



## The Bride in the Jewish Wedding Tradition

### Part 1: *Shiddukhin* (The Marriage Arrangement)

~ “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the best man rejoices when he stands and hears the bridegroom’s voice. So now my joy is complete! He must increase, while I must decrease.” (John 3: 29-30/MEV)

A traditional Jewish wedding, during Jesus’ time, consisted of three major components:

- The *Shiddukhin*: the Marriage Arrangement
- The *Eyrusin*: the Betrothal
- The *Nissuin*: the Marriage

In this chapter we will discuss the marriage arrangement, the *shiddukhin*; chapter two and three will discuss the betrothal and marriage, respectively.

The parents, primarily the fathers, of the future groom and bride, arranged a traditional Jewish marriage. More often than not, the purpose of a Jewish marriage was to enhance family connections. An example of a *shiddukhin* was Abraham’s search for a bride for his son, Isaac.

*<sup>1</sup> Abraham was old, having seen many days, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. <sup>2</sup> Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all his possessions: “Put your hand under my thigh, <sup>3</sup> and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live, <sup>4</sup> but that you will go to my own land and to my relatives to get a wife for my son Isaac.” (Gen 24:1-4/NABRE)*



**Rebecca and Eliezar**  
**Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889)**

When Abraham's servant, Eleazar, saw the beautiful Rebekah he believed he found a bride worthy of his master's son. Eleazar gave Rebekah gifts and asked to meet her family and so she brought Abraham's servant to their camp where he met her brother, Laban, and father, Bethu'el. Eleazar described to Rebekah's family the mission that his master had sent him on, that is, to find a suitable wife from Isaac among his kin. He explained that Isaac would inherit his father's considerable fortune thereby demonstrating that this would be a good match for Rebekah. Once everyone was in agreement, Eleazar provided Rebekah and the family with costly gifts, the *ketubah*, or the "bride price." Then, Rebekah left with Eleazar and he brought her to Isaac.

After agreeing to the *ketubah*, it was a tradition that the future bride and groom would take separate ritual immersions in water known as the *mikveh*. The *mikveh* was symbolic spiritual cleansing in preparation for the betrothal.

We see all the elements of the *Shiddukhin* in the Gospels:

### The Father selects the bride for His Son:

*<sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; <sup>39</sup> and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. (John 6: 37-39/RSVCE)*

Just as Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac, the Father employs many *Shadchanims*, matchmakers, to find those who would become His Son's bride. The matchmaker's job was to promote the bridegroom to his potential bride and to her parents.

### The angels were the first *Shadchanims* to introduce Jesus:



*<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, <sup>33</sup> and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1: 26-33/NABRE)*

*<sup>8</sup> And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; <sup>11</sup> for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12/RSVCE)*

### John the Baptist was a *Shadchanim*:

John the Baptist had his own following of disciples. Before John had been arrested by King Herod, a question arose between some Jews and John's disciples regarding Jesus who was also baptizing disciples. John explained that he had already made it clear that he was not the Messiah. Then in the next statement John takes the part of a *shadchanim* introducing Jesus to the Jews and his disciples that it is Jesus to Whom they are to be betrothed, as now his own ministry must diminish while that of Jesus' can flourish.

*<sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:29-30/RSVCE)*

John the Baptist was also Jesus “best man,” or in Hebrew, the *shōshbēn* (as discussed in the previous essay, The Bride in Scripture). The *shōshbēn* had various responsibilities, but one of them was to announce the bridegroom when he returned to “carry off” his bride for the wedding feast at his father’s house. We will discuss this in the third section of these essays on the Jewish Wedding Tradition.

### **Those that spread the Good News of Jesus Christ are *Shadchanims*:**

The apostles were *shadchanims* sent out to spread the Gospel to the ends of the world so that those called to be the Lord’s bride might respond to His call of love. We too become *shadchanims* when we share the Good News of the Gospel with unbelievers and believers who might not fully appreciate their high calling of become the Bride of the Lamb.

*<sup>2</sup>For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2Cor 11: 2/NABRE)*

### **The Holy Spirit is the supreme *Shadchanim*:**

The Holy Spirit is the supreme *shadchanim*, and it is through Him that all other matchmakers, whether they are angels, prophets, apostles, or you and I, are empowered to share Jesus the Bridegroom with humanity adding to the beauty of the Bride.

*<sup>26</sup> But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; <sup>27</sup> and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27/RSVCE)*

*<sup>13</sup>But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.*

*<sup>15</sup> Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15/NABRE)*



The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, bears witness of the Son, the Bridegroom. The Divine *Shadchanim* does not just introduce us to the Groom, but reveals our essential need for Him, and that He is our salvation, completeness, and eternal joy.

### **The *Shiddukhin Mikvah*:**



When did a *mikvah* take place in the New Testament? Actually, there are several places in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles where *mikvahs*, or ritual immersion, occurred.

