



THE CLOTHING OF THE

KING

Midweek Sermon Series




THE CLOTHING OF THE
KING



Midweek Advent *and*
Christmas Sermon Series





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Sermons written by Matt Popovits

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SERIES
OVERVIEW

Every morning, the sun rises, alarm clocks sound, foggy eyes open, and then, at some point, we get dressed. Socks, underwear, pants, shirts, and shoes: we don clothing that rightly corresponds to our vocations, our culture, and even the weather outside. Our clothing serves as the marker that sets us apart as a species and as an indicator of societal and individual values and traits. As Mark Twain once said, “Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”

Twain may have been right on that first part, but his statement excludes the first naked people in history, Adam and Eve. And we would argue these two have had quite the influence on who we are and where we are going due to both their lack of clothes as well as their eventual attire.

And so it follows that clothing in the Bible is more than a tangential detail. In fact, clothing often has significant implications for revealing God’s plan of redemption, for our Creator is also the first tailor, seamstress, and cobbler. Despite their rebellion, he covered Adam and Eve’s shame and nakedness. Later, he designed and instructed the Israelites on the priestly garments of the Tabernacle, which all have an intricately thought-out purpose and intent for the people to fellowship with their God. The biblical authors use both metaphorical and actual descriptions of priestly and royal garments to point us to the one true Priest and King, Jesus. And it’s this King, first wrapped in the rags of a swaddle, who then hangs naked on the cross in order to clothe us in the riches of his righteousness.

This midweek Advent Sermon Series tells the stories of the clothing of the King. Stories that describe a wardrobe at once splendid and sin-stained, with fabrics that reveal who we are and cover us all the same. The clothing of the King is tattered and worn and glorious in its incorruptibility. It isn’t ours, yet he gives it to us freely.

For this series, Pastor Matt Popovits has taken some of the best-known mentions of clothing in Scripture to proclaim Christ. Interweaving Old Testament stories like that of Adam and Eve’s clothing in exile and Joseph’s coat of many colors with Christ’s redemption on the cross,

these sermons give texture and shape to the threads of Scripture. We believe they will provide you with a detailed view of Christ's robe of righteousness constructed for everyone on that workbench of Calvary.

We hope whether you deliver these sermons verbatim or adapt them for your specific congregation, you find the words a warm comfort during this time of year as we reflect on the good news of Christ's incarnation and our longings for Christ to return once again.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

With each sermon, you'll find suggested songs to include in your service. These songs are available on our Advent playlist posted to [Spotify](#) and [Apple Music](#). Charts, lyrical videos, propresenter slides, and more resources for presenting this music are available for download in our Midweek Advent Church Resources. We pray these songs encourage you and your congregation throughout the Advent season.

For more information on 1517 Music, please visit 1517.org/music.

We've also prepared social media slides and propresenter slides to be used with your sermons, which are also available in our Midweek Advent Church Resources download.

Finally, we've compiled and designed a devotional on the Clothing of the King to be used in your bible studies or for personal study by your individual congregants. Each entry includes a brief Scripture passage, devotion, and prayer for every day of Advent. You can find the free download for this at our Advent 2023 Devotional, or you may order printed copies from the [1517 Bookstore](#).



ADVENT ONE

**THE FORETASTE
OF FASHION**

ADVENT ONE

THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SCRIPTURE:

GENESIS 3:14-21

The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

SUGGESTED HYMNS

COME THOU FOUNT
THERE WILL BE REST

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SERMON: So much of Christmas is about the clothes. There's the ugly sweater you'll don at the office Holiday party, the coordinating outfits in the colors of the season displayed on the Christmas card you've yet to order and, of course, the matching pajamas mom has picked out for Christmas Eve. We spend a good deal of time this time of year worrying about what we wear. And for good reason. The clothing of Christmas tells a story, doesn't it? It tells the world something of the excitement with which we celebrate, the meaning we seek to incorporate, and the memories we aim to make.

The same could be said of the Scriptures. The clothing tells a story. Sure, it's easy to overlook. But as with so many other parts and pieces of God's Word, these elements are not accidental. Indeed, these mentions of clothes, coverings, robes, and coats are rife with meaning. As we'll learn throughout the advent season, the clothes point us forward, to the King himself, Jesus Christ.

