**Isaiah 61:10-62:3 December 27, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the book of Isaiah chapters 61 and 62 here re-reading these words. “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.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Everyone remembers the great gifts of Christmas. I’m sure when you think back on Christmas’s of the past you can remember being a child and receiving “that” gift. The gift that you asked for and pleaded for month after month after month until you finally got it. Maybe it was a bike, the barbie “dreamhouse”, or even a toy tractor. Then as you get older you can remember the years that you got some strange gifts, some memorable gifts, some sentimental gifts, even some wacky gifts like you would receive in a white elephant gift exchange, or if you participated in being someone’s secret Santa. But one type of gift usually gets forgotten. Perhaps you received it just a few days ago. For kids, it’s the one thing they despise seeing when they rip into that paper, or reach into that gift bag. Clothes. Socks, shirts, pants, gloves, or even the worst, underwear. Clothes on Christmas is usually met with a half-hearted “thanks” or even just a push to the side as you reach for another present. You can imagine the same sort of response in 2020 to receiving the gift of a new mask. Clothes don’t usually fit into the category of “that” gift, they are usually given for practical reasons. Practical gifts aren’t always the most memorable, but they are the most important. Whether the child realizes it or not at the time, they need new clothes. They need to have warm socks for the winter months. They may not “want” these things on Christmas, but they are needed. Here in Isaiah, we see a joy and an exultation over the gift of clothes, and it’s not just simply a practical gift it’s a matter of life or death that we receive these clothes from our Heavenly Father.

We are clothed in Isaiah 61-62 with what Isaiah describes as the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. These aren’t bargain bin sorts of clothes that God is giving us. They are garments that are described in the same way as the kinds of clothes that a bridegroom would use to deck himself out like a priest. Priests wore some expensive and extravagant clothes, here they use the example of the headdress but priests wore much more than that. They wore expensive jewels and gold just to give you an idea of how extravagant their clothes were. And that’s how we have been clothed by God. We have been clothed as a priest is decked out to stand in the Holy places in God’s presence. We are decked out like a bride who is given away in marriage, who wears the most expensive jewels that her and her family can afford.

We are given an amazing gift by God, with His salvation and His righteousness. And Christmas is a celebration of the new life that we have in Christ, of the adoption as sons and daughters that we receive by the Savior’s coming and dying for our sake. As Simeon says in our Gospel lesson when he holds Jesus, “For my eyes have seen your salvation.” He holds salvation in his hands, our salvation, the salvation passed down from generation to generation that so many waited for, and yearned for, and died for. Now that salvation has come, and we are the recipients of it, we are now the adopted sons and daughters of the Most High thanks to that gift that Simeon held so long ago in his arms, praising God through the words of the Nunc Dimittis.

And what’s our response to this amazing gift? Sadly, too often, it’s the same as children when they receive clothes for Christmas. “Gee God…thanks…” Instead we reach for the next present. Instead we pray and ask for a Christmas list of other and more spectacular gifts in our own eyes rather than thanking God for the gifts that He has already blessed us with. Instead of giving thanks for the salvation won for us on Calvary’s cross and living lives that reflect that, we live lives devoted to the “presents” of this life. Lives that revolve around the next gift, the next score, the next big payday. Lives that wish for more, more space on the pontoon, more money, more cars and even more houses. Lives that put down the practical and amazing gifts that God blesses us with here in His House, and instead reaches for the fleeting pleasures of this world when we neglect coming to worship and the study of God’s Word.

Clothes. That’s what God gives us, and we receive it as a child receives a practical gift from their parents. We don’t deserve these clothes of righteousness. We instead deserve to stay in the filthy rags of our sin. Children don’t deserve the love of their parents, any parent who is hearing this message today knows that children can’t possibly earn the love that their parents show them, because parents give an unconditional love that comes from a place of mercy and compassion. And so it is with our Heavenly Father. He showers us with a love that comes from His mercy and compassion for us, and He gives us a practical gift that we don’t deserve when he clothes us with His righteousness and salvation.

Zechariah 3 shows us a picture of this amazing gift when the angel says “Remove the filthy garments from him, and to him he said, “Behold I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” The old disgusting rags of sin have been removed and we have been given the gift of clothes, new and pure, the same clothes of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks in Galatians about this amazing dynamic that we experience now that Christ has come. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” God sent His Son to be born under the same weight of the Law that we have all been burdened by since the time of our own birth. And that child came, in human flesh just like us, burdened by the requirement of perfection, just like us, to make us children of the Heavenly Father, God Almighty, so that we could be just like him. And now, we are God’s children, not on account of our own actions. Not on account of our works of thankfulness and praise. Not on account of our own perfection for we are in no way perfect on our own. But because of Jesus Christ. Because He loved us so much to die for us. And now through His death, we are clothed in garments of salvation and righteousness that have changed our lives forever.

Where does this happen? Well, Galatians doesn’t only talk about our adoptions as sons and daughters of God our heavenly Father, Galatians also talks about this clothing that we receive from God. Galatians 3:26 “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were *baptized* into Christ have *put on Christ*.” Put him on as a child is dressed before they go outside to meet the day. We are clothed in the garments of salvation and righteousness meaning that we are wearing the righteousness of Jesus Christ that He himself earned by His death and resurrection. That is our Christmas gift, that Martin Luther himself speaks of in the Large Catechism where he says “Christ himself is our garment, the garment of our righteousness and salvation.” He clothes us, in Himself. He gives us, the identity that He had from the moment He was born in a stable and placed in a manger. The identity of God’s child. The identity of a co-heir of the eternal joy that awaits all of us in heaven for all eternity.

Which means that now that we are clothed in His righteousness and fellow heirs of salvation, we cannot possibly push this amazing gift to the side. It can’t just sit under the tree until we take all the decorations down, throw it in a drawer, and never wear it, look at it, or care about it again. We must not reject the clothes that God has richly put on our backs. Baptism is the amazing moment when we are washed clean of our sin and clothed in Christ’s righteousness but it is not a “get into heaven” free card. It isn’t eternal life insurance, it is the creation of faith. Faith that receives the gifts that God gives, but faith that also can grow weak and die. Faith that is weakened when we give in to the temptations of the devil. Faith that is destroyed when we put ourselves before God and his promises. Faith that is damaged by this world and it’s promises of a better life if we simply give up the life that is to come. Romans 13:14 warns us about the dangers of giving into a life that is simply lived for the glorifications of the flesh and putting back on the disgusting rags of sin that we once were clothed in before our adoption as sons and daughters of God. “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Now that we have been sanctified; made holy by God, washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism and adopted as sons and daughters of the most high, we must not gratify the desires of our sinful flesh. We must not choose to walk back into the darkness. But we instead stay in the light. As Isaiah says, “For as the earth brings forth its sprouts and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all nations.” In the same way that a garden produces a crop, we produce fruits of faith and good works in the lives we live as evidence of the faith that exists in our hearts.

Now that we are God’s children, may we continue to live in the light. Live in the promises of God, and let our lights shine not just on Christmas but all throughout the year. May God’s Word destroy the rebellion of our hearts and lead us to repentance in the times that we don’t show God the gratitude and thanks He deserves for the gift of His righteousness and salvation in the garments that we proudly wear as His children. As we go forth from Christmas into the New Year, let us rejoice together, as it says at the beginning of our lesson today, and exult in the Lord throughout our days this coming year. For he clothes us in the practical gifts that we need to survive the destruction of the world, and yes, even survive this past year as 2020 will be remembered for years to come: He gives you salvation, life, and a faith that receives His forgiveness. God bless you this day and always with the gift that has given us salvation: Christ’s robe of eternal righteousness.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.