

THE MYSTICAL ROMANCE

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A stack of old newspapers and magazines, scissors, paper and glue, other assorted craft supplies
- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: STAINED GLASS WINDOWS O’ MATRIMONY

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines, and other assorted craft supplies. Invite the teens to cut them up to create together a pair of designs for stained glass windows. Both windows share the common theme of marriage, but one window should depict marriage as your teens think it ought to be, and the other should show a distorted version of marriage. As an example, you might suggest that they include words like “kind” and “patient” on the “good” window, and words like “unforgiveness” or “abuse” on the “distortion” window. When finished, allow a few minutes for the teens to explain their work.

IF YOU HAVE A GROUP OF SIX OR MORE, BREAK THEM INTO TEAMS OF THREE TO FIVE AND HAVE EACH TEAM PRESENT BRIEFLY WHEN THEIR ARTWORK IS COMPLETE.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: WHAT’S YOUR IDEAL?

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What do you think an ideal romantic relationship looks like? Have your ideals ever changed? How?
- What sorts of things influence our romantic ideals?
- What role does your Christian belief play in how you think about love, dating, and marriage?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *Allow your teens to share freely. Some of their notions may seem petty or short-sighted, but at this stage of the discussion, allow them to open up about the development of their thoughts so far. (If you’re having trouble getting the discussion started, try offering them this Ann Voskamp quote: “Romance isn’t measured by how viral your proposal goes”.)*
- *Whether we realize it or not, we are very influenced not only by the relationships we see around us, but also by the narratives that we absorb in fiction, film and media stories. Sometimes the examples we look up to can create false expectations and/or misguided aspirations.*

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- *We should always ask ourselves who we are allowing to influence us. Are they people who share our values? Are they trustworthy? Is the example they set for us consistent with what the Bible teaches? If your Christian belief doesn't affect the way you think about romance, love and marriage, then it's time to re-examine those ideals.*

THE LESSON: REVELATION 19

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

(IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO HELP RESPOND TO QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE RAISED DURING THIS UNIT, WE RECOMMEND "DISCOVERING THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER: A HANDS-ON APPROACH, VOLUME 3: SPECIAL OCCASIONS" BY SUE CARELESS.)

There is only one truly epic romance. It's the story of a bride and a groom. It's a story of undeserved love and unfathomable sacrifice. It's the story of Jesus loving us so much that he died to ransom us from our sin so that we could be with him forever.

Christian marriage is sacred because it points us to the greater love story that all believers share in. Our lives, whether we marry or not, are like signs that can tell others about our Lord. But the marriage relationship points to the Gospel in a unique and powerful way when it emulates the love of Christ for the Church: humble, grace-filled, and sacrificial. This is why St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

Not only does Christian marriage point to the spiritual reality of Christ and the Church, but it serves other important purposes too. It draws men, women and children into families. It provides us with opportunities to love God and one another. And it also brings about spiritual growth in husbands and wives. Through one another they can come to better understand what it means to love and be loved, unconditionally and sacrificially.

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Consider this: If we are believers, then all that we experience in this life is carrying us forward to a glorious consummation, "preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Christians believe that Jesus will come again in glory, that the dead will be raised, humanity judged, and believers go on to experience eternal life with their Lord. The Book of Revelation records for us St. John's divine vision of these "last things". We're going to take a look at the passage describing Jesus, our triumphant bridegroom, and the divine marriage feast.

Refer to Revelation 19: 6-16.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- How did St. John (the writer of Revelation) react to what he was experiencing? What does this tell us?
- What does this passage tell us about how the bride "made herself ready"?
- In what ways does this seem like a "normal wedding" to you? In what ways is it different?
- What does this passage tell us about Jesus?
- What do you think Christian husbands and wives should take note of (from this passage) if they want their marriage to point to Jesus?

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *St. John was overwhelmed by what he was witnessing. Encountering an angel moved him to worship – something that should be reserved for God only (v10). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. John was able to put this apocalyptic experience into words, though because of the mystical nature of what is described these things can sometimes be challenging for readers to grasp.*
- *It's worth first noting that Ephesians 5:25-27 says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish". This tells us that removing sin from the bride is the work of Jesus. But Revelation 19:8 says that it was "granted to her" to dress herself in "the deeds of the saints". We know that we cannot earn salvation or eradicate our own sins, but as we look forward to the day when we will stand before our Lord, we can be motivated and inspired by the thought of clothing ourselves in the deeds of obedience born of our love for him.*
- *Some familiar wedding elements are present here. There is a bride and a groom. The bride has prepared herself with particular care and the witnesses are jubilant. The appearance of the bridegroom is exciting, but it goes far beyond any earthly wedding we may have seen before, even a royal wedding. This wedding is epic. There is powerful thunderous worship going on from a great multitude. We may be accustomed to reading the Gospel accounts of Jesus, which describe when he came to earth in humility. But the second coming of Jesus will be marked by triumph and glory without parallel. This is a bridegroom like no other.*
- *Jesus is described as faithful, true, a righteous judge and a conqueror. He is glorious, majestic and powerful. He is "The Word of God", a title that we may be familiar with from the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14). Those who belong with him are characterized by strength and purity. All authority has been given to him (see Matthew 28:18), and he will rule over all.*
- *Christian husbands and wives should remember that this wedding was arrived at through sacrifice and forgiveness. We see an emphasis on purity, but also on qualities like faithfulness and truth, and on all things being done for the glory of God and in a way that honours him first and foremost.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer).)

Spend some time praying the prayer below for the people you know who are married, or are preparing for marriage. You may also want to pray that if and when you marry, God might bless your marriage in this way, asking him to help you to view marriage, not through a distorted lens, but through a clear one.

O God, who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony to such an excellent mystery, that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church: Look mercifully upon thy married

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servants, that they may love, honour, and cherish each other, and live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness. O Lord, bless them, and grant them to inherit thy everlasting kingdom; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ADAPTED FROM THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MATRIMONY, BCP PAGE 571)

CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

Before closing, ask the teens to pray the words of the At-Home Challenge prayer with you, for the married people of your parish, and for any other believing couples they may know.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE “PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS” SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER.

Then finish with the “Grace”, the final prayer in the booklet.

REVELATION 19: THE EPIC MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.