It starts early. In Genesis chapter three, Adam and Eve are naked and afraid. We are mere moments into life in the Garden of Eden and they have thrown it all away. The first of billions to buy Satan's tired lie that we are better off out from under God's love and leadership, our ancestors are being read the riot act by God. Their sin would unleash a tidal wave of divine judgment upon humanity, the biggest of which was their expulsion from the Garden itself. Not only would life for mankind forever be frustrating and filled with death, but they would no longer enjoy the presence of God. They, and we, would be left alone with our sin, made to reel from its effects apart from God, and feeling far from him whose love and care we need the most.

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SERMON:

Perhaps as you enter the holiday season you're feeling the effects of Adam and Eve's fall from grace. If so, you're not alone. Despite the Christmas music that's been playing since before Thanksgiving and the party invitations that are piling up the primary emotion of many is grief. It could be that you're grieving the absence of a spouse. This is the first Christmas since they've been gone. Or it could be you're grieving the financial pressures that you feel as we turn the corner into the most expensive time of the year. You wish you had the means to do more but for whatever reason, whether it's college debt, a few bad decisions, or a low paying job, you just can't. For others, this season brings a keen awareness of relational strain. There's the sibling you're not speaking to, the kid who's disappointed you, the sister-in-law who was hurt by you and who will definitely not be sending a card to you. Or perhaps what you're grieving is simply a long list of regrets you carry, regret and guilt over good things you've left undone and terrible things in your past that you can't undo.

As we enter Advent, where and how are you feeling the effects of Genesis chapter three in your life?

So there stands Adam and Eve, naked and awash in shame. Their nudity at first, when they were unblemished by sin, was of little account, at most a symbol of their purity and of their safety in God's care. But now, corrupted by sin, sent out on their own, and vulnerable to the evils of a broken world as well as their own dysfunctional hearts, their nakedness is a liability, not to mention a source of shame serving to remind them of their fall from grace.

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SERMON:

So what does God do? Does he send them off into the wilderness, cold and exposed, naked, afraid, and covered in guilt? No.

Genesis states it plainly, *“And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them”* (Gen. 3:21).

Let’s let that sink in: God made clothes.

God himself—with his own hands—fashioned a covering for both Adam and Eve. He was the first fashionista, the original couture designer. But he didn’t use fig leaves as Adam had done and he didn’t whip up a few yards of fabric from some cotton in the garden. No, he worked in leather. He used skin.

Though they and all humanity had been sentenced to death, the very first to die would not be Adam or Eve, but another. It would be the first time blood would be shed in God’s good world, the first time a final breath would be taken, and the first time a once warm and vibrant body would grow cold. And it would all be done in service of mankind’s sin and shame. A third party, some truly innocent being (we are not told what kind of animal it was, only what it gave) would lose its life, all so that guilty Adam and Eve could be sent out into the unknown completely covered.

What kind of God would cover over the sin and shame of a people who have rejected him? And what kind of God would not only cover their shame, but do so at such an awful cost and with his own two hands?

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SERMON: Are you starting to see it?

Is it coming into focus, how this moment points us to Jesus?

Theologians call this the “proto-euangelion,” the first glimpses of the Good News. Once Adam and Eve went on their way, their nakedness covered in new leather duds, God didn’t give up on the business of making clothes and covering shame. This would be only the beginning. This would be just a glimpse

You see, in the very beginning God had in mind your sin and your shame. He had in mind the vulnerability we all feel, the pains and problems associated with life in this sin-sick world that we are all feeling and fighting. And God would not be satisfied until we were all covered.

And so he sent his Son into the world, the one whose birth we eagerly await on this first week of Advent, to be our covering. And the clothing God the Father makes for all mankind, in Christ, is cut from the same bolt as those original garments. God again works in flesh and blood. Through the loss of the most innocent lives, through the shedding of blood, through the letting out of a last breath, and through the extinguishing of a perfect life, forgiveness was fashioned – enough for the whole world.

In the life and death of Jesus Christ there is now an outfit custom made and crafted by God for you. And though we wander in a dark and difficult world, in Christ, we are wrapped in the mercy of God, protected from the harshest

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

SERMON:

elements: namely, the ultimate effects of our sin. We are covered and we will survive.

I do not know exactly how you're feeling the vulnerability and difficulty of our broken world this Advent season. But I do know that whatever it is, it is covered over by Jesus Christ. You might think it too big, too awful, too evil. But it's not. When God makes a covering, he covers completely.

