Christian faith means preparing ourselves to meet Christ. We meet Christ in the way we live our lives. In the Bridegroom services, we hear examples of people who both meet Christ and fail to meet Him.

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- **Interpret** the meaning of the actions of characters and stories from Scripture, as symbolic of living a life in preparation for encountering Christ.
- **Connect** forgivness, mercy, and love for others to love for Christ.
- **Decide** on specific ways to live in a preparation for Christ, based on the examples from Scripture.

**INTRODUCTION**

To be faithful Christians, we prepare ourselves to meet Christ Jesus. This has to do with the way we live our lives. The people in the Bible stories we read on these days are lessons about how each of us can live the kind of life that will prepare us to encounter Him.

Note: The Bridegroom services are the Orthros services of Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday, and they are celebrated on the evenings of Palm Sunday, Holy Monday, and Holy Tuesday. In some parishes the Orthros for Holy Thursday is chanted on Holy Wednesday evening.
PROCEDURES

1. Focusing activity
Ask students to name one thing they like doing more than anything else:

- Is there one thing in your life that you could wake up early in the morning to do, even if you’re not a morning person, and spend all your time doing, from the moment you wake up, all day long, every day?

- Is there one thing that really grabs and holds your attention, no matter what is going on?

- Think about why this particular activity holds your attention so well, and why you can spend so much time with it. Why do they enjoy that activity so much?

Guide the conversation, helping them to express that they derive joy from certain activities that they can spend hours doing.

2. Name their present praxis
Ask the students:

- How is this kind of excitement and energy for faith in Christ possible for people? Is it possible for you?

- Remember that Christians are called to be faithful and dedicated to Christ and their faith at all times, even while they are doing other things and not just when they are at church.

- Our dedication comes in many different forms—how we treat others, how we spend our time, how disciplined we are at using our talents, etc.

- This “work” we do to bring us closer to Christ prepares us for Christ.

3. Reflect on present praxis
Have students think about this challenge:

- How do you feel about the idea that the harder we work, the greater the benefits will be?

- Think about physical training, such as in an athletic competition. Athletes train for competition; musicians practice before a performance; and students study for tests.

4. Access the Christian story and vision
Give students time to read pages 4–5 and 7–8.
Explain to students:

During the Bridegroom services, we hear stories and examples about faithful preparation, and also examples that show how sometimes people fail to prepare, including Christ’s cursing of the fig tree (p. 5), the story of Joseph (p. 5), the Parable of the Ten Virgins (p. 7), and the story of the repentant woman (p. 8).

5. Appropriately the story and vision

The following activity should take about ten minutes.

Let students know that when they are done, the class will regroup to contribute responses to a class chart.

Depending on how many students you have, divide students into pairs or in groups of 3. Assign each group one of the following Scriptural stories heard during the Bridegroom services. Each group should discuss the question that accompanies the reading and be ready to share with the whole class.

Alternative: Have all the students answer every question.

A. Genesis 50:15–21—Joseph forgives his brothers. Think of a time when someone hurt you and you had to forgive that person. What was it like to try to find a way to comfort and speak kindly to that person?

B. Matthew 21:18–19—Jesus curses the fig tree. Jesus is angry at the fig tree because it doesn't bear fruit. We can be like this sometimes, when we don't “bear fruit” by using our talents more fully or sharing what we have with others. What are some ways that you bear fruit in your life? How can you be more fruitful in your life?

C. Matthew 25:1–13—The Parable of the Ten Virgins. Five are prepared with oil for their lamps, and five are not. The bridegroom, or Christ, does not recognize those who are not prepared and does not permit them entry into the wedding feast. We keep “oil” in our lamps by doing works of mercy for others. What have you done in the past week to add “oil” to your lamp?

D. Luke 7:36–40; 47–50—The repentant woman anoints Jesus’s feet. The Pharisee’s sin was that when he looked at the woman,
he only saw her sinfulness. He didn’t see her as a full person who was turning toward Christ. Can you think of a time when you made a mistake like this, seeing someone only from the outside and seeing only his or her sinfulness? Can you think of a time when you made a change like the woman did and turned toward Christ?

6. Decision for lived response
On the blackboard, draw a 2-column chart. Fill in the left column as above. Place only the question at the top of the right column, leaving the rest of the column blank. Work through each example and ask the students to complete the right side to answer the question, “How will I do this?”

Help students to generate examples of realistic situations in which they will be challenged to follow the right example. Encourage them to be specific about what they will do in the situations that may arise in their lives.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of living a life that prepares to meet Christ</th>
<th>How will I do this?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Joseph forgave his brothers instead of being angry and vengeful toward them.</td>
<td>In teaching about forgiveness, it can be more helpful to think and talk about what a Christian does not do if he or she is hurt. Christians do not seek revenge, spread rumors to garner support or gain sympathy, nurture negative feelings, etc. The example of Joseph is acceptance and trust in God, in spite of his brothers’ mistreatment. We should emphasize that the main thing about forgiveness is choosing to love God instead of hating or resenting another person, even if that person has hurt us.</td>
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<td>B. Jesus curses the fig tree because it does not bear fruit.</td>
<td>Each student should share one specific and unique way that he or she can bear fruit. For example, how is each student talented, and what will he or she do to share that talent?</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. The oil in the lamps of the five prepared virgins symbolizes works of mercy that we are all called to do for others throughout our lives.</td>
<td>Help students to think about people around them who may need “works of mercy” from them. It may be a peer who is lonely, people who don’t have a lot of money and who could use donations, etc. Help students to decide specifically how they will do works of mercy for someone specific and real.</td>
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| D. The repentant woman changed her life and turned toward Christ, even though the Pharisee judged her. | This example can be approached from two angles:
1. Invite students to take the position of the Pharisee—is there someone they know whose life they are tempted to judge? This may include people who are seen as “sinful,” but the challenge is to see them as people made in God’s image and not to judge them. How can they treat these persons with love instead of judgment?
2. Invite students to relate to the repentant woman. Help them to consider and share things in their lives that they need to change in order to turn toward Christ. |

Closing Prayer
Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, deliver me from the spirit of laziness, meddling, vain ambition, and idle talk.
Grant to me, Your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience, and love.
Yes, Lord and King; grant me that I may see my own faults, and to not judge my brothers and sisters, for You are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.