

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent – Year B – December 11, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Isaiah 61:1-3,10,11 written by Pastor Paul Horn

**“Rejoice in the Lord! He brings you new clothes for Christmas!”**

What do you want for Christmas? If you're expecting the gifts from the *Twelve Days of Christmas* carol from your true love, they're looking at \$23,000 and some change for everything from the partridge in a pear tree to 12 lords a leaping... that's according to PNC bank. What do you want for Christmas? How about something more practical, like a new car? There's a recent TV commercial of a husband leading his wife out of their front door. When he pulls off the blindfold, there in the driveway sits a brand new car with a big red bow on it. As she hugs him in thanks her eyes are drawn to a bigger, fancier car driving slowly down the street. She can't take her eyes off of it.

The TV you get for Christmas isn't wide enough, the computer/laptop isn't fast enough, the cell phone is already out-of-date, the clothes are out of style, you've mastered the video game already. At first we're excited about the new. Then, they break, wear out, and are not so shiny, and the kids are playing with something else.

Do we do that the real meaning of Christmas, too? For Christmas is not just about the cooing and ahhing over the baby in the manger. It is not the warm and fuzzy feeling of a “Christmas spirit” every time we hear a Christmas carol on the radio. Christmas is much more than that. It's about the Son of God coming in the flesh, and his purpose in coming: to live a life free from sin for us; who resolved to come down to earth to suffer God's wrath over your sins as your substitute, to endure torments of hell in your place, to die in your place, and to rise again. And by his work, God gives these gifts: eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and salvation.

Aren't these the gifts we need under the *Tannenbaum* this Christmas and every Christmas? We need these gifts because... well, because of how Isaiah describes us this morning. From our lesson in Isaiah chapter 61...

Vs1 the poor - Isaiah is not talking about those who have little or no money, but those tormented and weak and not able to help themselves, those who are poor spiritually. Does that describe you?

vs2-3 those who mourn and grieve - Since I've been serving here at Faith Lutheran there are 17 families in this congregation who have had a loved one die. Isn't the Christmas season especially difficult for you who mourn and grieve, your loved one is not here to celebrate with you?

Vs3 those who despair - Life in general can lead us to despair - the stress of work, the stress of parenting, and grandparents who are raising their grandchild. Now add the pre-Christmas season and moving into a new church. It can be a bit overwhelming! It's easy to throw up your hands and say, “I can't do this anymore!” Is that you?

Vs1 those in darkness - Those who live in the darkness of their past poor choices in life. Is that you?

Vs1 those who are brokenhearted - Normally we think of a boy whose heart is broken by a girl. Not the case here. Isaiah is talking about those who are aching spiritually. For example: do you know someone close to you who will be celebrating Christmas for the wrong reasons this year? Whose plans don't include worship of the Christ child? Does your heart ache for them?

Vs1 those who are captives and prisoners – prisoners of their own sins, held captive by Satan's influence, who daily feel the pull of this sinful world, who feel trapped by the same sins they continue to fall into again and again, the ones you struggle with every day and feel that you never get ahead but always seem to fall. You feel like a prisoner in your own body.

Do you feel like you're wearing the prison clothes, with shackles around your ankles and wrists, chains around your heart? Are you in a state of grieving and feel like you're always wearing a black veil over your face and shrouded over your heart? Do feel poor and despairing, wearing raggedy clothes, like little Annie in the orphanage, who is then chosen to visit the billionaire Daddy Warbucks? And now, this pre-Christmas season, you are told the King is coming, and I'm dressed like this? This Advent season we need to be wearing the proper clothes for the King is coming to bring us to his wedding celebration. I can't go dressed like this...

How'd you like new clothes for Christmas? In Isaiah the Servant of the LORD speaks, **"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."** The good news Jesus brings is that he has brought you new clothes for Christmas. Isaiah then records our words in response to this good news, vs10 **"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."** These are the clothes we need to get into the heavenly wedding banquet, clothes only our Savior can give to us. Jesus earned the garments of salvation and the robes of righteous by fulfilling all of those things Isaiah said that he would do.

**"I have come to bring release from darkness for the prisoners."** On the road to Jericho when Jesus gave blind Bartemaus his sight, did he not only open his eyes, but also the eyes of his heart as well? So that he could see who Jesus was - his Savior, the Son of David. **"I have come to bind up the brokenhearted."** We can't help but think of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears, weeping because of the guilt of her sins. Jesus, the Physician, carefully wrapped up her wounded heart by saying, "Woman, your sins are forgiven." **"I have come to bring comfort for those who mourn."** Jesus said to Jarius whose 12 year old daughter had just died, "Don't be afraid, just believe." Jesus said to Martha whose brother Lazarus had just died, **"I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will never die."** And then he proved it by raising his own body from his grave.

This is the robe Jesus wove by his righteous life. And through your Baptism he has placed this robe on you, draped over your soul and body. Covered by the robe of Christ's righteous, you are beautiful in God's sight, like a bride on her wedding day, Isaiah said, a bride adorned with her jewels, sparkling bright, presented to the heavenly Father, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5)

Rejoice in God! Be glad! He brings you new clothes for Christmas! He also brings you the **the garments of salvation (vs10)**. These also are clothes Christ has given you. Isaiah prophesied how Christ would make these

garments of salvation for us. **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we consider him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53)**

The garments of salvation are washed in the blood of Christ. By his bloody sacrifice he has taken God’s wrath, Satan’s fury, hell’s fires, the grave’s dark chamber on himself. He has placed this garment of rescue on your shoulders, so that you look dressed like a groom on his wedding day, in a fitted tuxedo, finely pressed, black shoes shined, all smiles as his bride walks down the aisle.

How about some new clothes for Christmas? Jesus says to you today, vs1 **“I have come to proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners.”** Christ has taken your prison clothes, your chains and shackles and has replaced them with clothes meant for a free person. You are people of God who have been set free from their prison to sin. With these new clothes you have been set free to serve your God.

Jesus says to you today Vs2-3, **“I have come to comfort those who mourn and to provide for those who grieve, the oil of gladness instead of mourning.”** Christ has taken the black veil off your heart, and has replaced it with clothes of gladness. My friends who grieve and mourn, you have true lasting gladness that comes only from the garments of Christ’s resurrection – comfort of knowing that those who die in the Lord died with the robe of Christ’s righteousness draped over their body and soul at death, a robe that brings life and power over grave.

Jesus says to you today Vs3, **“I have come to bring a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”** There is no room for despair in the heart of a Christian. No room for, “I can’t do this anymore.” For the clothes Christ gives us at Christmas only lead to praise – smiles in our hearts and on our faces because Christ has done all of this for us. We wear the garments of praise because God through his Word and Sacraments gives us strength to get through life, to tackle the tough days of pre-Christmas. God, through his Word and Sacraments gives us the wisdom to look ahead, past this bitter life, to the better days spent with our King, our bridegroom. He will come for us again and we will all be dressed in white, seated at the table with all the saints, and the finest wines and choicest cuts of meat and fruit from the Tree of Life will be there for us. And we will dine with our King, and sing his praises forever.

This... all this because you and I have been given the best Christmas present ever. The garments of salvation and the robes of Christ’s righteousness! Amen.