And just in case you need a refresher on exactly when it was that God clothed you, personally, in Jesus' shame-covering, sin-destroying garments of grace, let this be a reminder to you: it was at your baptism. At that moment you encountered the water and the Word you were not only given a new name (child of God!), a new life (eternal!), but a new outfit. You were covered in grace and mercy, won for you in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This season, Jesus is clothing you with his perfect righteousness. It fits easily beneath an ugly Christmas sweater. It goes great with new flannel PJ's. And it will add a little extra "something" to your family photos.

You are arrayed in something made just for you, something that has come at a great cost and that has been in the works since the very beginning. And it will fill your journey toward Christmas with peace.

Rejoice! You are wrapped in the oldest and most fabulous fashion: forgiveness. *Amen.*

ADVENT ONE || THE FORETASTE OF FASHION

NOTES

The background is a solid blue color with white line art depicting a nativity scene. In the foreground, the Virgin Mary is shown in profile, wearing a head covering and a robe with horizontal stripes. Behind her, the infant Jesus lies in a manger. To the right, a cross is visible on a post. The background also features stylized trees and other elements of a stable or cave setting.

ADVENT TWO
**AN ENVIABLE
STYLE**

ADVENT TWO

AN ENVIABLE STYLE

SCRIPTURE:

GENESIS 37:1-4

Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

SUGGESTED HYMNS

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?
OF THE FATHER'S
LOVE BEGOTTEN

SERMON:

Why is it that when you were younger your mom always cared so much about how you were dressed? Why did she always have something to say about the dress you picked out for church, if your shirt was tucked in at school, or whether your outfit matched on a Saturday afternoon of running errands? Why does it matter so much, to so many a mom, that we look fit and proper and put together?

SERMON:

I'm sure you know the answer. It's because the clothes we wear are more than a mere utility, covering us up and keeping us warm. It's about how we are presented to a watching world. Moms (and dads!) understand that how we carry ourselves communicates something significant to those around us. It sends a message about who we are, who we aim to be, where we come from and how well we are loved. And every parent wants the world to know that their kid is loved.

That's why even at the ripe old age of 43 you can expect a sweater from mom for Christmas, something she thinks will "serve you well at your next big meeting" or a text about how lovely it was to see you in a tie at the kids' Christmas concert. "You looked so nice," she'll write. "You should do it more often."

Joseph's story is one replete with references to clothing. In every major movement of his incredible tale there is some mention of what he's wearing. It starts, of course, with that infamous coat: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors" (Gen. 37:3).

The truth is, we don't know for sure if it was a multi-colored coat or simply a long and flowing coat, the Hebrew can be translated in a few different directions. What is clear, however, is that the coat was extravagant, it was opulent, it was all kinds of "extra" as the kids say. And it sent a clear message: Joseph was prized, treasured, and even favored by his father above all others. And Israel, his father, wanted everyone to know it.

SERMON:

The mentions of Joseph's clothing continue. Sold into slavery by jealous siblings, he finds favor with his captors only to be wooed, pursued, and assaulted by the wife of one of Pharaoh's prominent soldiers. Refusing her embrace, Potiphar's wife lays hold of his outer garment, but Joseph flees. She is left holding his coat, but Joseph's character remains intact.

Nonetheless, Joseph is falsely accused of wrongdoing and tossed in jail. However, his knack for interpreting dreams wins him a chance at redemption. Pulled from the pit he's given a shave, a haircut, and (here we have yet another mention of his wardrobe) a fresh set of clothes. He appears before Pharaoh as a new man, ready to become his confidant. And he does.

Joseph rises to power and what are we told? Pharaoh places a signet ring on Joseph's hand and arrays him in the finest of linen. Now it's not just his father who has dressed Joseph in something that says, "He's special" but it's the very King of Egypt. And whereas in the beginning it was just his brothers who took note of the extravagant coat, the audience has expanded. Now it's all of Egypt and the surrounding people that see Joseph decked out in glory.

But still there's more. And this may just be the best part.

After making peace with his brothers, revealing his identity as the second in command to Pharaoh and, more importantly, after refusing to treat them as their sins against him deserve, Joseph turns the tables. Rather than punishing the ones who had sought to destroy him, he chooses to bless them. He saves

SERMON:

them from famine and showers them in gifts. Genesis ends the account of Joseph's kindness by telling us this: "To each and all of [his brothers] he gave a change of clothes..." (Gen.45:22). There it is again, a mention of clothing.

