

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Christmas, January 3, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 459:1-4, 129:1, 371, 297:1-4, 428.
Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-9, Ephesians 2:1-10, Luke 4:14-21.
Sermon Text: Isaiah 61:10-11
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do you feel when you are wearing new, elegant clothes? You surely feel good. You probably are happy.

In the Word of God you heard today, you see that kind of feeling – and the happiness that it goes with it. But the Word of God gives you more than just a new dress or shirt and pants or a new necktie. Your new, elegant clothing is God’s righteousness. God’s righteousness, in its simplest definition, is sinlessness, moral perfection. Through faith in Christ God’s righteousness is given to us.

So you have these special clothes from God. We just sang about: “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 371:1) These clothes are given to us when we hear the words from God: “your sins are forgiven”.

And God’s righteousness is more than just something to make you feel good for a short time. It is a goodness, a robe, a dress, a gown, clothes that will get you into heaven. We receive it because God justifies us, that is, he declares us ‘not guilty’ because his Son Jesus Christ has paid the price for all our sins. And it is more than just an outward covering. It reaches to the heart. It is more than just feeling good. It is not just an emotion. But our feelings and emotions play a big part in our lives.

Do you think about this when you come to church? Do you realize that you will again be given the clean robe of Christ’s perfection? Do you realize when you leave the house to head to church and again when you come in the church door that you are going to hear something about the forgiveness of your sins?

And do you realize that you can have the clothing, the covering over your sins that God gives to you along with others who are in church? Everyone who is old enough to understand what Jesus Christ did for him or for her is here for that reason – to receive again God’s righteousness. And you have brought your young children here to hear the Word of God, too.

We all together begin our worship by repenting of our sins. That’s the first page and a half of our liturgy. And we especial think about repentance on a day in which we are to receive a visible sign and seal of God’s forgiveness – Christ’s body and blood given in bread and wine for the assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins of which we have just repented.

I want to remind you again this morning that

WE CAN “DELIGHT GREATLY IN THE LORD” AND REJOICE IN OUR GOD

1. **We have been clothed with garments of salvation.**
2. **It is “The Sovereign LORD [who] will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”**

This chapter In Isaiah begins with the Anointed One of the Lord speaking, as you heard in our Old Testament Lesson. The Anointed One is the Lord Jesus Christ, as you heard him tell us in our Gospel lesson that these words apply to him. Jesus himself fulfilled the words of Isaiah. Listen to the many blessings which will be given to mankind. You heard Jesus himself in our Gospel lesson say, in fulfillment of these words: *“the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to*

proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV)

Those are some marvelous promises here, which were literally fulfilled when Jesus came to earth. Then in a few verses we read about the joy, the happiness of the believer: ***“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, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”***

Think of some of the special clothes you may wear in a lifetime. For women they may include a wedding dress. This is probably a woman’s most special dress. And as weddings are planned, the bride usually gets to keep this dress. For men, their most special clothes may be a groom’s special clothes. These are sometimes rented clothes but they make you look your best. If you rent them, you can’t keep these but must return them. Well, the clothing that Christ gives you is special clothing that you get to keep. And wear. All the way to heaven!

So you have these special clothes from God. This is salvation. This is God’s righteousness

We daily repent of all our sins, and can be reminded of God’s salvation and the forgiveness of sins. But as we put these clothes on every day, we can’t keep these clothes pure and clean. We are going to get them dirty and want to have them cleaned so they are nice and fresh and new looking. That’s what our lives are – we get our lives dirty – filthy even – again and again.

That is what God calls sin, transgression, iniquity. We confess our sins using words to state that we are by nature, sinful and unclean. In a couple of chapters, Isaiah will remind us that ***“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

But right here Isaiah tells us – and these are Words intended for all mankind – ***“he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”*** The garments of salvation especially fit those who believe them. The unbeliever rejects them and often thinks that he or she can stand before God in his or her own clothes. The believer rejoices in God because ***“he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”*** With the speaker of these words, we, too, say and sing and feel with our whole hearts: ***“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.”***

Like Simeon, the man whom you heard about last week, you can rejoice, as our liturgy invites us to sing after receiving the assurance of the forgiveness of sins in the Lord’s Supper, ***“mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”*** Luke 2:30-32 (KJV)

Not only can you rejoice that you have received God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ ***“as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”*** you can get that cleaning every time you hear God’s words “your sins are forgiven.”

The first picture Isaiah used was a picture that the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham would immediately recognize and understand. Their normal, every-day clothes would be very plain and not elaborate at all. So he speaks of the pictures of a bride and a groom. He speaks of the bridegroom adorning his head like a priest! That was a familiar picture to Isaiah’s hearers. A wedding was a time when the bride and groom would wear all their finery – their best – and their jewelry. Scholars tell us that the groom was dressed as much like a king as possible. If he were rich enough to afford it, he wore a gold crown. Otherwise it might be a garland of fresh flowers. His garments might be scented with frankincense and myrrh, his sash might be a brilliantly colored silken one.

At her wedding, the bride would wear her best and all her jewels. The adorning of the bride was a very costly and elaborate affair. Much time was given to the preparation of her person. She was decked out with all the precious stones and jewels that the family had inherited from previous generations. Those who were too poor to afford much themselves would borrow what they could from their friends.

The comparison for the groom is made to the priests who would be clothed in special robes and a headdress or turban that was especially designed by God with ***“gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.”*** Exodus 28:5 (NIV)

This picture of the glorious clothes is used for the picture of Christ's salvation and God's righteousness.

Even when Jesus would physically heal people on earth, he often made it clear that something else, something more important was given to them – the forgiveness of sins. One such example is recorded in Matthew chapter 9 when some men ***“brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”*** Matthew 9:2 (KJV) With forgiveness of sins comes a clear conscience

But remember that these pictures of being marvelously dressed are not just a fashion show. They show us – they show you – how God ***“has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom.”*** Remember these words are about salvation and God's righteousness.

Jesus Christ earned that for you on the cross and he gives these things to you. You don't have to buy them – and you couldn't afford it! Jesus Christ redeemed you “not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”

Isaiah gives us another picture which reminds us where these gifts – this glorious clothing of salvation from God and God's righteousness – come from and it is not just to be hoarded by you for yourself.

“For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.” Does the seed make itself grow? No, of course not. You probably have some garden seeds in their packets that will never grow unless they are planted in soil. Then they will sprout and grow. Soil, water, fertilizer – all these things are provided by God and we are just the instruments God uses to plant them.

The great, supreme God Jehovah causes this growth and beauty. We don't reach out and grab it. We don't buy it like those new clothes that I talked about at the beginning of the sermon. This doesn't come about because of us. It comes about because Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth to obey the law of God perfectly in our place and then to be punished for breaking that law of God in our place.

You want to have the covering that God gives you. But it is something you want to rejoice in and share. You want to rejoice that everyone here today has repented and received that righteousness of God. You dare not complain that someone else doesn't deserve that robe of forgiveness. No one deserves it because of sin.

And it isn't just for the people in this room. God wants it to be shared with all people in all nations. And it is your calling to serve as God's servant to help give that Gospel away. As God's dearly loved children, we pray that God's righteousness would abound over all the earth, and that all the world – people in all nations – would yet join in celebrating the praises of God.

Isaiah was so excited that in the very next words of Scripture he writes: ***“For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”*** Isaiah 62:1-3 (NIV) May we every day rejoice in the robes God has given us! Amen.