

making the commitment. It may be a statement of intention, or a series of questions and answers. Some form of reaffirmation of the baptismal vows is always included.

This action follows the prayers [and confession of sin] and precedes the peace within the eucharistic rite. It begins with the act of commitment.

The blessing, the commendation and the pledge of support, and the final prayer are provided as models. They may be adapted for the particular circumstance, or other forms may be used as seems appropriate to the celebrant and to the individual making the commitment.

This form was prepared by the Rev. Bonnell Spencer of the Order of the Holy Cross.

## The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

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**I**n most societies, when persons approach marriage, a series of rites separates them from their peers (the unmarried men and women of the community), prepares them for marriage, and integrates them into the life, responsibilities, and customs of married couples in the community.

Among the Jews the rites of marriage involved a ceremony of betrothal, some time prior to the wedding, in which the father of the bride gave his consent to the union. The wedding itself was preceded by a procession of the bridegroom and friends to the bride's home. She was richly dressed, wearing a veil, which she would not remove until her entry into the bridal chamber. The ceremony included vows and a written contract ("covenant"), and a blessing over a cup of wine. During the ceremony the bride and groom stood under a canopy in the presence of at least ten witnesses (the "minyan," a minimum number necessary for a synagogue service). Following the ceremony the wedding company went in procession to the bridegroom's home while the witnesses sang love songs (see Psalm 45 and the Song of Songs); there was dancing and a feast that lasted from seven to fourteen days.

There is no hint concerning a Christian marriage rite in the New Testament, although it does provide teachings concerning the duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, and married couples within the community. Probably the rites of Judaism were followed with little modification since they were a part of ancient and familiar custom.

Among the pagan Romans wedding rites began with a betrothal at

the home of the bride, where a contract was signed before witnesses. The man gave a betrothal present, kissed the bride, and placed a ring on the fourth finger of her left hand as a symbol of possession. The hands of the two were joined. A banquet generally followed. Some time later, on the day of the wedding, the bride was arrayed in her wedding garments, which included a cincture (a symbol of virginity), a yellow dress, flame-colored veil, and floral crown. The bride and groom made a solemn declaration before witnesses after which the *pronuba* (representing Juno, goddess of marriage, domesticity, and childbearing) joined their hands. The couple offered a sacrifice at the family altar to propitiate the *lares*, and the *auspex nuptiarum* (priest of the marriage rites who would guarantee the auspiciousness of the rite) recited a prayer which the couple repeated as they processed around the altar. At some point a veil or pall was held over the couple. A banquet followed, lasting until nightfall when the bride was led to her new home, accompanied by virgins and young unmarried men singing wedding songs, and was carried over the threshold by her husband. They lit the hearthfire together and she was sprinkled with water, a symbol of fertility among other things. The *pronuba* prepared the marriage bed as the couple went through the rites of loosening the marriage cincture and praying to the gods of marriage. On the following day the bride received her new relatives and sacrificed to the gods of her new home.

Incidental references to marriage in the writings of the church fathers indicate that the rites were not radically different among early Christians, except for evidence of the consent and possibly the attendance of the bishop who participated in some marriages. Christian prayers and blessings were, of course, substituted for pagan ones, and a Eucharist replaced the pagan sacrifices.

When the liturgical books developed, lections, psalms, and prayers were provided for the Eucharist, with a special blessing before the communion of the newly married couple. Forms for blessing the newlyweds in bed were also provided. Some books contained propers for use at a daily office, and propers for a Eucharist after thirty days and at one year. Late in the middle ages marriage rites came completely under purview of the church and were considerably abbreviated. Banns were posted to advise the community of the coming marriage. The equivalent of the old civil marriage was held in the church porch immediately before the wedding, and the giving of blessed bread and wine often substituted for communion.

Many theologians, from the time of Clement of Alexandria and Augustine, had looked upon marriage as a concession to human

weakness; Luther considered it a vocation appropriate for Christian living. He greatly abbreviated the marriage rite, retained the publication of banns, and followed the custom of asking questions of betrothal in the church porch. These were followed by the verse "Those whom God hath joined together" and a proclamation of the marriage. These two elements were not in the English rites but did have medieval German precedents. The couple were then led to the altar for the reading of Genesis 2:18, 21-24, and an exhortation which consisted mainly of scriptural quotations followed by a prayer.