Joseph gives to his brothers—*who had rejected him, tried to kill him, trafficked him into the hands of strangers and told their father that he was dead*—brand new clothing. It's more than a practical gift. It's a symbolic and powerful present. Joseph gives them fresh, clean clothes for a new beginning as his brothers.

So, what's all this have to do with Jesus, Advent, and preparing for Christmas? Well, don't you see it? Joseph's story, especially every costume change, points straight to Christ. It points us to the journey Jesus will undertake, for us, in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

He is the Son the Father loves. The Father himself will tell us as much at the moment of Jesus' birth when Angels fill the sky singing, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14) and at his baptism when his voice will boom with the words, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

But his favored status, along with the things Jesus will say and the miracles he will perform, will anger his brethren. His own people will reject him and seek to destroy him. They will even strip him naked, holding tight to his garments and casting lots for them. They will try to snuff him out completely, placing

SERMON:

him in the pit of death. But like Joseph so many years before him, Christ will rise. And when he does he will be wrapped in glory, covered in more power and beauty than before. He will be wielding the authority of the highest office in the land, and indeed holding the whole world in his hands.

But there's more, and it might just be the best part. Like Joseph, Jesus will feed and *clothe* his enemies. He will bless—extravagantly—the very ones who betray him, reject him, deny and kill him. But he will give to his enemies more than food in a famine and a new pair of pants. To all those who believe in him and are baptized into his death and resurrection, he will give the food of total forgiveness for every sin against God to feast on forever and he will cover us in righteousness and goodness which wraps around us like a long, flowing robe enveloping us as we stand before the Father.

He gives us new clothes for a new relationship as his forgiven brothers and sisters.

Joseph's story, which points to Jesus' story, is not just about a father's love for his son, but ultimately about God's love for every disobedient kid and the lengths he'll go to wrap us all in an undeserved, opulent coat of mercy and grace.

Moms and dads worry about what their kids wear for lots of reasons, among them is the fact that what our kids wear tells a story to the rest of the world about the parents themselves. And the same is true with our Heavenly Father.

ADVENT TWO || AN ENVIABLE STYLE

SERMON:

In Jesus Christ, we are no longer clothed in our sins and shame, but are called to his court and clothed in spectacular robes we don't deserve. Robes which declare to anyone who cares enough to take note that we, my friends, are incredibly loved.

What began with Joseph has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. God is clothing his kids—even and especially the worst of his kids—in a truly enviable style: salvation.

And just as mom says when she sees you in a tie, "It looks so good on you."
Amen.

NOTES

The background is a solid blue color with white line art. The central focus is a figure wearing a hooded garment, possibly a shawl or a simple robe, with their hands tucked into their sleeves. To the right of the figure, there is a simple white cross. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

ADVENT THREE

**CLOTHED IN
CONVICTION**

ADVENT THREE

CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SCRIPTURE:

JONAH 3:6-10

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

SUGGESTED HYMNS

O COME, O COME,
EMMANUEL
LO, HOW A ROSE
E'ER BLOOMING

SERMON:

Sometimes we “wear” our emotions. Whether we intend to or not, the things we feel – like surprise, shame, or joy – have a way of shining through in our body language and in our countenance.

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON:

When you step off the karaoke stage at the company Christmas party after crushing a rendition of “Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer” your pride will be evident to all. You’ll be wearing it.

When your sister-in-law opens up the present that you re-gifted to her from your mother-in-law, *in front of* your mother-in-law, the embarrassment you feel will shine as bright as the lights on your Christmas tree. The family will see it all over your face.

Yes, sometimes we wear our emotions.

And that’s certainly the case with repentance. At least it should be.

Repentance, the desire, when God’s glory confronts us, , to turn from our sin and fall into God’s mercy, is central to the rhythm of the Christian life, as well as an important theme in Advent. Time and again, we are brought face to face with God’s good and perfect standard, the beauty and the weight of which brings us to our knees. It humbles us to the ground, fills us with regret, and makes us yearn for grace, which the Father gladly gives in Jesus Christ. Time and again he revives us, bringing us back to life as we look at, lean on, and rest in his Son.

