

“God’s Gift of Clothing”
Christmas 1A – December 26, 2010
Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 147:1-12;
Galatians 3:23-27, 4:4-7; John 1:1-18.

Introduction:

*On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
A partridge in a pear tree.*

*On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Two turtle doves, And a partridge in a pear tree.*

*On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Three French hens, Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.*

*On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Four calling birds, Three French hens, Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.*

*On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me
Five golden rings, ...
Four calling birds, Three French hens, Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.*

Christmas is about giving and receiving gifts,
isn't it? I realize, in our country, gift giving is all Christmas

means to much of the population. They don't often make the direct connection that we give gifts to each other as a memorial of the great gift God has given us in His only begotten son, Jesus Christ.

It is testimony we, the church, need to keep putting out there, so more and more people will make the connection, and invite Jesus into their lives.

What Happens When We Invite Jesus Into Our Lives?

In order for Jesus to become part of our lives we need to confess to him our sin so we can also receive his forgiveness. Simply, sin is disobedience to God's perfect will for us. Thus, we confess to Jesus all the times we have not obeyed God's will whether in our thoughts, our words, our actions, or our failures to act. Our confession and Jesus' forgiveness establishes Jesus as our personal savior. He has already earned the right to be the savior of the entire world by virtue of his death on the cross. The death of a perfect human – the very son of God – made sufficient payment to cover the penalty attached to every human soul because of our individual sins.

With all due respect, but President Obama is wrong. All salvation is not corporate salvation. There are corporate sins that must be confessed and repented of corporately. Slavery was such a sin, and it took a lot of

blood to atone for that sin as a nation. However, Jesus did not die on the Cross to save the United States of America. If He did, then none of us are ever going to Heaven because this nation, nor any nation, will ever be 100% right with God. Jesus didn't die for nations, he died for the people of the nations.

Jesus died on the Cross for "whosoever"; for each individual who comes to that momentous intersection of life and chooses to believe in God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus forgives us and takes up residence within us through the person of the Holy Spirit, we become what St. Paul describes as a 'new creature' (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are now keenly spiritually oriented and desirous of the things of God. A transformation begins to take place within us.

The thing is, when we first give our life to Jesus Christ we bring whoever we are to that moment. Some of us are pretty good people. We were raised by God-fearing parents who instilled the right values in us; and we took to those values and have been trying to live them out in our daily lives. There are still things Jesus needs to forgive but we are not so lost in sin that our soul cannot respond to God's graceful offer in Christ Jesus.

There are others of us who grew up rougher.

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For whatever reason we either haven't been taught God's values, or we didn't absorb them, or we have unholy experiences in our lives that have done real damage to our soul. As a result, our life is filled with more obvious sin; there is more in our lives that needs forgiving. We have a lot of bad habits that might involve language, lifestyle issues, thought patterns, addictions, or bad relationships. At any rate, when we invite Jesus into our lives we bring all that brokenness with us. Some bad habits, or bad desires Jesus is able to command out of our lives. Others, have to be trained out through the work of the Holy Spirit and God's Word interacting within our soul effecting our mind, emotions, attitudes, habits, relationships, and decision-making ability. This takes time and effort to accomplish.

As Christians we now live in two worlds. We are still here, in our sinful bodies, but we are also present with God through the interaction of our own spirit and the Holy Spirit. We have one problem we can't overcome. God hates sin and will not allow it in His presence. So, while the habits of sin are being discovered and worked out of our lives

We Need A Way To Be Able To Be In God's Presence.

Praise be to God, God has provided the answer.

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Isaiah wrote, *“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....”*

(61:10) Isaiah foresaw a time when God would put a robe of righteousness on his people that would act as a garment of salvation. It works like this: when we invite Jesus into our lives and confess our sin to Him, he forgives us and we are born again into God's forever family; but, as mentioned earlier we are still here in these bodies of sin. So, how can we stand before a holy God while sin is still attached to us?

It is because God has provided for us a robe of righteousness which is a garment of salvation. God did this for us through our Savior, Jesus Christ. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, *“You were all baptized into Christ, and so you were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus”* (3:26-27).

The Gospels tell us there was something special about the robe Jesus wore, because of the way it was woven. It was special enough that the Roman soldiers were casting lots for it as Jesus was hanging on the Cross. I think God wants us to make a connection – to connect the dots – between Isaiah's prophecy about God

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clothing us with a 'robe of righteousness', Paul's words that we are "clothed with Christ", and the very person of Jesus and his robe.

Here's how they connect for me: None of us can make ourselves good enough to earn the right to stand, naked, in the presence of the Living God. Theoretically, we can do this. Jesus was able, but my experience with myself and with others is that we just can't do it. (E.E illustration of 3 sins per day). Isaiah 64:6, says it this way: "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;...*" So, there we are, trying to stand before a holy God while wearing "filthy rags". That is just not a good image. So here is what God has provided for us.

When we invite Jesus to enter our lives to forgive us of our sin, he comes bringing a trash bag and a robe of righteousness. He collects all our sinful stuff – thoughts, word, and actions - and loads it into his trash bag. Next he removes the filthy rags of our own attempts to make ourselves perfect and puts them also into His trash bag. Then He clothes us with Himself. Visually, He puts His robe on us. Then He takes the trash bag with our sin and our filthy rags, and He carts it away. This fulfills what Psalm 103:12 (NCV) says: "*He has taken our sins*

away from us as far as the east is from west.”

We are not yet righteous and won't be until we are in Heaven and have transcended this early body of sin. But now, through the amazing grace of Jesus Christ we are enabled to stand in the presence of the Living, Holy God because God doesn't see us as sinful. God sees us as He sees His son, Jesus Christ. It is not a game. It is how we can still be here, still dealing with sin, and yet be in the presence of God. There in God's presence, we worship God, and we make intercession for others as we lift them on the stretchers of our prayers before the presence of the Almighty.

God offers us a gift of clothing. Why would we refuse it? If we accept it, it will be personally delivered by Jesus. You can receive yours this morning. Just make your confession and ask for it. Amen?