 30)
- Funeral (#8, May 7)
- No class May 14
- Marriage (#9, May 21)



Introduction

- **Lutheran Christians understand marriage in two ways:**
 - **Marriage is God's gift, and God intends to bring strength and joy to those who enter into marriage and, through marriage, to promote the well-being of the whole human family.**
 - **Marriage is a human estate where two people make vows to each other which are publicly witnessed, and society recognizes their status as legally married.**
- **Order of worship in ELW surrounds those entering this human estate with the gifts of the presence and support of the Christian community and the promise of God's word proclaimed through scripture and blessing.**

Introduction

- **The words and actions of the marriage rite are encircled by the pattern of the Sunday assembly: declaration of intention part of Gathering (like with baptism); vows, giving of rings, acclamation and marriage blessing are located between hymn of the day and prayers of intercession (like with baptism).**
- **The notes include helpful suggestions for adapting the service, depending on location and circumstance.**



Introduction

- **Challenge of wedding planning: helping the couple see their marriage as a baptismal vocation while maneuvering through the influence of cultural values on marriage and marriage rites.**
- **Planners must decide how the gospel will be proclaimed in the service, and the appropriateness of the couple beginning married life by receiving holy communion with the assembly.**

A Baptismal Vocation

- **Baptism is the source of our most basic dignity and vocation.**
- **As an expression of baptism, marriage is one kind of baptismal call.**
- **Marriage is one way that Christians participate in the priesthood of all believers in response to the promise God made to them by water and God's word.**
- **One person becomes an expression to another person, and together to the community.**

A Baptismal Vocation

- **Seeing marriage as part of baptismal vocation has important implications:**
 - 1) **God's faithfulness to God's people becomes the model for and the only way that two people can pledge lifelong faithfulness to each other.**
 - 2) **Baptism opens our eyes to see that we are children of God and equal members of the body of Christ—thus, husband and wives are equals, and marriage is equal in importance to any other baptismal vocation (including ordination). Within marriage, partners live together as equals.**



A Baptismal Vocation

- **Seeing marriage as part of baptismal vocation has important implications:**
 - 3) **Finally, marriage is one way the baptized participate in the life of the Christian community and share God's redeeming word to all the world.**
- **Couple who appreciate marriage as their baptismal vocation will most often choose to be married in church, surrounded by the Christian community—preferably as part of the principal Sunday assembly rather than as a separate service.**



A Worldly Estate

- For many couples, thinking of marriage as a baptismal vocation is new and unfamiliar. This is understandable, since marriage rites and even marriage itself are only secondarily Christian in nature; marriage and marriage rites originate in society rather than in church.
- In fact, the Christian rites surrounding marriage are relatively late editions—Luther and the reformers saw marriage as a "worldly estate" instituted by God, rather than as a sacrament instituted by Christ.

A Worldly Estate

- **Luther held that marriage should be regulated by the state and that getting married before a civil magistrate is as valid as marriage in the church. (ELW has a reaffirmation of vows for those civilly married who wish church blessing.)**
- **Although Luther recommended that marriage be celebrated in a church, he was not concerned with the influence of cultural practices on the ceremony "as long as common prayer and God blessing are prominent."**

A Worldly Estate

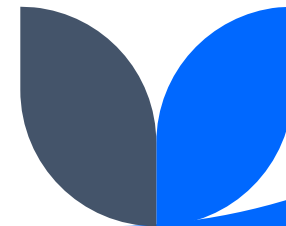
- **Luther's marriage rite was a simple exchange of vows and rings and the pronouncement of marriage, followed by scripture readings (and probably a sermon) and a blessing.**
- **Marriage blessing (called the "nuptial" blessing) acknowledges the union "in Christ" of husband and wife. The church's essential role in marriage is defined by this blessing.**

Christian Ideals Meet Cultural Realities

- **Marriage has always been the most difficult rite of passage for the church to negotiate. Compared to funerals, people are less willing to defer to the church when it comes to marriage.**
- **Some of our most cherished wedding practices (bride wearing white, bride processing as the center of attention, the father "giving the bride away," unity candle) reflect cultural values rather than the church**

Christian Ideals Meet Cultural Realities

- In the U.S., the pastor or other religious leader functions as a magistrate for the state. (Importance of Marriage License)
- At most weddings, the bride and groom are the center of attention and those who gather function more like an audience at a performance than as participants in a worship service.