And Advent itself, along with its close cousin Lent, is intended to be a penitential season, a time when we squint our eyes and look even more intently at our weakness, our mortality, and our failures revealed by God’s law. Doing

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON:

so creates an extra sense of expectation and urgency for Christmas morning, when the grace of God will arrive in flesh and blood, in a newborn's cry from a back alley in Bethlehem.

We find a powerful example of repentance in a strange place and with an unexpected people: the Ninevites. Yes, Ninevah, that pagan metropolis famously begrudged by the guy that got swallowed and spat out by a whale, is a picture of repentance. Jonah did all that he could to avoid the assignment, but eventually showed up and preached the most bare minimum of messages. It was just eight words: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4) Despite the brevity, the King of Ninevah and all of his people were cut to the core. They believed the words of the reluctant prophet. And in doing so, they believed God. The king and his subjects wanted no part of God's judgment. The book of Jonah describes it like this:

The word reached the King of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish" (Jonah 3:6-9).

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON:

To fast, to forgo food, was to admit your mortality with every hunger pang. To wear sackcloth was to wrap yourself in humility, reflective of your sinful state. To be covered in dust and ash was to publicly embrace the shame of your sin. And the Ninevites did this from the throne room to the stable, from king to cow. Yes, even the cows expressed contrition. This was some grief over sin, this was some real, robust, and unmistakable repentance.

Faced with the judgment of God the Ninevites didn't just feel bad, they wore their grief. More than an emotion, it was an expression. It was a loathing of sin so deep, a desire to be new so palpable, a hunger for mercy so intense that it couldn't help but be seen on the outside, to shine through the body and be communicated in their countenance.

When was the last time you repented like that? Do you even know where your sackcloth and ashes are stored?

Even though you are just as bad and broken as the worst of Ninevites, it's probably been a while since you've shed a tear over your sin, let alone sat in ash (whatever that would equal in today's day and age). When we take an honest look at our spirituality we must repent of even our repentance, for even in this we fall far short.

But take heart. God knows this. And he's preparing a gift in response.

We most often talk about Jesus Christ as our *salvation*, with the movie in our minds immediately making a jump-cut to the cross. But a significant part

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON: of Christ's saving work was not only in dying for you, but in living for you. And it's in his living—particularly in the realities of his incarnation—that he embodies perfectly the humility that you and I, when faced with our sin, so often fail to embrace.

Let's think about it, shall we?

It's one thing for God to take on flesh and be made man, but for him to do so in utter weakness, as a baby? That's incredible, in the most accurate sense of the word. He's born to an unwed girl, on a cold night, with less than a little renown. He makes himself utterly vulnerable, susceptible to the brutalities of this world, capable even of death. The prophet Isaiah says he would grow to become a "man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:1), easy to overlook. Jesus was the kind of guy you'd first pity rather than praise. This is the King of the Universe, embracing rejection from his own people, despised by his generation, treated as a sinner even though he himself knew not a speck of sin. In his incarnation, in his living and his dying, Jesus wears the humility, the weakness, the shame, the rejection, the mortality that rightly and only belongs to us. And he did it so that we could receive a membership in the Father's family that rightly and only belongs to him.

He went from the throne room to the stable.

The King was born among the cows.

He didn't just feel bad for us in our awful state.

He joined us in it.

He expressed his sorrow.

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON: It shone through his life and it was communicated in his countenance.
He wore it.

This perfect weakness, this “substitutionary humility” of Christ, covers over our limp and lame shows of sorrow. It replaces our impotent expressions of regret. We are free to have no faith in our repentance—though repent we must—but instead to have faith in Christ, who has been perfectly humble, weak, frail, and mortal on our behalf.

And wouldn't you know it, that as you gaze intently on the advent of Jesus, with its attendant humility, that it is used by God to move you back into that rhythm mentioned earlier?

Seeing Christ wrapped in weakness, God's aim is to lead you to publicly confess your own. When does this happen? At the very least, it happens here in church. God gathers us into his house to confess verbally, boldly, and honestly as part of the liturgy that we are wretched sinners and desperate frauds. And then he causes us to respond with joy—real and palpable joy—when you hear him say, through the voice of your pastor, the words I declare to you now: “There is no judgment in Jesus Christ. Every piece and every part of the sins you've confessed are freely and forever forgiven.”

