

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Isaiah 62:1-5

**The Epiphany King has Come to Claim his
Bride!**

- 1. The groom's elaborate planning
and preparations**
- 2. The groom's irrepressible joy and
gladness**

**Hymns: 90 – 93 – Distribution: 94, 87 –
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All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Isaiah 62:1-5 –

***For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.***

**²*The nations will see your righteousness,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.***

**³*You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.***

**⁴*No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.***

***But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;***

***for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.***

**⁵*As a young man marries a maiden,
so will your sons marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.***

In some cultures, a groom will pay his bride's family what is called a "bride price." This is an amount of money or a gift that compensates a father for giving his daughter to a man to marry. In some parts of Africa still today, I hear that it is customary to give livestock as the form of payment to the bride's father. The customary

"cattle to bride exchange rate" can be up to about 3-4 cows.

There's a story of a young man who asked to marry a girl from a neighboring village. The people of that village unfortunately considered that this girl was not exceptional in any way. Her family wasn't influential. They were not rich. The people of that village did not consider her to be beautiful by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, they judged her to be rather plain. And they didn't consider her to be remarkably brilliant either.

Yet when the young man came to barter for his bride, he offered the father ten cows for her. The bride's family was astonished. Such a price was unheard of. As quickly as they could delicately accept, they did. News of the transaction spread throughout the area. And everyone laughed at the young groom for his foolish investment.

After they married and time continued, this young husband continued to treat his bride as a ten-cow wife. She was his princess, and he was her prince. He spoke glowingly about her to everyone he knew. He helped her with household chores, as few other men in his culture did. He gave her his heart. In short, he kept his wedding vow to the nth degree – honoring her, respecting her, and cherishing her.

With time, a remarkable transformation took place. The young, plain, unexceptional girl became a princess in every sense. Her bearing was regal. Her manner was gracious. Her care for her appearance was meticulous. Soon she held a position of respect and honor in the community, all because she had a husband who continued to treat her as a ten-cow wife.

This morning, the prophet Isaiah is talking about a ten-cow wife. Now you won't find that term in Isaiah 62, because Isaiah's time in history is different. His culture is different. So he'll use terms and images to which Jewish people of about 700 B.C. could relate. But his point will be the same. **"The Epiphany King has Come to Claim his Bride!" Today we will see in our reading:**

1. The groom's elaborate planning and preparation
2. The groom's irrepressible joy and gladness

1. The groom's elaborate planning and preparation

To clarify the picture in this reading, Christ the Epiphany King is the groom, and his people – the Holy Christian Church – are the bride. (In fact, I'd almost hesitate to use the picture of a ten-cow bride in our culture today due to baggage it might carry except for the fact that I am included as the bride!)

As we consider the groom's planning and preparation in this reading, we see that some changes are needed. And it's not the groom who needs to change; it is the bride. When God addressed his people in this reading, he declared a name change for them. This is significant. The LORD said, *"No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate."* You may have noticed that those words for their names are capitalized. They are Hebrew adjectives that God recognized his people should be called:

- AZUBAH – "Forsaken." "Abandoned." Why would this name have fit God's people? Because the LORD himself had been forced to abandon his people, the people he had chosen. Because of their sin and abandonment of him, he had let them have their own way and turned away from them. In fact, at the beginning of this book of Isaiah, when God called Isaiah to be a prophet to his people, he said that Isaiah must preach to them *"...until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken"* (Isaiah 6:11,12).

God had turned away from his people, and in their exiles their cities would lie forsaken as well for all to see!

- SHEMAMAH – "Destroyed." "Devastated." Not only were they a forsaken people, but their cities also lay devastated. Earlier in Isaiah he had prophesied: *"Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers... Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah"* (Isaiah 1:7,9).

We might compare this to the scenes we see on the news after a tornado has gone through a city, or after an earthquake has devastated an area. There are piles of pieces of buildings that have been devastated! And all the nations around God's Old Testament people could see this "forsakenness" and "devastation" and could also call them these names in derision!

Were things really that bad that God had to do those terrible things in forsaking his people and devastating their cities? This seems pretty dramatic!

I'd like to read God's description of what his people had done, which he laments about earlier in this book of Isaiah and also in the book of Jeremiah: *"See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her – but now murderers!"*

Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute... how can you say 'I am not defiled'... See how you behaved in the valley... you are a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving – in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her... You have lived as a prostitute with many lovers – would you now return to me? declares the LORD" (Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 2 and 3 [selected]).

This is how the bride that the Lord had made promises to treat him! Practically speaking, how does a husband feel when he has been slapped in the face in this way?

I saw a recent news story and took note of it, since I spent many years living in Wisconsin. It was a news story about Suzy Favor, a track star from the late 1980's at the University of Wisconsin and then an Olympian for the United States in three Olympic games. She was athletic; a model with knockout looks; an All-American with nine Big Ten track titles. She was so talented that the Big Ten female Athlete of the Year now wins the award that is named for her. She is married with a 7-year old daughter.