*<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.*

*<sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him;*

*<sup>17</sup> and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:13-17)*

Christians believe that Jesus was without sin so why did He need to be baptized? Even John the Baptist was mystified by Jesus’ request, and what did Jesus mean when He said, “*Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*”? I spent some time reading commentaries of this particular scripture and I found them

diverse and yet each compelling in their own way. This does not surprise me for how could a single meaning circumscribe the fullness of the Word which is inseparable from the One who spoke it? Nevertheless, the one commentary that I found most appropriate for our discussion here comes from the Navarre Bible which I quote below:

“‘Righteousness’ has a very deep meaning in the Bible, it refers to the plan which God, in his infinite goodness and wisdom, has marked out for man’s salvation. Consequently, “to fulfill all righteousness” should be understood as fulfilling God’s will and designs. Thus, we could translate “fulfill all righteousness” as “fulfill everything laid down by God.” Jesus comes to receive John’s baptism and hence recognizes it as a stage in salvation history—a stage foreseen by God as a final and immediate preparation for the messianic era. The fulfillment of any one of these stages can be called an act of righteousness. Jesus, who has come to fulfill the Father’s Will is careful to fulfill that saving plan in all its aspects.” (see page 46 of the Gospel of Matthew/Navarre Bible)

It is the thesis of these essays that salvation history, that is, the fulfillment of the Divine plan, involves not just redemption and justification, but the sanctification (or as the Eastern Church calls it, *theosis*) of the Church so as to become the Bride “holy and without blemish.”

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27)*

So what I am proposing is that Jesus, in accepting the Father’s divine plan, in His baptism is submitting to *Shiddukhin*, the arrangement of the Father’s marriage of His Son, and the Bride. The *mikvah* of His baptism is sign and confirmation of our Lord’s submission to the Father’s plan. And in like manner our baptism, whether in infancy or as an adult, is our submission to the Father’s marriage arrangement with His Son and our inclusion into the Church who is the Bride. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are vows made in baptism which confirm our belief in the Bridegroom and also our rejection of Satan which may be made by parents or godparents.

Finally, there is another baptism that does not have its origin in John the Baptist, but is uniquely a gift from the Bridegroom through the Holy Spirit.

*<sup>11</sup> “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (Matt 3:11-12)*

Of course, John is speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which we celebrate on the Feast of Pentecost and re-present sacramentally in the Confirmation of the believer.

*And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49)*

It is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit who clothes us in Christ’s righteousness such that the Bridegroom is presented with a bride who is clothed in “splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she be holy and without blemish.”

*“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.  
<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;  
<sup>8</sup> it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev 19:6-8)*

## The Bride Price

The Father set the *ketubah*, the bride price, which His Son would pay for His Bride. The first reference to the price was given in Genesis after Adam and Eve ate the apple. In the passage known by Christians as the protoevangelium, God judges the serpent for deceiving our first parents.

*<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel. (Gen 3:15/NABRE)*

As a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, death and corruption entered the world. God was not about to allow Satan to have victory of His creation. Through the "seed of the woman" a Savior, the eternally begotten Son of the Father, would come into this fallen world. He would pay the bride price, taking upon Himself our fallen nature, ransoming us from the power of sin and elevating our dignity so that we might be worthy of being His bride. A beautiful description of the price that Jesus paid for His bride is the Suffering Servant passage from the Book of Isaiah.

*Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For he grew up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form or majesty that we should look upon him nor appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him.*

*Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

*<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was struck. <sup>9</sup> His grave was assigned with the wicked, yet with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*



**Ecco Homo (Behold the Man)  
Antonio Ciseri (1821-1891)**

*with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, thus he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isa 53:1-12)*



**The Scouring at the Pillar  
James Tissot (1836-1902)**

*<sup>10</sup> Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; He has put him to grief. If he made himself as an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> He shall see of the anguish of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge My righteous servant shall justify the many, for he shall bear their iniquities.*

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will divide him a portion*



Is there a price that the Bride must pay? Yes, in fact it is the same price that the Bridegroom:

*<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matt 16:24-25/NABRE)*

Consider the price paid by the Mother of the Bridegroom and the first member of the Church and Bride of Christ paid (see “Pieta” by WA Bourguereau from the previous page). While Mary held her infant Son Simeon prophesized the great suffering she would experience.

*<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; <sup>34</sup> and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,*

*“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against <sup>35</sup>and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:33-35)*

Why would God want and expect Mary and her sons and daughters (the Bride) to participate in His suffering? St. Paul answers this question in his epistle to the Colossians:

*<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, (Col 1:24-25)*

The Bride is called not just to pay the same price as the Bridegroom, she is called to become what God had originally planned for humanity before Satan’s deception—like the Bridegroom:

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:3-8/RSVCE)*

The price we pay is to give up the hubris of our self-sufficiency, our self-priority, and our self-righteous demand that we be “equal” so that we can take on the self-emptying “mind” of Christ. It is in obedience and taking up our cross that we will be exalted and in so doing become the Bride of the Lamb.