Christian Ideals Meet Cultural Realities

- **Understanding marriage as two individuals directing their lives toward each other to the exclusion of others is very different from marriage as a baptismal vocation.**
- **Weddings, then, are frequently the scene of conflict between church and culture; between an understanding of marriage grounded in the gospel vs. economic, political or romantic views.**
- **Wedding planning is frequently a matter of negotiation.**



Celebrating Holy Communion as a Marriage Feast

- **Almost universally across cultures, wedding celebrations include a meal, banquet or feast, which is characterized by joy and relative extravagance.**
- **Holy communion is the church's feast in celebration of the marriage between Christ, the bridegroom and Christ's bride, the church.**
- **Scripture is full of wedding banquet imagery to describe God's love for God's people.**



Celebrating Holy Communion as a Marriage Feast

- When we receive the bread and the cup, we receive Christ's love for us, which is as passionate and intimate as love between a bridegroom and a bride.
- Christ, the bridegroom, gives his body and blood, his very life, for his bride.
- Since holy communion is an intimate sharing in God's love for us in Christ, its inclusion in the marriage ceremony is appropriate for the assembly that will gather.



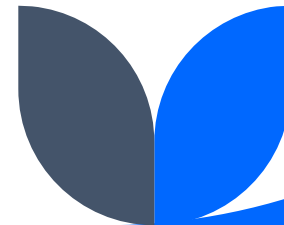
Celebrating Holy Communion as a Marriage Feast

- If holy communion is included, it is to be celebrated with the whole assembly, and not limited only to the couple or the wedding party.
- If a significant part of the assembly are not baptized, or if including communion would be more divisive than unifying, more exclusive than inviting, then holy communion should not be offered.
- Remember, "Admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized ("Use of Means of Grace")



Preaching for the Occasion

- **The marriage rite includes a sermon as part of the Word portion of the service; but when the marriage rite is included in the Sunday assembly, few people attend weddings for the sermon.**
- **Sermon is the time to expound on marriage as a baptismal vocation by proclaiming the gospel into the lives of the couple and the assembly.**
- **The wedding sermon calls for a bold, clear, relevant proclamation of the gospel.**



Preaching for the Occasion

- **Boldness of the sermon helps the church compete with all of the cultural values represented at the wedding, which make their own claim on the couple and the assembly.**
- **The gospel proclamation makes clear that God delights in the bride and groom, whom God claimed as children in baptism, and blesses them in their life together.**
- **The preacher might effectively use the words and actions of the marriage rite, including the sacraments, to point to God's presence, participation, and blessing in marriage.**



Preaching for the Occasion

- **Just as the sermon at a funeral is not a eulogy, so the sermon at a wedding is not time to disclose personal information about the couple or to offer last-minute advice on a successful marriage.**
- **And yet the sermon should be personal—perhaps revealing a truth about the couple, a truth about God and then reflect on how these truths intersect.**
- **Scripture provides the preacher with language and images.**



Preaching for the Occasion

- While there may be many in the assembly who are struggling with troubled marriages (perhaps including the family), the preacher speaks truthfully about marriage without instructing, exhorting or persuading.
- Weddings are the time for pastor sensitivity by naming God as the source and power of love, by describing how God's love empowers human love and assuring God's blessing and the Spirit's guidance.
- Presiding minister not an "officiant" but a "proclaimer."



Leading the Marriage Service: Preparation

- **All congregations should put in place wedding policies which will not only help answer a couple's questions, but helps explain what is and what is not allowed so that conflict in planning is largely avoided.**
- **Preparation for marriage should include private sessions with the couple and the pastor, but perhaps other married or engaged couples as well. These sessions stress the baptismal call of marriage.**



Leading the Marriage Service: Preparation

- **As in baptismal preparation, the order of marriage itself may be the best means for teaching about Christian marriage. While planning the details, the meaning of the words and actions contained in the rite provide a rich opportunity for explanation.**
- **Regardless of instruction of the importance of baptismal vocation, there may still well be negotiations over cultural practices that a family wants which are contrary to the gospel.**



Leading the Marriage Service: Preparation

- The space influences what options are available and how they might be used.
- Planning the wedding also includes determining which family members and friends will help lead the service.
- Rehearsal is important so that leaders not only know what they are to do, but the meaning behind what they do.