The rites of later German church orders were generally more elaborate; that of Hermann of Cologne required an examination of the couple and their parents as well as the publication of banns on three holy days before the wedding. The rite itself was performed within the Sunday service and began with an exhortation which included several scriptural quotations. There followed a silent prayer by the congregation, the betrothal questions, exchange of rings, proclamation of marriage, the singing of Psalms 127 and 128, and prayer. The German rites deleted the blessing of the ring. In the Reformed churches marriages were also conducted within the Sunday service, with banns published beforehand. Reformed tradition rejected the blessing or the giving of rings within the rite.

The 1549 Prayer Book drew its marriage rite from the Sarum and York traditions, the Consultation of Hermann and some other German church orders,<sup>1</sup> and the exposition of marriage from the *King's Book*. The rite was to be preceded by the publication of banns on three Sundays or holy days. The marriage took place in the church on Sunday after Morning Prayer and the Litany and before the Eucharist. An Exhortation lists three reasons for the institution of marriage: (1) the procreation of children; (2) "a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication"; and (3) "mutual society, help, and comfort." The couple is charged to declare any known impediment. The charge is followed by the betrothal, the giving of the bride, the vows, and the giving of the ring (not blessed). "Other tokens of spousage, as gold or silver," are also to be given. A prayer for grace to keep the vows and live according to God's law, a proclamation of the marriage, and a blessing follow. The priest and couple move to the altar during the saying or singing of Psalm 128 or 67, and the couple kneel for the Kyrie, the Lord's Prayer, preces, prayers for the gift of children and for graces necessary to marriage, and for the priestly blessing. A hom-

<sup>1</sup> Probably that of Brandenburg.

ily is provided for use if the sermon does not expound on the duties of husbands and wives according to the Scriptures. The couple is required to receive communion.

The 1552 revision made minor changes in prayers, omitted the requirement of other gifts along with the ring, and changed the form connected with the ring accordingly.

The 1662 revision no longer requires the couple to receive communion at their marriage but they are urged to do so either at that time or at the first opportunity thereafter. This was a concession to the Puritans who objected to having weddings on Sundays or at the Eucharist because of the festivities traditionally associated with weddings.

The American revision of 1789 deleted from the opening exhortation the "causes for which Matrimony was ordained," and eliminated the words "with my body I thee worship" from the form used with the giving of the ring. The procession to the holy table and all that followed were omitted, leaving an abridged rite which represented the old civil espousal, cut short before the sacramental reinforcement of the civil action.

The 1892 Book restored references to marriage as instituted by God, as signifying the union between Christ and His church, and as "adorned and beautified" by the miracle at Cana.

The 1928 revision eliminated the phrase "with all my worldly goods I thee endow," the use of Old Testament models for marriage, and the promise of the woman to "obey." It provided an optional form for blessing the ring, a prayer for children, and another prayer for the couple. Eucharistic propers were given.

The present revision again sets marriage within the context of the liturgy of word and sacrament. In place of one set of propers, a choice of psalms and scriptural readings from the Old and New Testaments is listed within the rite. The "giving away of the bride" is optional as is a new form for the presentation of both bride and groom. The congregation is asked to uphold this couple in their marriage.

A form is provided for the blessing of a civil marriage (pp. 433-434), based on the one first included in the 1949 Book of Offices.<sup>1</sup> An order for marriage (pp. 435-436), analogous to the orders for the Eucharist and for burial (pp. 400-401 and 506), lists elements which are to be included in any alternative or newly composed rite.

<sup>1</sup> Compiled by the Liturgical Commission, commended for use by General Convention; second edition, New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1949.

### *Concerning the Service* (p. 422)

#### *The Church's Requirements for a Christian Marriage*

The first paragraph defines Christian marriage: "a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God." It then states the canonical requirements for a marriage in the Episcopal Church: at least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian; there must be at least two witnesses; and the marriage must conform to the laws of the state and the canons of the church.

