

**The Third-Last Sunday before Advent, November 12, 2023**

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## **He Shall Come as a Bridegroom**

Matthew 25:1–13

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

Jesus said, **“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. . . . And while [the foolish virgins] were going to buy [oil for their lamps], the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. . . . Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”** (vv 1, 10, 13).

Heads up! The end is near! Just how close is it? Consider these facts: Already our Lord Jesus Christ has been conceived and born. Already He has suffered, died, and been buried. Already He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. And even now, He sits enthroned at the Father’s right hand. What’s left for Him to do? Only this: He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick who are still alive and those already dead. One small step for our Lord, but one giant leap into eternity for mankind. And **no one knows that day or hour** (v 13 // Matt 24:36)—which means it’ll be soon, and if not soon then now!

So what will it be like when He comes again? How do we get ready?

JESUS SHALL COME AGAIN AS A BRIDEGROOM,  
SO EVEN NOW LET YOUR LAMPS BE FILLED WITH OIL TO MEET HIM.

Other parables picture Jesus as a returning king or master or landowner, but not this one. You want a picture of what it’ll be like? Picture a bridegroom arriving to escort His bride and her attendants to their wedding celebration and new home—to the most magnificent, lavish, delightful, and honorable wedding you can imagine. The kind of feast you never want to end.

### I.

Jesus said, **“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom”** (v 1). Ten virgins—that’s us. In what way are we like

them? Even now we're waiting for the Bridegroom to appear. We've come out to meet *Him*.

It means our time of waiting isn't agony or drudgery. A wedding is something you approach with joy and expectation. Excitement hovers in the air. The days and hours leading up to the happy event are already charged with joy and eagerness, not with dread or sorrow. May it be that way for us! May we view the time we have now, the time we have here, this time of waiting and watching, not as a burden but as a blessing. Because we are waiting and watching for Christ the bridegroom!

Yet our hope doesn't make us less attentive or less focused on our life here. As Christians, we don't bury our heads in the sand as we wait for the end. We aren't blind to reality. We don't ignore our responsibilities. This hope of ours doesn't lead us to fiddle away the time but to make the most of it. As the Holy Spirit says through St. Paul, **"Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time—redeeming the time—because the days are evil"** (Eph 5:15–16 ESV/NKJV).

Our hope enables us to live this life. The fact that Jesus will come as a bridegroom shouldn't make us lazy or irresponsible. It shouldn't lead us to look in the mirror and spend our time primping. No matter how much time I spend trying to get myself ready, it'll never be enough. So we don't wallow or despair; we live by hope. Do what you do with joy and diligence, even the little things, knowing that the bridegroom soon will come!

We live with hope in the fellowship of the church, in community with other Christians. There are ten maidens, not just one. Ten maidens go out together to meet the bridegroom. Ten maidens wait together for him. Of course, each of us must be vigilant and responsible, but we wait and hope as members of the waiting and hoping church. We hope and are ready for Him not by ourselves and alone but in the company of others. Sunday after Sunday we gather here to watch and wait.

## II.

Now of these ten, hear what Jesus said:

**Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the wise answered, saying, "Since there won't be enough for us and for you, go rather**

**to the dealers and buy for yourselves.” And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came. (vv 2–10a)**

Each of those ten virgins has a lamp, and that lamp marks each of them as one who waits for the bridegroom. They’re alike in that way. They’re also alike in the fact that all ten of them become drowsy and sleep. They find it hard to wait, to remain vigilant, to keep their eyes open. And isn’t that so true? Though we know He’s coming, we often become drowsy and even fall asleep to His arrival. Then at midnight comes the cry: “Awake! Arise! The Bridegroom’s here! Come out to meet Him!”

So they rise and trim their lamps and that’s when the truth hits: Five of them are fools, and five are wise. The wise are those who believe the Lord’s word, and so their lamp is lit with oil. But the foolish have all lamp and no light. They weren’t sure the bridegroom would ever come. They had no faith in the promise. Their oil had run dry. An empty lamp as worthless as a flashlight without batteries, it does nothing for the one who holds it. So when the announcement comes, it catches them by surprise. The five fools want to borrow oil from the others. Faith cannot be borrowed. You cannot believe on behalf of your friends or family members. **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ** (2 Cor 5:10).

Where, then, does one get the oil of faith? How do we keep our lamps filled? Where should we direct those who are empty or dry? We know that **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ** (Rom 10:17). So seek out the means of grace. Point them to Christ’s Church. The Holy Spirit fills our lamps through God’s holy Word and Holy Sacraments. They provide the fuel that we need while the bridegroom delays and the world around us gets darker.

The world, of course, thinks differently. **People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil** (Jn 3:19). So the world tempts us, saying, “Who wants to be naïve and inexperienced? A virgin?” The idea gets mocked today. We get called old-fashioned, prudish, and uptight. So what? We’re told that we have to try it or we’ll miss out. Really? But does experience with sin make you wiser or more foolish? Does it prepare you to meet Christ when He comes, or does it leave you empty and dry? Would we let the last drops of oil burn out and follow the world into the void? Why would we want to be like those fools?

When Christ returns in glory, how would you want Him to find you? Drunk or high? Watching porn or entertaining lust? Laughing, smiling, and winking at crude and disgusting things? Bitter and angry? Verbally abusing those around you? Filled with despair? Stop! Repent! That’s the way of the fool!

But wisdom calls out a warning alarm: Wake up! Repent, confess, and turn away from sin. Before He comes in glory, Christ gives what you need here in the Church. He is gracious. The oil flows from His cross and empty tomb. It flows through Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution. It flows through His Holy Word. It flows through the precious Sacrament of His body and blood. He forgives all our sins—all of them! He promises eternal salvation. He fills our lamps, lights them, and trims them with the hope that God will keep His promise and bring His people into the feast.

### III.

**“The bridegroom comes,”** Jesus said, **“and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” But he answered, “Truly, I say to you, I don’t know you.” Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour (vv 10–13).**

Why does the bridegroom come? Simply to take home His bride and begin the celebration! He would have all ten virgins ready and waiting with filled lamps and wide eyes. He really does want us with Him in the marriage feast—not just in the end but even today. He doesn’t want anyone shut out. Today He throws the door wide open. Today He says, “I know you. I forgive you. I bless you. Enter into My joy.”

Here we have a foretaste of what is to come. Already, He has begun to wake us up and shake us from our slumber. Already, joy, anticipation, and excitement hang in the air. We wait with His Word in our ears, His body and blood on our tongues, and His praises on our lips. And at His coming, He will “from death awaken me, that these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, my Savior and my fount of grace” (*LSB* 708:3). He will open our eyes fully, and we will see Him—*Him, the Bridegroom!*—face to face.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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