



Oil in Our Lamps

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Being worthy of a temple recommend is a wise way to prepare to meet the Lord.

While Coy Manning was in the hospital with cancer, her temple recommend expired. She knew she had only days to live and realized she would never visit the temple again in this life. Still, she told her physician, who was a member of the Church, that she wanted to have a current temple recommend when she died. He replied, perhaps in jest, “I don’t think they use them over there.” Of course her bishop and stake president were happy to visit her. With her renewed recommend she was content knowing that she had been judged worthy by the Lord’s earthly representatives to enter the temple, or symbolically to enter into His presence. She was at peace for the journey that came just a few days later.¹

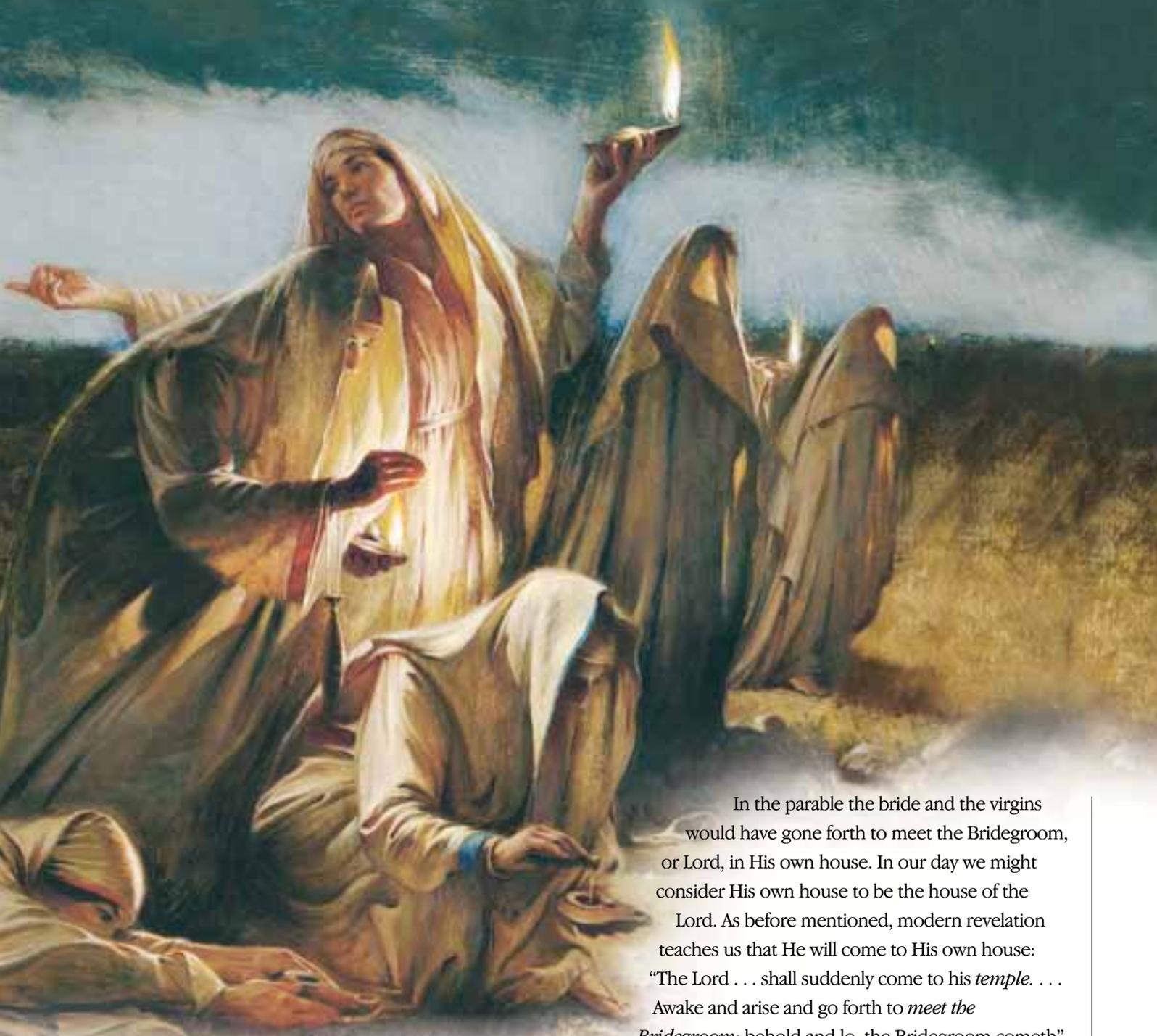
Parables of Preparation

When speaking of His Second Coming, the Lord has said, “I will suddenly come to my

temple” (D&C 36:8; see also D&C 42:36; 133:2; Malachi 3:1; 3 Nephi 24:1). Because He will come to His temple, we would be wise to prepare to meet Him by being temple worthy.

