

# *THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE*

*Some homework for you to complete...*

**The wedding service is both traditional and flexible.**

**We try to customize it to reflect you.**

**The wedding begins when family arrive and ends when you return home from the honeymoon.**

HOMEWORK: Schedule a two hour slot with your fiancée. Unplug the phone, television, cell phones, computer, etc. Set a relaxing atmosphere, and then close your eyes and envision the entire wedding process. Discuss details and don't leave until both partners have a unified vision of the process. Then turn to the service outline, and fill in the homework items. This process will help us build a ceremony together reflecting your personality and preferences.

*Some introductory questions to answer...*

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, please rank your wedding for style and atmosphere. ( A "1" is Birkenstock shoes, James Taylor on a CD player, flowers picked from the field, etc. A "10" is bagpipes, horse-drawn carriages, ice sculptures, imported trees, and a symphonic orchestra for music!)
2. Are there any themes for your service like honoring family members, the two families meeting each other and joining, or family reconciliation?
3. Will you want Holy Communion to be served? *In our church all baptized Christians are welcome to receive both the bread and wine.* We usually ask the bride and groom to serve the wine as the first act of their married life, a profound and memorable event.
4. What kind of music will be played, and by who?
5. Are there any family issues to be aware of in advance of the ceremony?

# THE CELEBRATION AND BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE

## *The Ceremony...*

### **The Introduction**

Celebrant:

Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Into this holy union \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ now come to be joined. If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of you know any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully, and in accordance with God's Word, you do now confess it.

### **The Declaration of Consent**

\_\_\_\_, will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

Bride: I will.

\_\_\_\_, will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

## *Some Homework Preparation...*

1. *Will you use a unity candle? If so, will the mothers or other family representatives of the Bride and Groom be lighting family candles prior to the ceremony?*
2. *How many family members will be present and seated up front? How will they come in?*
3. *How do you want to come into the service? It is customary for the priest to usher the groomsmen and groom out from the front while the bridesmaids process in from the back.*

4. *What names do you prefer to use for the rest of the ceremony?*

Groom: I will.

Celebrant:

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?

People: *We will.*

*5. The Presentation of the Bride traditionally falls after the congregational vow and before the Ministry of the Word, but the Presentation is optional. It comes from a time when the bride represented a dowry of land or wealth. The Bride's father can present the Bride in the traditional manner, or to have all the parents join together to present both Bride and Groom to the entire congregation. Or we can skip this part altogether. What do you want to do?*

*6. Music either instrumental, solo or congregational singing may follow the Presentation. Do you want music here, and if so, what kind?*

## **The Ministry of the Word**

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have created us male and female in your image: Look mercifully upon this man and this woman who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **The Readings**

After a scripture reading, the reader says:

The Word of the Lord.

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Before the Gospel, the Celebrant says:

The Gospel of the Lord

People: *Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

After the Gospel, the Celebrant says

The Gospel of the Lord.

People *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

*7. The congregation is seated for the reading. We offer the wedding party the option to be seated also. This gives you the chance to breathe, have a sip of water if you wish, and listen to the readings and homily comfortably. If you choose to sit, then during the Vows only the Bride and Groom will be standing, in order to focus the action on them alone. Do you want to stand or sit?*

*8. To be a Christian ceremony we must have at least one reading from Holy Scripture. Refer to your ceremony booklet to see the scripture selections. We prefer family members or friends to read any selection other than the gospel, which is reserved for the priest to read. Choose your readings, and who will read them. Please show any non-scripture selections to the priest prior to printing them in bulletins!*

*9. Would you like a short homily preached following the readings? We would love to offer one!*

## The Marriage

Groom: In the Name of God, I, \_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

Bride: In the Name of God, I, \_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

Celebrant: Bless, O Lord, these rings to be a sign of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Groom and Bride: \_\_\_\_, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (or in the Name of God).

Celebrant: Now that \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People: **Amen.**

## The Prayers

Celebrant: Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

***Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,***

10. *The vows are very ancient and inclusive. Please discuss any potential additions with the priest. Some couples memorize them, but that is not required!*

11. *Make sure the rings get to the ceremony! Usually the best man is responsible for the rings from the time of the rehearsal to the ceremony. Delegate that now!*

12. *The Lord's Prayer moves to the Communion section if we have Communion, so if you choose to have Communion, please consult the priest if you print a bulletin with the Prayer included.*

*but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially upon this man and this woman whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony. *Amen.*

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. *Amen.*

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their life. *Amen.*

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. *Amen.*

Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. *Amen.*

Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. *Amen.*

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. *Amen.*

Grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. *Amen.*

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*13. These prayers are called "petitionary" prayers because we are asking or petitioning God for blessings on behalf of the Bride and Groom. They can be read by either one person, or distributed among family members and friends for greater congregational participation. Please tell the priest which method you prefer, and make sure to copy this sheet and distribute highlighted prayers among those you ask to read. The prayer for children is optional. The priest is happy to take the first and last petitions to get the ball rolling!*

## The Blessing of the Marriage

Celebrant: Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of man and woman in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

*or this:*

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. **Amen.**

14. *Please choose which of the two blessings you wish the priest to use. The priest may wrap the clerical stole around the hands of the couple as the Bride and Groom kneel to receive the Blessing of God upon their union.*

15. *The final Blessing invoking the Holy Trinity is ancient and not optional! If you have chosen to have a unity candle, we need some short musical selection to play while the Bride and Groom rise after the final Blessing to light the Unity Candle together.*

## **The Peace**

Celebrant: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: *And also with you.*

16. *It is customary for the Bride and Groom to exchange the Kiss of Peace at the Passing of the Peace. Please do not wade into the congregation to greet your guests as pandemonium will ensue! Stay up front and please greet only immediate family and members of the wedding party.*

17. *Please decide how you would like to be introduced as a couple, whether more formal like "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Jones Smith," or less formal like "Bob and Sally Smith."*

18. *We end the service here either by explaining Holy Communion and proceeding with the prayers for communion, or by dismissing the congregation. The wedding party needs to stay together following the ceremony to sign the wedding license and have photographs taken.*

## *Readings for the Ministry of the Word*

*One or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

### *From the Old Testament*

*A Reading from the Book of Genesis [1:26:28]*

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

*Or*

*A Reading from the Book of Genesis [2:4-9, 15-24]*

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground-- then the LORD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner/" So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

*Or*

*A Reading from the Book of Song of Solomon [2:10-13, 8:6-7]*

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. . . . Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

*Or*

*A Reading from the Book of Tobit [8:5b-8]*

Tobias began by saying, "Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors, and blessed is your name in all generations forever. Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support. From the two of them the human race has sprung. You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.' I now am taking this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together." And they both said, "Amen, Amen."

*From the New Testament*

*A Reading from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians [13:1-13]*

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things; endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

*Or*

*A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians [3:14-19]*

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

*Or*

*A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians [5:1-2, 21-33]*

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. . . . Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind--yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

*Or*

*A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Colossians [3:12-17]*

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

*Or*

*A Reading from the First Letter of John [4:7-16]*

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In his is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

### *From the Holy Gospel*

*The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew [5:1-10]*

People            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*Or*

*The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew [5:13-16]*

People            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basked, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

*Or*

*The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew [7:21, 24-29]*

People            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. . . . Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!" Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

*Or*

*The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark [10:6-9, 13-16]*

People            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. . . . People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

*Or*

*The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John [15:9-12]*

People            Glory to you, Lord Christ.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

*After the Gospel, the Reader says*

People            The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Christ.