

THE CLOTHING OF THE KING ADVENT SERMON SERIES
ROBED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has
covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom
decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a
bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

Isaiah 61:10

Today we are going to focus on an exchange that happens. And we all know that this time of year, the word “exchange” conjures up in our minds images of the stores *after* Christmas.

Friends, Christmas Eve is 2 short weeks from today, which means that in 2 weeks and 2 days it will be the day *after* Christmas and the stores will be packed with shoppers trying to return a size large for a size extra-large. Some of us will stand in line for hours trying to take cousin Linda’s gift back in return for store credit that we will never use.

There is an exchange that happens at Christmas. This exchange is so much greater than the annual exchange of gifts between you and your family. This exchange is between God and man. In this exchange Jesus gave up all that is rightly His – His heavenly position, His authority and rule, His almighty strength. And instead, Jesus took on our flesh. God became incarnate. He became wrapped in skin and blood, flesh and bone and took on human form.

More than just taking on our flesh—as if that wasn’t enough—in the birth of Jesus Christ, God takes on our position, our station, our very place in the created world. And what is that position and posture? It’s one of weakness, of vulnerability, of exposure to the elements of a sin-infected and violent world.

At Christmas, God became robed in flesh; He is born naked and small. God became exposed to the elements, given over to

everything from a cold wind whipping through the Bethlehem air to the hurt and heartache that comes with living close to you and me. We, like all sinful people, are the utterly depraved.

Let's not forget, though, that this is an exchange. An exchange takes at least 2 people. God isn't the only one gaining new garments and a different address. Someone else is trading with Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah, who spoke for God some 700 years before Jesus' birth, foretold of the "year of the Lord's favor." It would be a time when God's servant, the Messiah, would arrive and bring good news and everlasting joy to the world.

We heard in this morning's Gospel reading that when Jesus was some 30 years old and launching his public ministry, He went into a Synagogue to teach. Jesus quoted this very section of Isaiah. He opened the scroll, found the 61st chapter and read, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"*** (Isaiah 61:2; Luke 4:18-19). Then Jesus sat down and said, in a way that feels every bit like a mic-drop moment, ***"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"*** (Luke 4:21). Jesus couldn't have been any clearer. He is the one foretold by Isaiah, the one bringing God's greatest blessings to mankind.

And here comes this great exchange.

The prophet Isaiah goes into beautiful detail about what the "year of the Lord's favor" means for those who receive the Messiah. In verse 10 he writes, ***"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness..."*** (Isaiah 61:10).

Are you grasping it? I hope so, because this is at the very heart, the very core of what Christmas is really about. This exchange is what makes Christmas so incredible.

Isaiah is telling us that when the Messiah arrives, He brings with Him the good news of God's extravagant blessing, AND a whole new wardrobe – for you. Anybody who receives Him, who is connected to Him in belief and baptism, will be wrapped in salvation – saved, given heaven. And–this is the best part!–robed in righteousness. Anybody who belongs to the Messiah through faith will be covered in a rightness, a goodness, an innocence that we have not earned. Robes cover from head to toe. And so, anyone who receives Jesus will be so completely covered, that when God looks at them He will no longer see any of their evil deeds, any of their terrible choices, or any of the countless times when they've rejected God or failed Him. He will see none of it. He will only see goodness. Talk about looking your best!

This clothing exchange begins at Christmas.

At Christmas Jesus is born. He comes down from heaven to become a real baby. God takes on your humanity, your flesh and blood, along with your heartache, hardship, and even your death. Unlike any of us, He will be faithful while you have been faithless. He will reject every expression of sin and live perfectly in your place. He will confront death and wring out every ounce of God's wrath, taking it all with His own flesh and blood on the cross. And Jesus will rise out of his tomb declaring that your tomb has been totaled and that death has been de-fanged. All this is free, by sheer grace, for all, and it is received simply by faith. When the Christ Child was born of Mary and laid in Bethlehem's manger, He came to take your place, plod the life-path of your plight, and set you free. And when it's all said and done, He would wrap you in salvation and goodness that you did not earn. He took what rightly

belongs to Him, and He graciously bestowed it upon you. And the only thing that will be left for you to do is, just marvel at your new wardrobe, and give God thanks. It indeed would be the year of the Lord's favor. That's what Christ's incarnation, God becoming human, means. Christmas is a big, big deal!

When I was preparing this sermon I thought that if I were to embarrass anyone, it would be me.