Could the importance of temple worthiness be one of the Lord’s messages to us in the parables of the ten virgins (see Matthew 25:1–13) and the marriage of the king’s son (see Matthew 22:2–14)? These parables have more than one possible interpretation. However, one wise way to “liken [these parables] unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23) is to study them with the temple in mind. This perspective reminds us of the urgent need to have and to be ever worthy of a current temple recommend.

In the scriptures the Savior uses His title “the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:17) in reference to His Second Coming: “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to



FIVE OF THEM WERE WISE BY WALTER RANE. COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CHURCH HISTORY AND ART

meet the bridegroom” (Matthew 25:1).

In biblical times the destination of those who “went forth to meet the bridegroom” was the bridegroom’s home. Under the heading “Marriage” in the Bible Dictionary, we read: “On the marriage day, the bride was escorted to her [bridegroom’s] home by a procession consisting of her own companions and the ‘friends of the bridegroom,’ or ‘children of the bride-chamber.’ . . . When she reached the house, words such as ‘Take her according to the law of Moses . . .’ were spoken, . . . and a marriage deed was signed. After the prescribed washing of hands and benediction, the marriage supper was held” (728–29).

In the parable the bride and the virgins would have gone forth to meet the Bridegroom, or Lord, in His own house. In our day we might consider His own house to be the house of the Lord. As before mentioned, modern revelation teaches us that He will come to His own house: “The Lord . . . shall suddenly come to his *temple*. . . . Awake and arise and go forth to *meet the Bridegroom*; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh” (D&C 133:2, 10; emphasis added).

In the parable the Savior used a marriage ceremony in the *Bridegroom’s home* to teach about qualifying for the kingdom of heaven. In our day a marriage ceremony in the Lord’s house is the qualifying ordinance for family life in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 131:1–3).

Filling Our Lamps

The parable of the ten virgins teaches us about how to prepare wisely to meet the Lord at His Second Coming. “*Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins*” (v. 1).



In the parable the virgins were not able to enter the door without oil. In our day neither can we enter the door of the temple without a recommend.

The ten virgins, according to Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,

“represent those church members who are looking for the Bridegroom to come; and the oil-filled lamps are symbolic of the Holy Spirit which lights the way before the saints.”²

“And five of them were wise, and five were foolish” (v. 2).

Elder McConkie further explains that this parable is not about “good and bad, not righteous and wicked, but *wise* and *foolish*. That is, all of them have accepted the invitation to meet the Bridegroom; all are *members of the Church* . . . but only five are valiant therein.”³

In the parable, only those with oil in their lamps were able to enter the house of the bridegroom. In modern times, only those worthy of a temple recommend may enter the house of the Lord.

“They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them;

“But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (vv. 3–4).

In biblical times constant effort was needed to ensure

that an adequate amount of oil was maintained in lamps. In our day we must exert constant effort to remain temple worthy. In the parable the virgins were not able to enter the door without oil. In our day neither can we enter the door of the temple without a recommend.

The Lord commanded the children of Israel anciently to use “pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually” (Leviticus 24:2). According to *The Guide to the Scriptures*, olive oil is a symbol of purity and of the presence and influence of the Holy Ghost.⁴ In modern times a temple recommend is an affirmation of a person’s purity or worthiness.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

“And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (vv. 5–6).

Elder McConkie explains that “from evening to midnight there was no direct word from the bridal party. At midnight, the most unlikely of all hours for a joyous celebration to begin, the cry goes forth to a sleeping world.” Likewise, the Lord’s Second Coming will be “more distant than the early saints supposed.”⁵

The Lord will come again in a dark “midnight” hour when the world is ripe in iniquity and when for the “elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22). In such a dark time, what a truly stunning moment it will be when the Light of the World appears and darkness is banished!

“Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps” (v. 7).

They all thought they were ready. Outwardly, they all appeared prepared.

“And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out” (v. 8).

