

I thought before we got to the end of this liturgical year – and the beginning of Advent – we should have a guest speaker. . .

My name is MIRIAM -- and I am 13 years old. I hope to get married in the next couple of years – but today is not my day – it is my cousin Esther’s day – and I am honored to be asked to be one of her bridesmaids.

Now in your culture, a bridesmaid in a wedding ceremony is really no more than window-dressing – I mean, you need a maid or matron of honor to be your official witness – and to sign the marriage license –

But beyond that --- the bridesmaids – they hold flowers and look good in the pictures – but they really don’t DO anything. .

Now in my day – we actually did do something – we had one important task – and that was to escort the bride from her house – to the house she and the groom would live in – once her husband-to-be came calling for her.

You see, the marriage was already arranged months if not years in advance – between her father, and the father of the groom.

Then there was the time known as betrothal – stretching from the time the arrangement was made, to the time of the wedding --- you may remember this from St. Matthew’s Gospel . . .

when you hear “now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together.”

Betrothal was not really like your dating in most western cultures – a time of getting to know each other.

Once the arrangement was made, and the time of betrothal begun --- a groom may know who his bride is going to be --- but he might not ever spend time with his betrothed --- he might see her publicly, but would never be allowed to see her privately.

He is busy, saving up his resources, building a house, and when he established himself in the community – and thought his life and income was stable enough to take on a wife ----- he would come to get her.

Weddings usually occurred at the end of the harvest season – when there would be plenty of food to be had. For weddings were big gatherings of people -- with lots of food and drink, music and dancing. Guests even wore special clothes for the occasion (I think you heard a story about that recently. . .)

The wedding officially began after sunset – when the groom arrived at the bride’s father’s house – and escorted his bride to their new home – where the wedding banquet was held.

So that’s where the bridesmaid’s came in. . . our job was to make sure there was plenty of light –

First: at the home of the bride – so that when her father brought her out of the house and lifted her veil – the groom could get a good look at her.

Since we really did not know when the groom would arrive – there were lots of things that could delay him – we had to constantly be ready. Because when the cry came that the groom was coming – we had to go out to meet him.

The custom was that if the groom were delayed beyond midnight – all the festivities would be postponed to the next evening.

We bridesmaids were also to provide light throughout the route of the procession. Remember there were no street lights, or sidewalks, or paved roads, or even flashlights --- so we were to light up the way so no one would trip, or fall, or step in anything left behind by a horse or a donkey, if you know what I mean --- or be grabbed by a thief or a bandit.

And finally, once we arrived at the couple's new home – we were to light the torches that would have been placed around the courtyard where the banquet was to take place.

That was the role of the bridesmaid – a somewhat important role. . . we were to light the way. . . it we failed at our job – it might spell disaster for the celebration. . .

Now you've just heard a story about 10 bridesmaids – indicating a fairly big wedding: but 10 is also a number often used in Scripture to indicate fullness or completion.

Now five of these bridesmaids are described as wise, 5 as foolish. . . Which was I? Oh, it's really not important to my story – what IS important to note is five were prepared to do their job – 5 were not. But there is one detail of the story that is rather interesting. . . and brings to light, pardon the pun, the reason Jesus is telling the story. . .

The groom came at midnight – the last possible moment before things were postponed until the next day. In fact, we had all given up on him even arriving that night – which is why we all fell asleep. . .

Now recall in the Book of Exodus – it was at Midnight at which the angel of God went throughout the land of Egypt, slaying the first born of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and sparing the Israelites. . .

So in that Old Testament story of the Passover – which of course you recall every time you celebrate the Eucharist – for Christ is the new Paschal Lamb – freeing you from the slavery of sin and death --- midnight is a time of judgement:

--between the Jews and the Egyptians.

A time of judgement --between those in a covenant relationship with God, and those who are not.

A time of judgement--between those who are faithful to Christ – and those who are not.

A time of judgement -- between, as you will hear in a couple of weeks: the sheep and the goats. . .

The ultimate point of this story is that you will eventually be judged – on how well you have done the one job you have been given. NOT to light up the path of the bridegroom in the way I am called to do --

But to light up the world with the light of Christ -- which was given to you at your Baptism. Are you doing the one job that you have been given to do --- to mirror the light and love and mercy and forgiveness of Christ to others???

Or are you falling asleep on the job. . . or procrastinating – convincing yourself that you have plenty of time to get ready and to perform your Baptismal task?

All are invited to the banquet by God – but are you going to be included in the banquet feast or excluded?

The answer to one question will determine that: did you care enough to love – to love God with all your mind, heart, and soul --- and did you love all those God put in your life???

So take this advice from a Bridesmaid: be prepared! For you do not know when the Jesus, your bridegroom will arrive – may not come suddenly and find you sleeping or just plain procrastinating. I will say this again, and it is a message you will hear for the next few weeks: Be prepared!