

*¹⁰I will rejoice greatly in the LORD.
My soul will celebrate because of my God,
for he has clothed me in garments of salvation.
With a robe of righteousness he covered me,
like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest,
and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry.*

*¹¹For as the earth produces its growth,
and as a garden causes what has been sown to sprout up,
so God the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up
in the presence of all the nations.*

*¹For the sake of Zion I will not be silent.
For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth shining brightly,
and her salvation burns like a torch.*

*²Nations will see your righteousness,
and all kings will see your glory.
You will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will assign to you.*

*³Then you will be a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand,
and a royal diadem in the palm of your God.*

By now you've probably opened up all the Christmas presents you're getting this year. New stuff – some that will be cherished for years to come and some that may have already gone out with trash pickup. But what does the child in the manger bring us as we close out this Christmas season? He brings us action: new clothes, a new name, and a heart that treasures his people. Isaiah gives us some insight into what this coming Savior does for us and what that means about us.

There is some debate over who is speaking here – Christ or his Church? But whichever it is doesn't change the meaning here much. What Christ wins he shares with his Church, his beautiful bride of all believers everywhere. And so, the speaker rejoices here, not in the circumstances, but in the Lord himself. And what's the reason for his joy? God has clothed his people. And he hasn't just given them a nice Nike sweatsuit or a Rolex worth more than any car out in the parking lot. He's given the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness." And notice that these garments are given, not earned. Paul tells the Philippians, "For [Christ's]

sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith.” This rightness before God is never earned, no matter how hard you try. It is a gift – unasked, unforced, and unearned.

Isaiah pushes the imagery further though. He wants us to really understand what this righteousness is that we have from God. We’re taken to be guests at a beautiful wedding. And as the music starts to play, we turn to see the groom. He’s dressed to the nines and has clearly spent more time on his appearance today than he has every day in the last year combined. He looks sharp because when he lies on his deathbed, this day will be one of the five most important in his life. It’s the day he gets to have and hold his bride for the rest of his life.

But then, if you thought the groom was beaming in splendor, the bride walks in, and she’s wearing the whitest dress you’ve ever seen. Not a hair is out of place. There are no wrinkles or blemishes on any part of her. Around her neck is a necklace that shines like nothing you’ve seen before, with diamonds so big and so valuable that you assume they must have been lent by some museum. Look out Dianna and Kate! This bride and groom puts the royal weddings to shame.

Friends, this is how God dresses you. Completely. Beautifully. And he dresses you this way in Christ. You know the trade. Jesus took your sins. You took his righteousness. He became nothing to God so that you could become everything. You shine in the sight of God because Christ dulled himself to make you shiny.

But here’s our problem. We don’t always want to wear this righteousness of Jesus. We want to wear our self-made clothing. And the bigger problem? Spiritually speaking, we don’t have a clue how to sew. And so, we try to stitch together makeshift coverings that hide our guilt. We put on selective morality, where we highlight our seeming successes and hide our many failings. We put on misleading reputations, where the approval of others becomes our sole gauge of how good we are, and anything we do behind the scenes doesn’t count. And we put on useless comparison with others, where all that matters is that we run just a little faster than our neighbor as the hounds of hell chase us down. All these garments are ugly and useless. We think they keep us close to God, but they only serve to drive us further and further away.

There is nothing stupider than turning down God’s garments of salvation because you want to wear your own felt-made clothes of self-righteousness. And yet, even though we try to slip on our clown clothes again and again for some do-it-yourself salvation, God steps in, calls us to repentance, and gives us those priceless garments of forgiveness and eternal beauty. Know, brothers and sisters, that you are beautiful to God because of what he did for you on the cross. You are precious to him because he put his robe on you in baptism, whiter than the whitest baptismal gown. You are sharply dressed in the righteousness of Christ.

New clothing is fine and good, but there is certainly more under the tree. I remember as little kids our parents would have us open our clothes first. They knew we were not as excited about the Christmas sweaters as much as we were for the toys and games. Jesus has more under the tree than just clothes too. He comes to call us by a new name. And that's good, because our old names stunk.

Who were we without Jesus? We wanted to call ourselves successful, respected, and important. We did everything we could to try and earn those titles. And maybe, from a worldly perspective, we did. We won the respect from the people at work. We crafted a reputation that made people use the word "important" when talking about us. But how about God?

Does God think the Fortune 500 CEOs are most important? Does God measure success by bank account or social media followers? Just look at Abraham. God counted him righteous, not by the number of servants he had or the economic impact that his ranch brought to the surrounding region. God counted him righteous by faith.

Here's the truth! Apart from Christ, we can call ourselves whatever names we want – rich, appreciated, valuable. We can give ourselves those pep talks in the mirror every morning until we're blue in the face. But those old names will still stick to us – sinner, guilty, failure, unworthy.

What are these new names God give us, though? These names that Christ and his Church can't keep silent about? These names that can't help but shout of God's grace to nations and kings? God tells us here and throughout scripture. In verse four, right after our section for today, God calls us "My Delight Is in Her" He delights in his Church, those credited as righteous through faith, just like Abraham. But what else does he call us? Redeemed. Sanctified. His own. Get the picture? Maybe, if we had to distill it all down, we'd just use the simple word "Christian." We are in Christ, and as his fellow heirs, we receive all the gifts of his grace.

In our age of identity and hyper-focused box checking, God offers us something so much more fulfilling. He doesn't tell you your importance is found in how many friends you have or even if you like yourself all that much. He tells you that your importance is found in being his child, a child of the King of the Universe. When you fail, and you and I fail a lot, God invites you to come to him as his child to confess your sins. And he doesn't publicly shame you before forgiveness. He doesn't send you on errands to make up for it yourself. He offers free and full forgiveness in Christ. Treasure this name. Treasure this special relationship God has bestowed on you.

And this really brings us to the last gift under the tree. God has clothed you with his righteousness. He's named you as his child and heir. But now he gives you joy in who you are to him. God delights in his people. And that may sound obvious, but think about what these

people were. We were dead in sin and enemies of God. There was no greatness that we had to offer God if only he would make us his. In other words, God did not need us one bit. The need was only on our side. Yet, God calls us his crown here, his highest glory. And we are a crown in his hand because of Jesus.

Do you take joy in being God's treasured possession? Do you rejoice that even though you are so deeply flawed, God still holds you in his hand? Or, do you start to believe that God's love is conditional? "God saved me, but now I must keep him happy." Do you start to believe that it is only halfhearted? "God loves me, but surely not with delight." Stop living with chronic guilt. Stop your joylessness that treats God's grace as a theory and not a reality. You mean the world to him. It's why he was so willing to sacrifice his Son to save you. It's why he will not let you sit in the stench of your doubt, but lifts you out of it again and again by word and sacrament.

Look at the presents your Savior brings under the tree. None of them are deserving of the trash. Wear that robe of Christ's righteousness with joy. Cherish that new name that marks you as his for all eternity. Rejoice in the fact that God treasures you enough to bend his almighty power toward your best interests. These are gifts of his grace, his undeserved love. So cling to them. Cherish them. Amen.