

**Christmas 1C Dec. 30, 2018 Colossians 3:12-17, Luke 2:41-52**  
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*New Clothes for Christmas*

Grace and Peace to you from God who is the source of all life, and from Jesus the Christ, who brings light and hope to a world in need - every day in every place. Amen

Just 6 days ago, we were singing Silent Night and basking in the glowing candles of anticipation - anticipating the myriad of emotions as we celebrated the humble birth of the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths.

It's a sweet and compelling story - complete with lowly shepherds tending their flocks in the fields outside Bethlehem, and the deafening sound of the angel chorus singing Glory Hallelujah! to the heavens.

We hear it every year. And still, we are captivated by the majesty of it all - and by what is stirred so deeply in our hearts.

And so it seems - a little anti-climactic TODAY - to envision Jesus as a 12 year old. Do you feel as if we missed something?

To catch us up... Jesus was circumcised just 8 days after his birth and given his name at the temple, where Joseph and Mary made their required offering (two turtle doves) on his behalf. At the temple, they listened to prophets Simeon and Anna, who spoke to them of his destiny. (Luke 2:21-40)

The next thing we know Jesus is 12 and wearing his traveling clothes on the round trip journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover. He was 12 years old - the age of reason for a Hebrew boy - but still an adolescent in his parents' eyes.

He is missing from their sight for 3 days. But, eventually, he was found back in Jerusalem - back at the temple - in deep theological conversation with the rabbis - who were amazed at what he knew.

In the following chapter Jesus is a grown man - standing at the river Jordan - and his clothes are sopping wet from his baptism by John and the Holy Spirit of God. (Luke 3:1-23)

Jesus grew up, like all of us do, if we're lucky.  
He grew out of his swaddling cloths, out of his childhood wrappings,  
out of his 12 year old adolescence -  
and into the clothing of a man on a mission from God. His mission -  
to bring hope to the hopeless and light to those who walked in darkness.

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In the letter to the Colossians we heard this morning,  
we can hear the writer urging congregations to do the same -  
to TRY ON some new clothes from God.

He said, Clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness, with humility and patience, with forgiveness and love.

- Compassion and kindness for the lonely ones, the hungry ones, the jobless ones.
- Compassion and kindness for those who grieve... patience and humility when you bear with those who struggle with depression, or emotional and physical distance from loved ones,
- Clothe yourselves with love for those who find themselves orphaned, separated from their parents, their siblings, their children.

The message from Colossians is an enduring one. It's a message for adults to be sure - certainly our 12 year olds can grasp the meaning... Often it's the smallest children who are courageous enough to live it out.

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Some years ago, after the fall of Communism in Russia, two American Christian teachers answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage.<sup>1</sup>

About 100 boys and girls, who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage.

The teachers tell the story in their own words:

It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas.

We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem.

Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger.

Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid yellow strips in the manger for straw.

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<sup>1</sup> *Two Babies in a Manger* [Author Unknown] 1994. We have not found the source for this story. However, it is true that after the fall of Communism, the Russian government welcomed many American Christians to be guest teachers in Russian schools and to help restore a respect for morals and ethics.

Small squares of flannel were used for the baby's blanket.

A doll-like baby was cut out from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The children were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help.

All went well until I got to one table where little 6 yr old Misha sat next to his finished project.

And I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger.

Through the translator, I asked the boy why there were two babies in the manger.

Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at this completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously.

For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately –

until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger. Then Misha started to ad-lib.

He made up his own ending to the story as he said,

“And when Mary laid the baby in the manger,

Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay.

I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa,  
so I don't have any place to stay.

Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't,  
because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did.

But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much,

so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift.

I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift.

“So I asked Jesus, ‘If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?’  
And Jesus told me, ‘If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift  
anybody ever gave me.’

So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me  
and He told me I could stay with him – for always.”

Little Mischa discovered a kinship with a baby who would know something  
about having no place to stay.

Mischa knew how it felt to have nothing - no possessions, no place to call  
home. He had nothing more than the clothing on his back.

But in his version of the Christmas story,

he was clothed with compassion and kindness and humility.

And he found someone who would never abandon him, never abuse him,  
someone who would stay with him – for always!

Jesus came into the world, an infant, born in the most humble  
surroundings, and he came bearing gifts.

Gifts of new clothes for all of us.

Gifts of gratitude and forgiveness, patience and humility,  
kindness and compassion.

Gifts of love for all.

Jesus came to show us the face of God - in the faces of the smallest, the  
poorest, the weakest, the most humble.

Jesus came to save us - and the world - from sin and death.

And all he had to give for it - was his entire life.

In this coming new year, my prayer is for you to delight in these new clothes for Christmas.

“You are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved  
Bear with one another... clothe yourselves in love  
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts  
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly  
And be thankful.”

And hold on to the promise that Jesus will be with you  
Forever and always.

Amen