#### *The Various Liturgical Ministers*

A bishop or priest normally presides, for only a bishop or priest can pronounce the nuptial blessing and celebrate the Eucharist. A bishop, when present, should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist. A deacon or assisting priest may deliver the charge (p. 424), ask for the declaration of consent (p. 424), read the Gospel, and perform the usual assisting functions at the Eucharist. If no bishop or priest is available, and if it is permitted by civil law, a deacon may perform a marriage, but must omit the nuptial blessing which follows the prayers. As at a Eucharist, it is desirable for the Old Testament lesson and the Epistle to be read by lay persons.

#### *The Use of Names*

In the opening exhortation, at the symbol *N.N.* (p. 424), the full names of the man and woman to be married are declared. At other places in the rite, where the symbol *N.* occurs, only the Christian names are used (pp. 424, 427, and 428).

### **The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage** (pp. 425-434)

The title, which is new to this revision, replaces the earlier Prayer Book title, "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony."

The first rubric designates that a marriage is to be celebrated in the church or some other appropriate place. Marriages in the medieval period were performed on the porch of the church and the couple entered afterward for the blessing of the marriage and the Eucharist. The 1549 Prayer Book prescribed that the marriage be "in the body of the church." The first American Book (1789), perhaps because of pioneer conditions, added permission for the marriage to be performed "in some proper house." English Prayer Books assumed that the marriage would be celebrated within the context of a Sunday service, after Morning Prayer and Litany and prior to the Eucharist.

The 1892 revision allowed the use of a hymn before any service in the Book. The 1979 Book allows the use of a hymn, psalm, anthem, or instrumental music during the entrance of the wedding party.

The direction that the woman stand to the right and the man to the left, as they face the celebrant, has been part of the service since 1662. It is from the Sarum rite which explains "the reason being that she was formed out of a rib in the left side of Adam."

### *The Exhortation* (pp. 423–424)

This exhortation goes back to the 1549 Prayer Book where the form included quotations from the exhortation of the Sarum rite, from the Cologne *Encheiridion*, from Luther's marriage rite (picked up by many of the German church orders), and from the *King's Book*. The 1549 form reads:

Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all men; and therefore is not to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding: but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained. One cause was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as be married might live chastely in matrimony, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Into the which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined so together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

In the first American Book the section on the causes for which marriage was ordained was deleted from the exhortation. In 1949, however, a canon (Title I, Canon 17, Section 3) was passed which re-

quired a couple to sign a declaration of intention which included a modified form of this section in which the causes are rephrased and listed in a different order. (The assertion that procreation was the first cause for which marriage was instituted was objected to as far back as Bucer's *Censura* of 1551, in which he maintained, on the basis of Genesis 2:18, that the primary cause was mutual society, help, and comfort.) The 1949 declaration reads:

We believe it [marriage] is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, for the safeguarding and benefit of society.

The present Book updates the language of the exhortation and restores to it some of the content of the declaration of intention.

### *The Charge* (p. 424)

The charge is an abbreviated form of that in earlier Prayer Books, which was dependent upon the charge in the York marriage rite. The 1549 form reads:

I require and charge you, as you will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you do know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, that ye confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as be coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow are not joined of God, neither is their matrimony lawful.

The last sentence has been dropped in the present revision because it refers to English civil law, not to canon law or church tradition.

### *The Declaration of Consent* (p. 424)

The declarations of consent are a contemporary form of the man's pledge to the woman in the 1549 Prayer Book. It was formed by combining those of the Sarum rite and Luther's marriage rite. The 1549 form reads:

N., Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other keep thee only to her, so long as you both shall live?

Until the 1928 revision the second question asked of the wife had read, "Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health?" In the present Prayer Book, in contrast to previous editions, the question is asked first of the woman and then of the man. These promises are equivalent to a final ratification of the engagement. Originally they were made at some time prior to the marriage. They publicly acknowledge that the choice is a matter of free consent rather than of constraint.