I pray you make the most of this advent season. I pray that you'd repent, that you would be cut to core with grief over your sin, for without Christ you are a short time from the judgment of God. But as with Nineveh, you are

ADVENT THREE || CLOTHED IN CONVICTION

SERMON: called to repent so that you might receive and rejoice in this: you are forgiven! Wear THAT!

As God convicts us, let us confess. And as he brings us to life with the gospel, let us celebrate. Perhaps you'll sing a little louder this advent season. It's good to not just feel what God works in us but to actually express it. After all, God has gone to the greatest of lengths to express how he feels for you, sending his Son from heaven to earth.

Sure, it might feel a little awkward, but that's okay. Christ has already done all of this perfectly for us. And besides, if a cow in Nineveh can do it, then why can't we? *Amen.*

NOTES

The background is a solid blue color with white line art depicting a nativity scene. In the foreground, a baby is wrapped in a striped blanket, lying in a manger. Above the baby, a star is visible. In the background, there are silhouettes of trees and a cross. The overall style is simple and graphic.

CHRISTMAS EVE

**ROBED IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS**

CHRISTMAS EVE

ROBED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

SCRIPTURE:

ISAIAH 61:10

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.

EXODUS 28:15–30

You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it—of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it. It shall be square and doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth. You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree. There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. You shall make for the breastpiece twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. And you shall make for the breastpiece two rings of gold, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. And you shall

EXODUS 28:15-30
CONTINUED...

put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. The two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings of filigree, and so attach it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. And you shall make two rings of gold, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it may lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod. So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord. And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly.

SUGGESTED HYMNS

LET ALL MORTAL
FLESH KEEP SILENCE

ONCE IN ROYAL
DAVID'S CITY

SERMON:

It's Christmas Eve and on Christmas Eve, we look our best.

We don't wear just anything to church, we wear the outfit picked out a few weeks ago when we were out grabbing some gifts for the kids. Speak-

SERMON:

ing of the kids, they're wearing what mom laid on the bed shortly before heading to church and the same can be said for many a husband here tonight. You look amazing, but it's your better half who deserves the credit.

And it's important to look your best. There's probably a trip to grandma's on the agenda, a nice dinner out, or a get-together with dear family friends. And through it all, pictures will be taken, a few gifts will be exchanged, and—Lord willing—some great memories will be made. Tonight is a big night. And on the big nights, the important nights, we make sure to wear our nicest attire.

And might I just say, you look amazing.

Tonight's a big night not just because of the festivities you've got planned and the new pajamas that await you. Tonight is a big night—the most amazing of nights—because tonight we watch and wait for a great exchange to begin. This time of year, that word, “exchange” conjures images of taking Aunt Linda's ill-fated attempt at a gift back to Kohls in return for store credit that you'll never use. But tonight's exchange is so much greater. It's an exchange not of gifts between you and your family but between God and man.

Tonight God takes on our flesh.

Tonight God becomes incarnate, he is wrapped in skin and blood, flesh and bone and takes on human form. But more than merely 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 posture in creation. And what is that position and pos-

SERMON:

ture? It's one of weakness, of vulnerability, of exposure to the elements of a sin-soaked and violent world. Tonight God is robed in flesh; he is born naked and small and offered 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 in close proximity to you and me, the utterly deprived.

But do not forget, this is an exchange. God isn't the only one gaining new garments and a different address. The prophet Isaiah, who spoke on God's behalf some 700 years before the incarnation of Jesus, foretold of the "year of the Lord's favor," a time when God's servant, the Messiah, would arrive and bring good news and everlasting joy to the world. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke chapter 4, Jesus, some 30 years old and launching his public ministry, quotes this very section of Isaiah. He opens the scroll in the synagogue, finds the 61st chapter and reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:2; Luke 4:18-19). He then sits down and says, 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.

But back to 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

CHRISTMAS EVE || ROBED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

SERMON: clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness...” (Isa. 61:10).

Are you grasping it? I hope so, because this is what makes Christmas Eve so incredible.

Isaiah is telling us that when the Messiah arrives he brings with him the good news of God’s extravagant blessing and with it a whole new wardrobe. Those who receive him, who are connected to him in belief and baptism, will be wrapped in salvation and—this is the best part!—robed in righteousness. Those who belong to the Messiah will be covered (head to toe, because that’s how robes work) in a rightness, a goodness that we have not earned. They will be so completely covered, in fact, that when God looks at those who receive this Messiah 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 him or failed him. He will see none of it. He will only see goodness. Talk about looking your best!