In the parable oil could not be loaned to someone else. In our day we cannot loan our temple worthiness to someone else.

“But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves” (v. 9).

The Keeper of the Gate

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (v. 10).

The closed door is a poignant reminder that “this life is the day for men to perform their labors” (Alma 34:32). It would be foolish to procrastinate the day of our repentance until the midnight hour or to leave this life without oil. Just as oil is not purchased at midnight, neither is righteousness developed in an instant.

“Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us” (v. 11).

The fact that the five foolish virgins knocked, *expecting*

to enter the marriage supper, indicates one of two things: (1) they thought they could prepare themselves *after* the Bridegroom came, or (2) knowing that they at first had not been prepared to enter, they were hoping for mercy. Either way, the door was shut.

“But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not” (v. 12).

Our Lord, on the other hand, knows each one of us,



The Lord will come again in a dark “midnight” hour when the world is ripe in iniquity and when for the “elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

even the thoughts and intents of our heart (see Alma 18:32). Joseph Smith’s inspired revision of the scriptures places responsibility for being prepared right where it belongs: “Ye know me not” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 25:11). In this parable it was the bridegroom himself who answered the door. In the Book of Mormon we learn that “the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; . . . for he cannot be deceived” (2 Nephi 9:41). He is the one who will symbolically be checking recommends at the door to the kingdom of heaven.

Church doctrine teaches us that Judgment Day will go beyond a recommend interview. The “Gatekeeper” has taught us that there are additional requirements, such as being humble, forgiving our fellow men, having charity, and so forth. Having a recommend may not be a guarantee, but worthily obtaining one would be a wise way to prepare for

the kingdom of heaven. Logically, if we are not worthy to enter the house of the Lord here on earth, common sense tells us that we will not be worthy to enter His celestial home either, the one being symbolic of the other.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND

The Wedding Garment

In symbolism that could parallel that of the oil in the parable of the ten virgins, the parable of the marriage of the king's son uses the "wedding garment" as a prerequisite to participation (see Matthew 22:11–14; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 22:14). The book of Revelation teaches us that the garment represents righteousness: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready . . . arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the *righteousness* of saints" (Revelation 19:7–8; emphasis added). In our day, the temple garment is clothing we always wear as a reminder of sacred temple covenants.

The final verse of the parable of the marriage of the king's son states, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Joseph Smith added a key phrase in his inspired revision of the Bible: "For many are called, but few are chosen: wherefore all do not have on the *wedding garment*" (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 22:14; emphasis added).

HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

Visuals enhance learning. Consider showing or having family members make an object discussed in the article. Following are two suggestions.

1. Share the parable of the ten virgins. Invite each family member to mold clay into the shape of a small bowl that fits inside your cupped hand. The resulting bowl is similar in size and shape to the ancient lamps used by the ten virgins. While you are doing this, consider discussing some of the requirements to enter the kingdom of heaven. During the coming week place a pebble or a marble in your "lamps" each time someone makes a good choice, such as reading the scriptures, praying, being kind, or giving service.

2. Show a passport or driver's license to the family. Discuss briefly how to obtain it and what privileges it allows you to have. Then show a temple recommend. Discuss what you must do to obtain one and what privileges it allows you to have. Share Sister Manning's story from the article. Consider discussing the relationship between our being worthy of a temple recommend and the ten virgins' being prepared to "meet the bridegroom."

Reminders of Covenants

Parables can have layered or multiple meanings. The similarities between the biblical parables mentioned and our preparation to enter modern temples should motivate us to "liken [the] scriptures unto us" (1 Nephi 19:23) and to desire to be temple worthy.

The temple recommend isn't just a record; nor is the garment just an emblem of past behavior. They are reminders of covenants made concerning future behavior—a promise to endure to the end. Being worthy of a temple recommend—just as Sister Coy Manning was—is a *wise* way to prepare to meet the Savior and to prepare for the spiritual journey we call death. It isn't the piece of paper that matters but the worthiness it represents. It would certainly be unwise, or *foolish*, not to be worthy of one.

"Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, *and oil with you*, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom" (D&C 33:17; emphasis added). ■

NOTES

1. Sister Coy C. Manning is the sister of Elder Joe J. Christensen, emeritus member of the Seventy, who shared this story.
2. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (1966–73), 1:684.
3. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:685; emphasis added.
4. See *The Guide to the Scriptures* (1993), 182.
5. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:685.