

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Sunday After Christmas, Year B; 27 December 2020
St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 202012261213)

Garments of Salvation

In nomine...

I. Christmas

Merry Christmas!

Today is the third day of Christmas: we'll get two Sundays during this Christmas season. All of these whole twelve days are intended to be a special time for remembering the birth of our Lord, the incarnation of God who chose to dwell among us. We celebrate these things because, somehow, they have made life different for us.

We celebrate these things because the coming of God in the flesh was a gift to us, a token of God's love, just as the gifts we have exchanged with one another are tokens of love and esteem. God has shown us God's love, God's esteem for us, in the incarnation and more, in God's continuing presence in our hearts and God's power to do something new, something important, something transformative in our lives.

II. Garments and Cloaks

We see this in our first reading, where the prophet gives thanks to God for God's gifts. Isaiah writes that God *has clothed me with the garments of salvation* and God *has covered me with the robe of righteousness* (Isa 61.10 NRSV).

You can hear the beautiful Hebrew parallelism going on here: garments and robes, salvation and righteousness. Maybe you can also, like me, hear echoes of Christmases past.

When I was a child, I had one grandmother in particular who would always send me a gift. And it would always be clothing. Usually underwear. This is not what I, as a child, had the least bit of interest in receiving. My grandmother had grown up under difficult circumstances, had lived

through the Great Depression. She had a great appreciation for the delight of having functional clothing in good condition next to your skin, *and* clothing that looked nice on the outside. She also had a great appreciation for Blue Light specials at K-mart. So I could count on receiving clothing from my grandmother for Christmas. As a child, my gratitude didn't always match up to my grandmother's generosity. But this year, when Becky gave me some tee-shirts and spoke of my old ones as being ridiculously full of holes, I was grateful.

The prophet Isaiah also responds with gratitude, with great rejoicing, with his whole being, even, to the gifts of raiment he has received from God. Isaiah speaks of the garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness.

A garment, a *beqed*, is the article of clothing worn next to your skin. It provides support and modesty and cleanliness. It is what helps you be presentable to the world and able to exert yourself without worrying about causing a scandal. There are instructions in the *Torah* about how to construct a *beqed*, a garment that some Jewish men will wear every day as a constant reminder of their connection to God, both their status and their responsibility as God's beloved children.

Isaiah speaks also of an outer garment, a robe or a cloak. This article of clothing is what covers the *beqed* in order to present something that looks nice for those around us. Those are the new clothes you might be wearing today, having received them for Christmas. The fancy suit you buy for a wedding or a job interview. Or maybe the special uniform you don for a graduation or a military honor guard. Isaiah speaks of a cloak of *righteousness*, sometimes translated as *saving justice*. It is an article of clothing that faces out into the world and projects the inner wholeness, well-being, and strength of its wearer. It takes that which is good and potent in its wearer and shares it with other people.

III. The Gifts of God to us

As Christians, we, too have received gifts of raiment from God. We were clothed with a inner, baptismal garment that we still symbolize with the alb worn at liturgies. That garment is God's gift to you, the gift you acknowledged and received at your baptism. And no matter how old you are or where life has taken you, that garment remains as pure and whole and unspotted today as it was on the day you were baptized.

We Christians have also been given a robe of righteousness, an outer garment of justice and care for others that is the outward manifestation of our faith. The apostle Paul takes a military analogy and refers to righteousness as a breastplate.

Inner garments and outer, these are like the nice new clothes I received for Christmas and was encouraged or commanded to wear to church the following Sunday! They are the ways God becomes incarnate in the world yet again through us and the love of God that we learn to express for our neighbors. Through this robe of righteousness, our very lives become tokens of God's esteem and love for the world around us, and God's great trust and calling to us. They are, as Isaiah suggested, like the garland placed upon the head of an honored bridegroom or the precious jewels with which a bride was adorned.

IV. Christmas Celebration

So as we journey through nine more days of Christmas celebration and thanksgiving, I invite you to enjoy those new clothes. They are gifts, both the inner clothes and the outer ones, but we still get to wake up each day and choose which ones we will put on. Those new clothes given by God are not fragile fast-fashion that need to be saved for Sunday best because they will fall apart after being washed three times. They are instead clothes that grow even more fitting, more attractive as they are used, worn regularly, and renewed day-by-day by God.

It is time to throw out the old garments full of holes, riddled with the challenges and disappointments of life. *Today* is the day for the new clothes, not tomorrow! Today, in this season of Christmas, is the time to receive those new clothes with joy, to put them on, and to experience God's continuing presence in our hearts, God's power to do something new, something important, something transformative in our lives.

We celebrate the birth of our Lord this season because *he* has made life different for us.

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