And that exchange begins tonight.

Jesus takes on your humanity, your flesh and blood, along with your heartache, hardship, and even your death. And 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 in his own flesh and blood on the cross. And he will rise out of his tomb declaring that *your* tomb has been totaled and that death, for all those who belong

SERMON:

to him, has been defeated. He will take your place, plod your plight, and set you free. And when it's all said and done he will wrap you in salvation and goodness that you did not earn. He will take what rightly belongs to him and graciously bestow it upon you. And the only thing that will be left to do is marvel at your new wardrobe and give God thanks, for it indeed will be the year of the Lord's favor.

And it all begins tonight, with the baby born in Bethlehem.

But let's take this further, shall we? Deep in the Old Testament, long before the incarnation of Jesus and before the prophecies of Isaiah, Moses was given instructions for the tabernacle and the garments of the priests who would minister there. The tabernacle, at that time, was the place of God's promised presence, the means through which he 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. The priests were, in some sense, the embodied presence of God.

In Exodus, Moses tells us that sewn into the priestly garments—onto the breastplate to be exact—were twelve different precious stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel, with the names of the tribes inscribed on them. The purpose for this was beautiful and personal: “Whenever Aaron 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” (Ex. 28:29).

SERMON:

Think about that: each time the priest entered the tabernacle and ministered 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.

We are told in the New Testament that the one being born tonight is the greatest of the great high priests, greater than Aaron and even greater than Moses (Heb. 4:14). And in his incarnation we have God, once again, dwelling with man. Jesus Christ is both the ultimate expression of the tabernacle and its priest. But this time the clothes of the "priest" are different. Rather than wearing fine linen and exquisite jewels, this high priest is wearing flesh and blood. The tent of God and the clothes of the priest are human flesh, blood, skin and bone.

And that's because this tabernacle and great high priest has come not to adorn himself in jewels but to make us the jewels. He has come to take our place and earn for *us* the holy garments. While Aaron stood before the Father with the names of God's people written beautifully over his heart, Jesus will *show us* God's heart. And he will live, die, and rise so that we can stand before the Father—bearing the name "forgiven"—as diamonds and as rubies ourselves, as sapphires shining with a holiness we haven't earned but desperately need. Yes, even you. You are a jewel shining in the light of Christ's holiness.

Tonight's a big night not just because of the festivities you've got planned and the new pajamas that await you. Tonight is a big night—the most amazing of nights—because tonight we watch and wait for an incredible exchange to begin.

CHRISTMAS EVE || ROBED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

SERMON:

Tonight, in the words of the famous advent hymn, “Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to command.” Tonight, God himself takes our place and is robed in our flesh, to take on our plight and to be our tabernacle and our priest. 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, 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.*

NOTES

The background is a solid blue color with white line art. In the center, there is a white rectangular box with a yellow border and a slightly distressed, torn-edge effect. Inside this box, the text is centered. The text reads "CHRISTMAS DAY" in a blue, all-caps, serif font. Below it, "WRAPPED UP" is written in a larger, bold, yellow, all-caps, serif font. At the bottom, "WITH LOVE" is written in a bold, yellow, all-caps, serif font. The background art features a baby wrapped in a striped blanket inside a manger, with a cross visible in the upper right corner.

CHRISTMAS DAY
WRAPPED UP
WITH LOVE

CHRISTMAS DAY

WRAPPED UP WITH LOVE

SCRIPTURE:

LUKE 2:1-7

SUGGESTED HYMNS

LET ALL MORTAL
FLESH KEEP SILENCE
ONCE IN ROYAL
DAVID'S CITY

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.

SERMON:

On this morning the King of the Universe, the Savior of us all, the long awaited Messiah has finally arrived. He's laid in a manger, doted on by mom and Joseph, spied upon by curious animals and, Luke tells us, this newborn Savior King, is "wrapped in swaddling cloths" (Luke 2:7).

There's a learning curve to swaddling a baby. Sure, some may come about it naturally, but ask any parent and they'll tell you that for

SERMON:

most, learning how to wrap that baby tight like a burrito takes some practice. Who's to say if it took Mary one, two, or twelve tries to get it right? She didn't have the advantage of watching a YouTube video to speed the process along. She simply had to figure it out.