What came to light in the news? For the last year she decided to work as a \$600 an hour prostitute for an escort service. It says that on her Twitter account she "took full responsibility for her actions" and that she regretted them, yet she says about the client who blew her cover: "He broke all the rules by (revealing) me. I don't want to be like him (and reveal who he is) because he is scum. And I will not become scum to make myself feel good."

What does a husband normally feel and do when his bride has treated him like that?

We might wonder what Israel's specific sins were. Earlier in this book, Isaiah had revealed God's complaints against his people:

- *"Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."* (1:15-17)

Injustice and bad treatment of people were sadly common in the land! That doesn't happen much in our world or among us, right?

- *"(You are) heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks"* (5:22) That certainly doesn't happen very much in our world today or among God's people, right?
- *"(They) acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent"* (5:23). How long would it take us today to have

a conversation about the same things happening in our world and among us?

- *"(They) call evil good and good evil. (They) put darkness for light and light for darkness. (They) put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."* (5:20) Nothing like that happening today, is there? Abortion, corrupt government, homosexual marriage, and clergy!

Isaiah may as well have been writing about the 21st Century and about you and me in various ways! And with our lackadaisical ways and our sinful attitudes he must say exactly the same!

And then... he paid ten cows for us – and more! And the groom brought dramatic changes to the situation. Isaiah wrote, *"But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you."*

The Lord tells them they will have a name change. This is the normal practice with brides today, and it is the same with God's people. He names her HEPHZIBAH and BEULAH. I don't know if you know anyone with those names. I went online to see where they rank in popular baby names today. In the government's Social Security Administration records for 2010, five babies were named Hephzibah and five were named Beulah that year. They rank about #17,000 in popularity in 2010. But God has named all his people those names:

- HEPHZIBAH – "My delight is in her"
- BEULAH – "Married"

And he has given her a beauty makeover! We now hear that *"You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God."* For one described a few chapters earlier as only having acts that were "filthy rags," she is now a "crown." And she is now a "diadem," literally the turban that the priest wore. And in a staggering turn of events that we can only call miraculous, she is a virgin! How is this possible?

In one of the New Testament chapters that also uses this illustration of Christ the groom and his Church the bride (Ephesians 5) the

Apostle Paul writes: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”* Earlier in this same book of Isaiah we hear, *“he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* (53:5)

Jesus Christ, the groom, the Messiah, gave his life and died in her place. He paid for her sins as he prepared her for the great wedding. On the cross he bled and died to take away her sin, shame, and guilt. He paid a high bride price. He paid the price of being AZUZAH (forsaken) as he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He paid the price of SHEMAMAH (devastated) as his body hung, ebbing of its life for the bride that he loved. **This is the price that was paid for your salvation! What planning and preparation has gone into the salvation of your soul so that this wedding might take place and your soul and body saved!**

2. The groom’s irrepressible joy and gladness

Yet there’s one more point that we can’t overlook before we close our thoughts on Isaiah 62. And that is the joy and gladness that shines through these words, which the groom feels as he comes to claim his bride. Has this been a grim act of duty to marry this bride?

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory... As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” We hear various things about the groom and his wedding:

- He must speak about it! He wants all the world to hear about this marriage.

Spiritually speaking, God wants all people to know about the salvation that he has brought about through his Son Jesus. Even “kings” of the earth must take notice of this, for it is a momentous and important occasion!

- Do you also sense his joy on his wedding day? Men who are married, do you remember your wedding day? Do you remember the joy that you felt? Do you remember the feeling you had as your bride was presented to you? What joy the Lord expresses as he sees his bride, the Church!
- We also see the King holding his “crown” in his hand. It may seem odd at first that he is not wearing his crown, but there are various things we might see here. He is gazing at his crown, holding it close and treasuring it. He is protecting his crown, and no one will take it away from him. Not only that, but he can display this crown of achievement to all. It is his treasured work!

We are bouncing metaphors around here, but think about the joy that God feels in his crowning achievement and in his wedding. I don’t know what the condition of your marriage is – unfortunately some grow to view their marriage as a tug of war, as depressing, or as a daily curse. Today, view this marriage as the ideal marriage of active love, a rewarding relationship, and a cherished union. **For ten cows and more have been given for this bride. And she reflects that value in her behavior and life now!**

Finally, we close with a thought about the future. The last book of Scripture, Revelation, says in chapter 21, *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his*

people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Marriage between spouses is normally only for this life. But this ten-cow marriage will last into eternity as Christ will make a second appearance to deliver his believers from this world and take them to the wedding banquet in heaven. This is where true deliverance is!

Until that day, may the thoughts in this Epiphany text give us reason to marvel. The groom has gone through elaborate planning and preparation for this wedding. And his joy and gladness is unmistakable. May our joy, gladness, and anticipation be unmistakable as well. And may we live up to the honor and dignity of being the bride of Christ, for whom he has paid the price of himself! Amen.