#### *The Pledge of Support* (p. 425)

A new part of this revision is the congregational pledge to "uphold these two persons in their marriage." The role of family, friends, and the community, which is often crucial in sustaining or breaking a marriage, is openly recognized by this question.

#### *The Presentation or Giving in Marriage* (pp. 425 and 437)

The Sarum rite included a giving of the bride in marriage by the father or a friend, but no text was associated with this action. In the York rite, however, was a question "Who gives me this wife?" The 1549 form reads "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" The form is a survival from a period when women were thought of as property. This revision makes the form optional. The forms provided (p. 437) also allow the substitution of "presents" for "gives" and provide for the presentation of the man to the woman as well as the woman to the man.

#### *A Hymn, Psalm, or Anthem* (p. 425)

Vocal music may be used to separate the opening section from the ministry of the word which follows. One possibility is the Gloria in excelsis or some other song of praise. This is an appropriate time for members of the wedding party to move to seats in the nave or chancel for the ministry of the word.

#### *The Ministry of the Word* (pp. 425-426)

The collect, drafted by the Rev. Dr. Charles M. Guilbert, preserves the main themes of the first prayer of the marriage rite in the 1549 Prayer Book, which was based upon the Sarum form for the blessing of the ring. The 1549 version reads:

O Etemal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name, that as Isaac and Rebecca (after bracelets and jewels of gold given of one to the other for tokens of their matrimony) lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, whereof this ring given, and received, is a token and pledge, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The 1552 revision deleted the phrase in parentheses; the 1928 revision the reference to Isaac and Rebecca.

Earlier editions of the Prayer Book had assumed that marriages would take place within the principal Sunday liturgy. When that custom fell into disuse it left a marriage rite devoid of the reading and exposition of scripture. The 1928 Book provided a Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for use at a nuptial Eucharist. This revision provides a full liturgy of the word with Old Testament lesson, psalmody, Epistle, Gospel, and homily. Prayer Books before 1789 had included a homily, partially based on that in the Consultation of Hermann, which was to be read if the sermon did not declare "the office of man and wife . . . according to holy scripture." The Apostles' Creed may be said at the conclusion of the readings (and homily) (see p. 437). The baptismal creed rather than the Nicene is especially suitable at such a time of commitment; furthermore it is more likely to be familiar to non-Episcopalians at the wedding than is the Nicene.

#### *The Marriage* (pp. 427-428)

The sacramental sign of marriage is the joining of hands, a custom practiced by the Jews (Tobit 7:13), by the Greeks, and by the Romans. The form is a contemporary version of that in earlier Prayer Books which was based on the Sarum form. In the 1549 Book the words for the man are: "I, N., take thee, N., to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us depart, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth." The woman's vow, until 1928, included a promise to "obey." Whereas the man was called upon to "plight" his troth, the woman was required to "give" hers. In the Sarum form the

woman promised to be gentle and obedient in the bed and at the table.

### *The Blessing of the Ring or Rings* (p. 427)

Because of the reformers' distaste for the blessing of material objects, the 1549 Book omitted any blessing of the ring. An optional form, based on that in the Sarum rite, was provided in 1928: "Bless, O Lord, this Ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy favour, unto their life's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." In this revision a new form has been provided which explains the significance of the wedding ring.

### *The Giving of the Ring or Rings* (p. 427)

It was an ancient Roman custom for the man to give a ring to the woman as a sign of betrothal; by the ninth century this action was duplicated in the giving of a ring at the time of marriage. The growing custom of the woman's also giving a ring to the man is recognized in the rubric in the 1979 Book. The 1549 form associated with the giving of the ring, based on the Sarum form, reads: "With this ring I thee wed; this gold and silver I thee give; with my body I thee worship; and with all my worldly goods I thee endow, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." In the 1552 revision the phrase "this gold and silver I thee give" was dropped. The 1789 revision eliminated "with my body I thee worship," and the 1928 Book omitted "and with all my worldly goods I thee endow." The fuller form in the present Book carries an echo of the original form. The alternative ending, "in the Name of God," may be used when the Trinitarian formula might become an imposition upon a non-Episcopalian who does not subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity. A new provision (p. 437) allows the substitution of some other suitable symbol, such as the mangalasutra in Indian cultures, for the wedding ring.

