

THE CLOTHING OF THE KING ADVENT SERMON SERIES  
**WRAPPED UP WITH LOVE**

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-7*

These past Sundays leading us towards Christmas we have been talking about clothes. In the Christmas story itself there is a detail mentioned about newborn Baby Jesus' wardrobe. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths.

There's a learning curve to swaddling a baby. Sure, some people may come about it naturally, but ask any parent and they'll tell you that for most people, learning how to wrap that baby tight like a burrito takes some practice. For us who need a tutorial, take a look at the screen. *[video shown giving instructions on how to swaddle a baby]*

When Mary gave birth to Jesus she didn't have her mother or an aunt near. Mary was on her own – a young, first-time mother. So, we don't know if it took Mary one, two, or twelve tries to get wrapping up her baby right. Mary also didn't have the advantage of watching a YouTube video to speed the process along. She simply had to figure it out.

And Mary would need to figure it out. Swaddling a baby is important. It is not only an act of a parent caring for her infant. Swaddling a baby is critical to providing a newborn with warmth and

security. An infant needs to feel both warmth and security in order for that brand new baby to fall asleep. And as every parent of a newborn has experienced, there is only so much crying that you can take. When a baby – especially a newborn – keeps crying, it doesn't take long before panic sets in. The parents start to worry, "What's wrong?" "Is Junior hungry, or hurt, or wet?" "Am I a bad parent? Yes, I must be the worst parent ever because I can't comfort my baby." Soon the mind gets crazy ideas like that. It happens when you're tired and you can't get a crying baby to sleep. And can you imagine the added pressure Mary felt knowing that this baby is God. This little one is the long-awaited Savior. She better not mess *this* up! She could be in *really BIIIG* trouble! Yes, even Mary likely wanted Jesus, to be quiet and to take a nap that first Christmas.

Traditionally, newborns would be washed with water, rubbed with salt and olive oil, and then multiple strips of fabric— torn from old clothes and household items—would be wrapped tightly around the child, securing their tiny arms to their side and their legs together and serving to shield them from the cold. But they were wrapped in more than mere strips of cloth. Each newborn was wrapped up in love. Every mother desires to ensure that her little treasure is safe, sound, and snug as a bug.

The swaddling cloths that wrapped our Savior are a small but important detail. It is Jesus' first outfit after all. More than that, these swaddling clothes are a picture of what this child, once grown, will provide for us all.

We'll start with the warmth. The warmth we are talking about here is not degrees on a thermometer. It's the warmth we need because this world is a cold place. Life is stuffed with broken promises, tension-filled relationships, gut-wrenching rejections, and terrible misunderstandings. These can leave you feeling like an outsider. These leave you feeling alone and caught in the cold, if you will. Perhaps you've felt the cold this holiday season. This is a time of year when relationships are front and center. Yet this

season is packed with opportunity for loneliness, and grief to be felt in full force.

And yet born in Jesus this Christmas is the promise that you will never be stuck out in the cold when it comes to your Creator.

Yes, our sins and struggles earn us an outsider status, a rightful rejection when compared to the beauty of our God and the standard for life and love that he's given to us and desires from us. But this baby has been born to bring just such outsiders back into the fold and family of God. This child will grow to live the life of love that we should live but fail to, and, by faith in him alone, his perfect fidelity to the will of God will be credited to us to enjoy as our own. Clothed, swaddled if you will, in his perfection we also enjoy his status. We are welcomed into God's grace, God's pleasure, and God's family as a son, as a daughter.

You may be "on the outs" with any number of people in this cold world. You may have outsider status in all kinds of clubs and groups. But through this Child, through Jesus Christ, God has made the way for you to be brought inside – in to the warmth of belonging forever in His love and grace.

God promises you in the Bible: ***"Now through Christ Jesus you, who were once far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13***

"Brought NEAR by the blood of Christ." Through Jesus' redeeming work – through Jesus' living the perfect life for you – He lived the life we DON'T and CAN'T live. He lived a perfect, sinless, God-pleasing life that we never achieve because of our constant sin and selfishness.

Through Jesus' death on the cross – He stepped in for me and for you to take the punishment we deserve for our wrongs.

Through Jesus, the Christmas Child, God has opened the way for repentant people – people who admit to and are sorry for and turn away from their wrongs –for us – for YOU -- to become a member of His family, His eternal family. And once you're adopted into God's family by trusting in the gift of Jesus Christ, you will

BELONG to God throughout this life and on through eternity. And friends, nothing and no one will ever be able to break the bonds of this love.

