

SERMON – DECEMBER 27, 2009

Today's sermon is all about clothes. Beautiful, expensive, haute couture garments: Didn't we all receive at least one item of clothing as a gift for Christmas? Dick got two: I'm not so sure about haute couture, but he got a blaze orange hat so the trucks on 97 can see him and won't run him down and one heavy-duty wool one so his head won't freeze off. I received a beautiful sweater, one I'll wear proudly because someone cared enough for me to pick out just the right one. How we love to give and receive splendid clothes. After all this is Christmas! It started 2 days ago and will continue on for 9 more.

But are the gifts, the parties, the extravagant food, the mandatory family gatherings, the emphasis on gaiety the reason we throw ourselves into this hectic insistence on merriment?

Or is the “spirit of giving” that the newspaper and TV ads regale us with the whole point of this joyful season?

Well, in a way, it is—but in a different way than they mean.

because *it IS* the gifts God has given to us, celebrated at this time of year but always present, that are the point.

As we celebrate the anniversary of the coming of Jesus the Christ into our world. We are rejoicing in that fact of life, that fact of our eternal life.—we're not still the little kids who have to be taught that, as we read in the Gospel today, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”-- Most of us can quote that by heart.-- that “The Word” is Jesus. We know that He is a member of the Trinity—the Godhead. We know that he deigned to enter into our human world to save us. Although we may not understand or describe that mystery in the same way, we who call ourselves by the name Christian agree that Jesus is the Way of salvation because He is God. We know that he IS the gift from God of God Himself.

I remember the Christmas of 1961. Steve, our first child, was 6 weeks old, so I was no longer bringing in any income, Bob and I were

renting what would in P.C. terms today be called sub-standard housing, my parents were on their way from Alabama to Farmington, New Mexico to see the new grandson and I was in the run down kitchen frantically making the obligatory Christmas gingerbread cookies complete with fancy decorations (which I hated doing!). Then, as I have discovered God frequently does, God surprised me with a glorious epiphany! My whole being complete with chill bumps, which I now know are Holy Spirit bumps, suddenly simply understood what Christmas is all about – the enormity of God's actually having come to this world as a helpless baby, to expose himself to the difficulties, heartaches and happinesses of human beings. The incident lasted only a moment, but it was a life-changing one.

The Isaiah passage we read today is part of the prophecy about the post exilic people – the Jews who after 70 long years in captivity had been allowed to return to their beloved Jerusalem only to find themselves still oppressed, poor, and seemingly abandoned to their fate. They lived under heavy Persian taxation and were harassed by regional provinces. Jerusalem's walls were in ruins. Famine and poverty were

rampant. The return did not meet expectations; it was not all that it was cracked up to be. Where was the glory of the restoration, the return to the land of promise? The promises of God had seemed to fail. Israel had been deserted and the land was desolate; Israel was rejected and ruined. The people of God were losing hope. –

Yet, our reading from the prophet Isaiah begins with “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” and goes on to say–“You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.” This word of the Lord was to His people at that time and place, but they are part of our heritage and we are the continuation of their story. God speaks this to us still.

In Galatians Paul writes– “Before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed” He continues “ . . . as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves

with Christ. All of you are one. God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the spirit of His son into our hearts crying Abba! Father! so you are no longer a slave but a child and if a child then also an heir, through God.” Think of that.

Because we have clothed ourselves with Jesus, we are heirs to Abraham's promise. Today's American Jews still refer to their earthly fathers as Abba as they did in Jesus' and Paul's time. Daddy! A term of endearment. -Through Jesus, God, our Abba, has given us the most beautiful clothing we could ever receive--- the garments of salvation, the robes of righteousness. royal clothes as befit the children of the King. We have only to accept them.

These are the things that we can claim with joy as part of being saved, not just in the afterlife, but the part of being saved that exists right now. Our joy foretold by Isaiah in the reading today, in the reading from Galatians about clothing ourselves with Christ, knowing that the **Word**

in John is Jesus, all has to do with that kind of “eternal” life, the quality of life, that Jesus' willingness to live for us and die for us brings to us.

We may have learned in our childhood that all Christmas is about is presents, and Santa Claus and cranberry sauce, or maybe we even learned that it's about good will toward the less fortunate, but it's not!! it's specifically about the Christmas gift our God willingly and lovingly gave of Himself to each of us by his birth, his life on earth, his sacrifice on the cross, his resurrection and ascension and his continual daily giving of Himself to each of us, with great fervor, in every aspect of our living---those garments of salvation, robes of righteousness in Christ, so that we can love Him, learn from Him, and follow Him.

Christmas is about our living each day, each year, totally overwhelmed, joyously inebriated, with the understanding that God Himself gives Himself to each of us so that we might give ourselves to Him, and in doing so, to others.