### *The Declaration of Marriage* (p. 428)

A declaration of the marriage with a joining of hands was part of the German rites late in the middle ages which Luther included in his rites and the German church orders also retained. From these it came into the 1549 Prayer Book. The present revision modernizes the

wording, and the scriptural sentence (Mt. 19:6) has been moved to follow rather than precede the declaration. The 1549 form reads:

Forasmuch as N. and N. have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same here before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving gold and silver, and by joining of hands, I pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In the 1979 Book the Amen is said by the congregation.

### *The Prayers* (pp. 428-430)

The Lord's Prayer is printed for use immediately after the declaration of marriage if communion is not to follow.

As at other Eucharists the prayers are to be read by a deacon or by some other person appointed rather than by the celebrant.

The prayers, drafted by the Very Rev. Robert H. Greenfield, begin with a preamble based on that of the first prayer at a marriage in earlier Prayer Books, originally from the Sarum rite. The next two paragraphs have as their source a prayer for parents by Bishop Angus Dun (p. 444). The supplication that the couple may acknowledge their faults and seek forgiveness is new. The next paragraph is based on a prayer in Services for Trial Use (1970, p. 316) which was drafted by Virginia Harbour (Mrs. Richard L.). The optional petition for children is based upon a prayer which entered the American Book in 1928 from the Scottish revision of 1912. The remainder of the prayer is based on the intercession in Services for Trial Use (pp. 319-320), also drafted by Ms. Harbour.

### *The Blessing of the Marriage* (pp. 430-431)

The first prayer, drafted by the Rev. Dr. H. Boone Porter, sets Christian marriage within the context of the incarnation and the cross. The imagery is from the marriage rite: the ring is a seal; the festal clothing normally associated with a wedding, the mantle; and the crowns, still associated with a wedding in the Eastern churches (of which we have a remnant in the wedding veil), the crown. The reference to the heavenly banquet anticipates the conclusion of the service in the Eucharist.

The second prayer is a slightly revised form of one which was first used in the 1928 Book. It was based in part on a prayer in the English Books which the 1789 American Book had omitted. In the 1549 version the prayer, derived from the sacramental blessing in the Sarum rite, read:

O God, which by thy mighty power hast made all things of naught, which also after other things set in order didst appoint that out of man, created after thine own image and similitude, woman should take her beginning, and knitting them together, didst teach that it should never be lawful to put asunder those whom thou by matrimony hadst made one: O God, which hast consecrated the state of matrimony to such an excellent mystery that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his church: look mercifully upon these thy servants, that both this man may love his wife according to thy word, as Christ did love his spouse the church, who gave himself for it, loving and cherishing it even as his own flesh; and also that this woman may be loving and amiable to her husband as Rachel, wise as Rebecca, faithful and obedient as Sara, and in all quietness, sobriety, and peace be a follower of holy and godly matrons. O Lord, bless them both, and grant them to inherit thy everlasting kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is worth noting that in this revision, in the preamble, the phrase "the covenant of marriage" has been substituted for "the state of matrimony." The word "state" connoted an idea of "natural law" in medieval theology, but has in modern use a secular connotation and no theological implications.

#### *The Blessing* (p. 433)

This form dates to the 1552 Prayer Book. The 1549 form, derived from Sarum, began "God the Father bless you. † God the Son keep you. God the Holy Ghost lighten your understanding," and ended "that you may have remission of your sins in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting." In the English Books this concluded the portion of the rite conducted in the nave of the church and preceded the movement into the chancel for additional prayers and a blessing and the Eucharist.

#### *The Peace* (p. 431)

The peace may be exchanged between the newly married couple and throughout the congregation. The custom of kissing the bride is a

survival of the medieval kiss of peace. It is appropriate for the couple to kiss at this time.

If Eucharist is not to follow, the wedding party leaves the church.