The Service: Gathering

- **Traditional procession of bride alone (perhaps with father) vs. liturgical procession of worship leaders and wedding party.**
- **Traditional procession doesn't honor the equality of bride and groom given through baptism.**
- **If the baptismal font is at the entrance of the church, the Gathering should take place at the font for baptismal emphasis.**

The Service: Gathering

- Hymn, greeting and introduction.
- Baptismal names should be used.
- Declaration of Intent: reminiscent of the declaration of intent by parents and godparents at baptism occurring at the same place in the service.
- Both bride and groom declare that they are freely coming here, the family and then the assembly promise to love, bless, support and care for the couple in their life together.

The Service: Gathering

- Family response to the Declaration of Intent takes the place of the father "giving away" the bride.
- The presiding minister then leads the prayer of the day from the chair—either Sunday prayer of the day, or one of the two provided in the marriage rite (or similar)

The Service: Word

- **Two or three readings, one of which should be a gospel (either Sunday readings, or selections from readings with themes appropriate to marriage). Readers should be well practiced in public reading.**
- **Sermon preached by presiding minister or another pastor.**
- **In response to the sermon, the assembly may join in praising God and proclaiming the gospel by singing the hymn of the day.**

The Service: Marriage

- **The central actions of marriage are the couple exchanging vows and rings, and the assembly acclaiming their marriage and praying for God's blessing upon their life together.**
- **Exchange of vows: couple face each other and uses the words provided in the rite (or similar) and declare their vows to each other—promise of lifelong commitment and expresses the complete sharing that marriage implies.**



The Service: Marriage

- **Giving of rings: sign of the vows just made; normally two rings, but when only one ring is given the rite is modified.**
- **Acclamation: after the presiding minister declares the couple married, the assembly acclaims their approval with "Amen. Thanks be to God!" Or similar. Applause is appropriate. This is also the time for cultural symbols (such as African American symbol of the couple jumping over a broom), etc. This would also be time for unity candle.**



The Service: Marriage

- **Marriage (Nuptial) Blessing:** The bride and groom then kneel for the marriage blessing. The presiding minister may extend a hand over the couple while praying the blessing. Parents may also be invited forward to lay a hand on their children's shoulders.
- **Following the marriage blessing, the parents (or others) may speak additional words of blessing and encouragement.**

The Service: Marriage

- This portion of the service concludes with the prayers of intercession, where the focus of the assembly expands from the couple to the needs of the church and the world.
- This is an appropriate time to remember the deceased of the couple's families.
- Best led by someone other than the presiding minister.
- A service without communion continues with the Lord's Prayer.

The Service: Meal

- **When holy communion is included, the service continues with the exchange of peace.**
- **Family and friends of the couple may bring the bread and wine forward at the offertory and/or assist with the distribution of communion.**
- **The meal concludes with the prayer after communion.**

The Service: Sending

- **Two forms of the final blessing are provided**
- **Hymn or instrumental music as the wedding party and ministers depart—usually in reverse order of procession (other than cross and torches which always lead processions)**

Summary

- **The proclamation of God's word as the promise of the gospel, and prayers for God's blessing upon the couple in their life together, are prominent.**
- **Everything in the service is in keeping with baptismal dignity and equality.**
- **Most important, God's love and faithfulness are emphasized, rather than that of the bride and groom.**



Summary

- **In these ways, the church celebrates the worldly estate of marriage as a gift that God intends to bring joy and life to the couple and, through them, to the world.**
- **Responding to this gift, marriage becomes a baptismal vocation and a sign of God's coming reign.**

Next semester: Baptism!

- 1. Baptism: Wellspring of the Christian Life**
- 2. The Place of Baptism in the Church's Worship**
- 3. The Shape and Practice of Holy Baptism**
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