And she would need to figure it out. Swaddling a baby was, and is, not merely an act of tender care from parent to infant. It's critical to providing a newborn with warmth and security, both essential to that brand new baby falling asleep. And yes, Mary likely wanted Jesus, meek and mild as he may have been, to take a nap that first Christmas morning.

Traditionally, newborns would be washed with water, rubbed with salt and olive oil, and then multiple strips of fabric—likely torn from various garments 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 as mom ensured that her little treasure—and in this case, our Lord and Savior—was safe, sound, and snug as a bug.

The swaddling cloths that wrap our Savior on this Christmas morning 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.

SERMON:

Temperatures aside, this world is a cold place. We don't like to dwell on it on Christmas morning, but life is replete with broken promises, tension-filled relationships, awkward interactions, gut-wrenching rejections, and terrible misunderstandings. These can leave you feeling like an outsider, alone and caught in the cold, if you will. Perhaps you've felt the cold this holiday season. At a time when relationships are front and center, this season is packed with opportunity for the dysfunction so common to human interaction to be felt in full force.

And yet born in Jesus this Christmas morning 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 one relationship will never more be in doubt. One status is strong and secure. You reside in the light, in the warmth of God's love. He cherishes you. He celebrates you. He dotes on and smiles at the very thought of you, much like, we can imagine,

SERMON:

Mary does with the newborn Savior. 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 dysfunction that exists between you and others.

But there's also the security and the safety.

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 fingernails. But wrapped tight, they feel – and indeed they *are* – safe.

We too are exposed. This world is not only cold, but dangerous. Death is all around us. And the Scriptures say that “Satan prowls like a roaring lion, seeking whom he will devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Cancer strikes a loved one. A moral failure takes out the career of a respected friend. Divorce pulls apart a home that you fought and sacrificed for—the list goes on and on. The attacks of this sin-sick world come at us from all sides.

But this brave little boy, born this morning in Bethlehem, has come to confront every evil that threatens us and battle every foe that terrorizes us. He's here to live, to fight, to die, and rise like a man on a mission. And in his brief life he will face every evil, he will confront every terror taking each one, including death, head on. And he will crush them all. Sure, he will win by losing, and it will confound us at first. But in dying, in being rejected by his own people, punished for crimes he did not commit, and giving his life on the cross as if he was the chief of sinners, this newborn will bring new life to the

SERMON:

world. He will drain the world's evil of its power, absorbing it all—along with God's wrath—into himself and rendering this world impotent to lay any kind of permanent claim on us. He will die. He will go from being washed in salt and olive oil and wrapped in swaddling clothes, to being bathed in perfume in preparation for burial, wrapped in graveclothes, covered in spices, and set in a tomb. But he will rise victorious.

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, like he, 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. There is little more loving to behold 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.

CHRISTMAS DAY || WRAPPED UP WITH LOVE

SERMON:

Mary's love for the Lord on this Christmas Day is a glimpse of God's love for us all, in Jesus Christ. Did you know that God the Father, because of Jesus Christ, looks upon you with an even greater love, that his eyes are fixed on you, and that you are held in his hands? It's easy, and understandable, if your mind is distracted by other gifts being given and received on this Christmas morning. But may there be a moment, at least one, where you realize that you too are swaddled in warmth and safety, and in the care of One who loves you more than you can possibly imagine. And why not let it be now? You are warm, secure, and safe in the love of Jesus Christ.

How might life be different, if you fully grasped that truth, truly understood the love of God that is yours, now and forever? Because it is, in fact, yours.

Would you live with a bit more bravery, willing to take on the things that are of greatest consequence, knowing that God has got your back? Because he does!

Would you let go of some anxiety, knowing that you already possess that which matters most? Because you do, and moreover God possesses you in his loving arms.

Might you sleep more soundly at night, knowing that life's biggest battles have already been fought for you and won for you? Because they have.

Might there be a bit more boldness in word and deed and more lightness in your heart, if you grasped just how tightly you're wrapped in the good things

CHRISTMAS DAY || WRAPPED UP WITH LOVE

SERMON:

of God, through Jesus Christ? Because, and please hear me clearly, God has got you and he is not letting go of you!

The swaddling clothes that wrap our Savior are a small but important detail. They are a picture of what this child, once grown, will provide for us all. What we receive this day—a beloved child wrapped in love—is what we all, through this child, get to become.

Now *that* is an incredible gift. Merry Christmas. *Amen.*

NOTES



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