

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 27, 2020

Isaiah 61.10-62.3

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,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD;
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
as he died to make us holy, let us live to make all free,
while God is marching on.

Glory, glory hallelujah! Glory, glory hallelujah!

Glory, glory hallelujah! God's truth is marching on.

v 3, "Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory", (Hymn # 354, Glory To God Hymnal)

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Luke 2.21-40

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

*Thanks, we give and adoration for your gospel's joyful sound;
May the fruits of your salvation in our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful, ever faithful to your truth may we be found.
v2, "Lord, Dismiss Us With Your Blessing", (Hymn # 546, Glory To God Hymnal)*

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Naked...you gave me clothing
Isaiah 61.10-62.3f
Luke 2.21-40

These two texts have in common the idea of rejoicing. The prophet not only wishes to verbally rejoice, but it is also to be a total body effort: "my whole being shall exult in my God". And in Luke we hear how Joseph and Mary and Jesus (now named) encounter Simeon and Anna, devout Jews, in the temple in Jerusalem as they have gone for the time of purification of Mary and the dedication of Jesus as the firstborn male child. Simeon and Anna are inspired by the Holy Spirit to rejoice in the presentation and presence of Jesus.

The prophet rejoices in how God has clothed him "with the garments of salvation" and "with the robe of righteousness", bedecked as beautifully and splendidly as a bridegroom and bride for their wedding. This promise of God is as sure as the earth producing fruitfully and faithfully as a garden, the righteousness and praise of the prophet (and God's people) to spring up as surely as what has been sown in the garden. The prophet can not keep silence, the prophet will not rest, until the proclamation of what the LORD has done has been experienced in the world, shining like the dawn or a burning torch, allowing the nations and all of the kings to come to know. And the people of God will also know themselves by a new name, which indicates a new status: "a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD...a royal diadem" in God's hand.

Luke's story continues to point to the responsibilities of the parents in the wake of the birth of their son. The child must be circumcised: a religious event performed in its "time", eight days (seven days, a week, plus one), a symbol of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Mary is required to undergo purification in accordance with requirements after having given birth, and Jesus is presented to God, echoing Samuel's presentation in the Temple at Shiloh (1 Samuel 2.24). Reflecting their social status, Mary and Joseph sacrifice two turtledoves or pigeons, the offerings of the poor.

As in Isaiah, the story from Luke is also one that refers to clothing, albeit metaphorically. The law of Moses is a "clothing" of protection and guidance for Mary and Joseph as Jews. The child is circumcised according to the practice initiated by Abraham, representing the covenant between God and God's people. Mary seeks purification through cleansing, which allowing her to fully return to her community. Simeon and Anna, the pairing of a holy man and a woman prophet amplify how God has "dressed" this story with faithfulness. Finally, the time in Bethlehem and now Jerusalem having come to an end, the family returns to their home in Nazareth, Jesus clothed with "the favor of God" which was upon him.

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Naked...you gave me clothing

Greenamerica.org

When we clean out our closets, we often use three piles for clothing: keep, donate, and toss (or throw away). Even though many Americans donate clothing, textiles still make up a shocking amount of the US waste stream. The EPA reports that Americans generate 16 million tons of textile waste a year, equaling just over six percent of total municipal waste (for context, plastics make up 13 percent of our waste stream). On average, 700,000 tons of used clothing gets exported overseas and 2.5 million tons of clothing are recycled. But over three million tons are incinerated, and a staggering 10 million tons is sent to landfills.

Donating: Many people donate their used clothing to outlets that resell clothing.

One such outlet is Goodwill, another the Salvation Army. With respect to Goodwill, five percent of clothes they receive are sent to landfills, largely due to mildew issues. The rest remain in their 3200 stores for four weeks before being moved to Goodwill outlets, found in 35 states, where items are sold for 99 cents a pound.

What doesn't sell at the outlets is then sent to Goodwill Auctions, where huge "mystery" bins full of items are sold for as little as \$35 each. Finally, what clothing remains gets sent to recycling centers where they will be cut into rags, processed into softer fiber used for filling furniture and building insulation, or sent overseas.

Overseas Exports: Secondhand clothes that don't sell in the US or go into textile recycling are often exported. Roughly 700,000 tons of used clothing gets sent to other countries annually, with a mixed outcome. In some cases, the clothing provides jobs. In other cases, the sheer volume of exported clothing has suppressed local clothing industries and developed an increased reliance on other countries. It's estimated, for instance, that the cost of a secondhand garment is as low as five percent the cost of a new garment in Kenya, meaning local industries are unable to compete with the influx of cheap, used clothing.

Three steps one can take to reduce one's impact on the Earth when it comes to clothes:

Reduce clothing purchases. Donating is better than landfilling, but it does not erase the impacts of the clothes we buy and discard

When buying clothes, choose second hand.

When purchasing new items, look for "recycled content" products to ensure we are creating demand for recycled textiles.

Synopsis: Donating usable clothing to Goodwill or Salvation Army or a second-hand clothing store allows for clothing use to be sustained, and organizations such as Goodwill and Salvation Army (as well as an increasing number of clothing companies) are committed to recycling what can't be worn.

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities around clothing?