Yes, these are all pictures of yours truly. On the left, those are my 1960's hanging out clothes. "cool, Dadio" – don't you think?

But when we went to church we wore different clothes. That's me and my 2 older brothers with my Dad on a Sunday. Sport coats, white shirts, and ties were standard uniform for all males, no matter how small. And then on the right – we dress differently for parties, don't we? This was a Halloween costume party, right here at church, this Fall.

Don't we try to dress for the occasion. We wear different clothes to work, than we would wear to a wedding, for example. This becomes real clear when you ladies pack for going on a trip. It takes days, maybe weeks. Because you pick clothes by "outfits." There's an airport outfit, and a beach outfit, and a sight-seeing outfit, and a dinner outfit. And once you pick the outfits, then there is another layer of coordinating jewelry for each outfit, and yet another layer of shoes. For guys, on the other hand, as long as the shirt passes the sniff test, we're good.

Dressing for the occasion was very important long ago, when people went to worship God.

Deep in the Old Testament, long before the birth of Jesus, before the prophecies of Isaiah, Moses was given instructions for how priests were to dress when worshipping God. God had Moses construct the tabernacle. The tabernacle, at that time, was the place of God's promised presence. This was where God would dwell with His people. It was a tent—yes, a tent—carried around by the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. Detailed instructions were given for each aspect of the tent and we are told that the garments of the priests were to be made from the same materials as the tabernacle itself. The priests were, in some sense, the embodied presence of God.

Sewn into the priestly garments—onto the breastplate to be exact—were twelve different precious stones, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel, with the names of the tribes inscribed on them. The purpose for this was beautiful and personal. God said, ***“Whenever Aaron [who was Moses’ brother and the one chosen to be the High priest] enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breast piece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord”*** *Exodus 28:29.*

Think about that: each time the priest entered the tabernacle and served in God's presence the names of God's people would be on the priest's heart and before God's eyes etched in beautiful stone.

OK, I need you to track with me here. The Bible tells us [in today's New Testament reading] that Jesus Christ is the greatest of the great high priests --, greater than Aaron and even greater than Moses (*Hebrews 4:14*). And in His birth we have God, once again, dwelling with man. God is with His people, but in a new

and fuller way – God has actually *become* a human being, He actually experiences what we go through.

So, Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of the tabernacle – He is God with His people. AND Jesus Christ is the ultimate priest – He represents you and me and all humanity before God. Jesus offers the sacrifice to pay for all people’s sin – that sacrifice isn’t an animal, but His own body and blood that He offered up on the cross.

In Jesus, however, there is something different from the priests of old. This time the clothes of the “priest” are different. Instead of than wearing fine linen and exquisite jewels, this high priest is wearing flesh and blood, skin and bone.

And that’s because *this* tabernacle and *this* great high priest has come not to adorn *Himself* in jewels, but [get this, this is important] Jesus came to be your priest, making you the jewels.

While Aaron stood before the Father with the names of God’s people written beautifully over his heart, Jesus will give us His heart, experience what we experience, know what we go through, and love us. He will show us God’s heart. The Father is not an angry tyrant, but a loving Father who would even give up His Son for you. And Jesus will live, die, and rise so that we can stand before the Father—bearing the name “forgiven,” bearing the title “Child of God.” You, anyone who trusts in Jesus, are made to be like diamonds and as rubies, as sapphires shining with a holiness we haven’t earned, but is given to us, put on us by Christ. You shine with a holiness you desperately need, but Jesus did it for you and gives you a sparkling image in God’s eyes. Yes, even you. You are a jewel shining in the light of Christ’s holiness.

It's just 2 weeks to Christmas Eve. The festivities, the family gatherings, the gift exchange will go by fast. Then will come December 26th and the gift exchanges at the stores will begin. The meaning of Christmas is not centered in the festivities you've got planned and the new pajamas that await you. Christmas is the most amazing of nights—because we watch and wait for an incredible exchange. God himself takes our place and is robed in our flesh. He takes our sin on Himself and carries it to die in His death on the cross. He comes be our tabernacle – He is God with us. And He is the greatest of priests. And in exchange we receive—you receive—the greatest gift of all, incredible, invaluable, and beautiful garments of grace.

No matter who you are, what you've done, what sins you've committed, no matter what doubts you carry, or issues you have, this Jesus has come for you. And the exchange He makes is for you. Wear what He offers with joy. And know that from now on, in the eyes of God the Father, you look amazing! Amen.