God promises: ***“You have been purified from sin; you have been dedicated to God; you have been put right with God by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** 1 Corinthians 6:11

Many of us know what it means to belong to God in a permanent way. In your baptism God promised that He chose you. He has loved you. That event gives you the confidence that God applied to you the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross. God made you His. He has brought you into the warmth of His loving you. It's all because of what Jesus, the One whose birth we celebrate did in His living, dying on a cross, and rising again to life.

This relationship that God wants to bring you – and ALL people – into, is like a warm father-son, father-daughter kind of relationship. ***“See how much the Father has loved us! [–Scripture tells us –] His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact, we are.”*** 1 John 3:1 Of course, you can always refuse this incredible invitation – and many people do – but who, after giving serious consideration to this invitation from God – would want to refuse it? Through the Christmas Child, God made a way for you to belong permanently in the warmth of His love.

One status is strong and secure. You reside in the warmth of God's love. He cherishes you. He celebrates you. Just like Mary did with the infant Jesus, just like parents and grandparents do with an infant in their arms, so also God dotes on and smiles at the very thought of you. And one day, at the return of Christ, the acceptance you have with God will shine brighter than any rejection you've experienced and any coldness that exists between you and others.

Now that Sue and I are grandparents, we have had our share of dealing with child car seats. Have you tried to figure out how to buckle those things into cars? Each seat is complicated in a new and different way! You need a PhD in physics to figure out which strap goes to which hook behind or under or down in the crack in the

car. Its so much different than 30 years ago when we had kids' car seats of our own.

Parents these days are very concerned about safety and security for their children. And rightly so! The world is a scary and violent place. There is a need to be sure that everyone – especially our little ones – are secure.

Mary wrapped up her infant, Jesus, just as parents have for centuries, to help him feel secure. Swaddling a baby gives a sense of safety and security. If an infant's arms and legs are left flailing about they can feel vulnerable. They shake and shiver as though they're falling. There's also the fact that they're prone to cuts and scrapes from their tiny yet surprisingly sharp little finger nails. But wrapped tight, they feel – and they really are – safe.

At Christmastime, your family may have family traditions you do every year. The traditions, the predictability provides a sense of stability, helping us feel secure.

You remember some of your Christmas rituals. Maybe you were a real-tree family, or maybe you were fake-tree people. Maybe you opened your presents on Christmas Eve -- or you opened them on Christmas morning *like you should*. Maybe your big Christmas dinner happened on Christmas Eve -- or on Christmas Day *like it ought to*.

Seriously, Christmas is full of those and many, many other traditions. Family rituals were a whole lot more important than you realized as a child, because they gave you an underlying sense of security.

High on God's list of priorities is his desire to make his adopted children feel secure. He knows how important that is for us to feel secure in uncertain times. So, He says, **"I will never leave you or forsake you"** *Joshua 1:5*. I will never abandon you or make you feel like an orphan.

God also promises you **"Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you will honor me."** *Psalms 50:15* These promises of God – trusting that God will always make good on His Word – faith,

trusting in these promises -- helps in the deepest valleys in life. These promises help you know you ARE secure in the times of personal tragedy and heartbreak. By trusting that God always keeps His promises, you can feel the sustaining presence of God in such a powerful way that somehow, while our worlds are falling apart, we know a deep and wonderful sense of security.

Some of us have stood by hospital beds or at gravesides this past year. Some of us have received devastating medical reports or pink slips at work at the wrong time, and while our worlds were crumbling around us, we know and trust God's certain promise that somehow, someday, He is going to put us back on solid ground where we could eventually feel stable and secure again.

And through faith in this child, through a relationship of dependence upon who this baby is and all that he will do, his victory over this dangerous world becomes our victory. Yes, it may at times feel as though we are flailing and falling. We will receive cuts and bruises, scratches and scrapes, but there will be no fatal blows for those who belong to Jesus Christ. We will be wrapped, swaddled in security.

There is nothing more loving, more sweet, than the love of a mother toward her newborn child. Her eyes fixed on him. Her arms, hesitant to let him go. Tears running down her cheeks as she watches him wiggle and move, yawn and stretch. And what great love a mother shows as she slowly, deliberately takes a tiny blanket, wraps it around his little body and tucks it just right so that it will stay put. She holds him, rocks him, and then he—and she!—finally fall asleep.

Such love.

Such a gift.

Ask any mom and they will tell you that there is no better present to hold in your hands.

AMEN.