

**Matthew 22 1-14 – Sermon for Eucharist and Baptism
Preached at 8am and 6pm on Sunday 15th October 2017**

There was a young boy who was looking forward to going to school. He had his school uniform. He liked wearing smart clothes; he had ever since he was just eighteen months old and has been taken to a family wedding. He understood that sometimes you wear certain clothes to go to certain events.

The family went to the stationery shop and bought him a pencil case and in it he had pencils, a rubber in the shape of a space rocket and a short ruler. He had a pair of black plimsolls to wear for PE. And his Mother had made him a bag to put them in. His new lunch box has a picture of Thomas the Tank engine on it

The letter had come from the local education authority some months before inviting him to start school and on the calendar was a large red circle drawn around the important date.

This young man was so excited. On the morning of his first day, he was up early and dressed before his Mother had chance to get his breakfast. They walked to school with him wearing his new stuff and carrying his new things. The teacher was waiting at the school gate and greeted him by name. As she did with all the other children arriving.

At 3 o'clock his Mother collected him and he chattered all the way home about the day he'd had and how wonderful it had been and how nice the other children were and he was a very happy child.

That evening he went through it all over again telling his Dad all about his day. Bedtime came and all was well until his Mother said to him...time for bed, you need to get some sleep ready for tomorrow.

He turned and said to his Mum. Why, what's happening tomorrow? She said...you will be going to school again. Oh, he said. I've done that. I've been to school. Why do I need to go again tomorrow?

I wonder what that little boy was thinking when he saw his Mum doing all those things getting ready for his first day at school. All that time, money, energy going into the preparations. Did he really think it was all just for one day? Perhaps it didn't cross his mind.

I suppose it isn't unheard of for people to spend a lot of money just for one day. Especially for big celebrations. A classic example may be the very large and lavish wedding celebrations that are sometimes shown on TV. Thousands of pounds and many weeks and months of work just to get ready for one day.

But of course after a wedding comes the marriage. The wedding celebration is just the start of their lives together. The first day of a new way of living and being.

And after the first day at school comes the years of education that a child receives. Going back to school day after day and gradually changing. Slowly learning. Being transformed into the person they become.

How on earth can a small child think that the first day at school is the only one they need to attend? How can a married couple think that after their wedding day they will know everything they need to know to live together well?

And in a way it is the same for those who come for Baptism. There is a service in church with people coming along in their best clothes, a party maybe and certainly a joyous celebration, one that the family have been looking forward to and planning for.

Whether it is our education, in our relationships, or in our faith, the first day may be the big event but it is just the start of something to come. Just like the wedding banquet in our reading today, we may come to the celebration in response to an invitation specifically to us with our name on it, or we come as one of many who are invited to a wider group - the family, the friends, the general public, the worshipping community, the good the bad and the ordinary.

However, when we receive that invitation, what really matters is that we accept it and we come and join in the wonderful celebrations, and in coming to the celebration, whether in the church building or over the internet or on our television screen, we understand that after that day we will never be the same again.

Our first day is just the first step in the Christian journey of faith. For many people joining with us today this act of worship is another step in their journey. For some it will be the first. Whether it is our first, our second, or we have lost count, we are making those small steps and we are making them with the help of those around us and with the help of God.

We keep all taking those small steps of faith and slowly we will be transformed, shaped, changed, as we grow in our understanding and our faith and in our relationships with those around us.

And of course, when we accept our invitation, we may have no idea who else has been invited too and who will receive an invitation in the future. We have no idea who we might end up meeting along the way, who we might be encouraged by or who we might encourage, who we might find ourselves laughing with, sharing our stories with, sharing a meal with. That is all part of the journey we are on, with people who, like us, have been invited to the heavenly banquet by the King of kings. Amen