#### *At the Eucharist* (p. 432)

The Eucharist continues with the offertory, at which the newly married couple may present the offerings of bread and wine and receive the Sacrament before other members of the congregation (see p. 438). A proper preface is provided for use at a marriage (pp. 349 and 381). A proper postcommunion prayer, drafted by the Rev. Dr. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., is also provided.

#### *The Blessing of a Civil Marriage* (pp. 433–434)

The Book of Offices<sup>1</sup> contained a form for "The Blessing of Married Persons," which was designed for the blessing of civil marriages. It was adapted from the marriage rite of the 1928 Prayer Book. This is the first Prayer Book to include such a rite among the pastoral offices.

The rubric prescribes that the service begin as at a celebration of the Eucharist, since the initial portion of the marriage rite is not appropriate for blessing a marriage which has already taken place. The collect and lessons of the marriage rite are to be used, however.

The address of the celebrant is based on that in the Book of Offices. The promises are those of the declaration of consent (p. 424) and the question asked of the congregation closely approximates that asked in the regular form (p. 425). The blessing of the ring(s) is also the usual form (p. 427), followed by the sentence which comes after the declaration of marriage (p. 428). From this point the rite proceeds in a regular manner beginning with the prayers (p. 428).

#### *An Order for Marriage* (pp. 435–436)

This order, new to this edition of the Prayer Book, allows use of the rite of another edition of the Book of Common Prayer, a rite from some other source, or a rite composed for the occasion, so long as certain conditions are met. It is analogous to the orders for Eucharist and for Burial (pp. 400–401 and 506). The elements listed are those considered essential by this Church for a Christian rite of marriage: a brief statement of the Church's teaching concerning marriage; an

<sup>1</sup> Compiled by the Liturgical Commission and commended for use by the General Convention; second edition, New York: Church Pension Fund, 1949.

assurance of the intention of the couple to enter into marriage, and of their free consent; an exchange of vows using either the form of this edition or of the 1928 Prayer Book; a declaration of the marriage; intercessions; the blessing of the marriage; the peace. The use of one or more readings from Holy Scripture is normative, as is the celebration of the Eucharist.

#### Additional Directions (pp. 437-438)

Following the Sarum custom, the English Prayer Books required that the banns of marriage be published three Sundays or holy days before the marriage was to take place. The marriage license originated as an ecclesiastical dispensation from the publication of the banns. The form to be used became part of the Prayer Book in 1662. Prior American Books preceded the form with a rubric, "The Laws respecting Matrimony, whether by publishing the Banns in Churches, or by Licence, being different in the several States; every Minister is left to the direction of those Laws, in every thing that regards the civil contract between the parties." The language of the form is updated in the 1979 Book.

Commentary on other additional directions has been included at suitable points within the commentary on the rite itself.

(See *The Book of Occasional Services*, pp. 144-146, for a rite for the Anniversary of a Marriage.)

## A Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child

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In most societies an expectant mother, at some point, is formally relieved of certain family and community responsibilities. After the birth of the child (whether the child lives or dies), she joins again the full life of the community, resuming her normal responsibilities within the family or (if it is a first child and it lives) assuming a different place within the life of the community from that which she formerly held.

After childbirth a Jewish woman was considered ritually unclean (relieved from certain responsibilities) for forty days after the birth of a male or eighty days after the birth of a female. Leviticus 12 prescribes both the number of days and the burnt offering and sin offering which were to be made at the conclusion of the period of uncleanness.

The early days of Christianity provide no evidence for a continued practice of ritual purification or any significance attached to ceremonies associated with the birth of a child into a family, though such rites may have continued with appropriate modifications and reinterpretations. The Canons of Hippolytus (fourth century) assign to a place among the catechumens women who have not undergone a rite of purification after childbirth. The seventeenth Constitution of Leo (c. 460) forbids women to receive communion for forty days after the birth of a child, but acknowledges that in a case of necessity she may receive without sin. In a letter to Pope Gregory, contained in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Augustine of Canterbury asks how long a woman should stay away from church after childbirth. Gregory replies that the time is a "mystery" rather than a strict legal require-