

# MARRIAGE

Children are the natural gift of this way of life, and couples procreate along with God, for the mysterious power to perpetuate life is woven into the natural capacities of the human body. In bringing their children to baptism, men and women help build up the body of Christ's Church and pass on its traditions and gospel to generations to come. They witness in this way to God's ever fruitful love, by which he causes life to flourish throughout the world, and makes his Church shine with his glory and holiness. Finally, by remaining together until death, married couples provide an enduring sign of God's everlasting covenant with his people.

In the Anglican tradition, the preface to the marriage service in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer set forth St. Augustine's three goods of marriage (fidelity, children, and permanence). But it brought out another good, also discussed by Augustine: "the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity." Augustine locates this mutual help in the original creation, noting that Scripture says Eve was made from Adam's side, not from a lower or a higher part of the body. In this way Scripture signifies the fundamental equality of man and woman. Man and woman stand side by side, facing the same future and helping one another along the same path. The help, love, and support given from one to another became a special emphasis in the Anglican tradition, discussed at length in one of the authorized Anglican Homilies on marriage and in Jeremy Taylor's beloved volume *The Marriage Ring*.

Consider the deep significance of a couple's promise to live together "in the holy estate of Matrimony," even in the face of immense difficulties. They pledge to love, comfort, honor, and keep one another and forsake all others. What an act of faith this is! Against all odds, the couple promise "to have and to hold" one another "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish." How can we not honor such resolve?

We know that, like any calling, these great vows may be taken only by the grace of God. In this way, men and women point to Christ — even when they fall short. For in the strength of their unity, they show forth the mystery of Christ's love. In their failings, they rely on his grace, which allows them to forgive, to try again and again, until all their efforts and desires are molded by the holy calling that is marriage.



THE  
LIVING CHURCH

We are a Christian ministry based primarily in the Episcopal Church, a member of the Anglican Communion. Since 1878 we have published educational resources of various kinds and *The Living Church* magazine.

The Sacrament of  
Holy Matrimony

**The story of God and humanity begins in marriage and ends in marriage. In the mysterious early chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read that God created human beings in his image and made them “male and female,” to be in fellowship with each other, and in faithfulness and love to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:27–28).**

“Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). God’s blessing rests upon this way of life.

Similarly, at the end of the Book of Revelation, the writer sees a beautiful vision: “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (19:9). “I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). Here, “the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them” (21:3). The faithful, loving, and eternal Lord — the source and goal of all creation — shall be forever united to his people. Heaven and earth shall be made one, never to be put asunder.

Between the beginning and the end, we find every manner of human relationship, good and bad. We cringe at accounts of horrible abuse in Scripture’s pages. We often read of marriage done badly, or see marriages that suffer amid hardship: war, famine, death. We see love and trust broken, and witness the deep grief of husbands and wives who cannot conceive. We watch the bitter infighting that characterizes so many families, brought to life in the stories of Jacob and Esau, in the lives of the Twelve Patriarchs, and in the rivalry of Christ’s apostles.

Yet Scripture tells us that the figure of marriage made fruitful in family life is itself an icon of God’s relationship with his people: “On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, ‘My husband,’ ... And I will take you for my wife

forever in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (Hosea 2:16a, 19-20).

When our LORD Jesus Christ came among us, he experienced the fullness of family life. Though he was born of his mother’s virginity, he witnessed the faithful marriage of Mary and Joseph. He was protected and nurtured by them, as well as obedient to them. We see here a pattern of the redeemed family.

In the letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul also speaks of the marital relationship in terms of the mutual love between Christ and the Church.

**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy. ... [N]o 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. (Eph. 5:25-26a, 29-30)**



He then quotes Genesis 2:24 and adds: “This is a great mystery, and I am speaking of Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5:32).

What we learn is simple yet profound: Marriage shares in the blessings of creation, the woes of human sin, and the glories of redemption. It is part of the long history of our failure, and has suffered like every other thing in creation by being subject to corruption (see Rom. 8:18-23). Yet, just as God did not abandon us in our sin, so he did not abandon this way of life, which underlies all human society — and this, despite our failures. God worked with and redeemed marriage in the history of Israel, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and in the life of the Church. He elevated it from its status as a form of life blessed in creation and marred by sin, raising it to become a sacrament of the New Covenant and a sign of his kingdom of love.

St. Augustine of Hippo, a bishop of the late fourth and early fifth century, helped shape the Church’s teaching about marriage by identifying three goods or ends of marriage: fidelity (*fides*), children (*proles*), and permanence (*sacramentum*). By pledging their exclusive faith to one another, and living together in love, couples exhibit God’s faithfulness and love to his people.