

Title: Christmas Clothes

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Scripture: [Matthew 2:13-23](#)

Text: [Colossians 3:12-17](#)

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We are about to start a new decade. It is hard to believe that we are twenty years into the third millennium. But in just 3 days, the year will come off your tongue easier than 2019. Just 2020. Of course, it stands to confuse the year with vision. Wouldn't it be nice to have 2020 vision in 2020? Would that we could have that 2020 vision for any new year. It's why people make resolutions. Resolutions are a way of seeing into a new year, hoping that you can make the year look a particular way. To see it, you have to imagine it. Have you made your resolutions yet?

Research tells us that 40-45% of Americans make resolutions and 76% will these keep their resolution at least one week! The good news is, make it a week and you are on your way. The drop off between weeks one and two is only 5%. Half of the people who make resolutions are still at it after six months.¹

The fact that the federal government tracks New Year's resolutions is something I find odd. No one from the government has ever asked me about what I resolve to do in an upcoming year. According to the web site, the first on the list last year was about exercise. Fifty-nine percent of resolvers want to increase the amount of exercise. They didn't quantify how much, just more. This resolution was followed closely by eating better, saving money and losing weight.² So, three of the top four relate to our physical bodies.

Sadly, there isn't one resolution on the list of 20 which is spiritual. There is a resolution about style. Eighteen percent want to dress better to improve appearance. Maybe that's about wearing Christmas clothes. Did you get any Christmas clothes? Wearing what you got for Christmas might be a good thing. What did you get?

Many years ago I was leading a children's sermon on the Sunday after Christmas. I was wearing a new tie which I got for Christmas. We talked about wearing Christmas clothes. A little boy asked, "What clothes did Jesus get for Christmas?" Before I could answer, a girl blurted out, "That's easy, he got clothes that he could grow into." "Oh, how do you know that?" I asked. "It says in the Bible that they wrapped him in swaddling clothes. His Christmas clothes were so big that they swallowed him."

The old Revised Standard Version Bible and the King James Version both describe Jesus' clothes as swaddling clothes. "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:12) The newer versions of the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version both use bands of cloth. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:12) A Christmas doesn't go by without someone asking what happened to the swaddling clothes. There was nothing swaddling about them. They were tight bands of cloth that severely restricted the child's movement. It was believed that it was necessary to bind the child for him to develop straight limbs and good posture.

Are you wearing what you got at Christmas? When you visited the manger, did it change you? Are you different because of Christmas?

The apostle Paul asked the same question. It might have been around Christmas although we don't know if it was. We have a lot of questions about his letter to the church in Colossae. We know that it was a church south and west of Ephesus, a congregation which the apostle Paul didn't travel to. We know it was a congregation that had a major theological dispute. It might have been about how to worship or what they believed. There are lots of theories but no one knows for sure. But Paul tries to address the controversy, then he says, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). That sounds to me like, "Wear what you got at Christmas." Much of the letter to the Christians in Colossae sounds like that.

For instance, he begins the letter saying that he is thankful for them because "...we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." (Colossians 1:4-5) We started the season of Advent preparing for the birth of Jesus with hope. Do you remember? The first candle of the Advent wreath symbolizes hope. We remember men and women who were waiting patiently for the coming Messiah. For over five hundred years, they waited and finally, God sent Jesus. God's Christmas gift is the hope that God will act again. At Christmas, the carol says, "the hopes and fears of all the years" are met in Jesus. Hope is a recipe for a richer life and we need to wear it into the New Year.

What do you hope for in 2020? Is it something personal or something for those around you? Or is it both. If God can transform the world with a baby born in a manger, God can transform your life but you need hope. At Christmas, we say yes to hope and need to wear it into the New Year.

Paul told the church that they need to wear peace. He said, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body." (Colossians 3:15) The irony of Christmas is we want the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts but we create a celebration that makes it almost impossible to experience peace. There is a part of me that is always grateful that Christmas is over and I know you have this feeling too.

Paul would remind us that peace is an internal experience, not external. In a world that is loud, harsh, angry, broken, Jesus is gentle, caring, compassionate. He offers tranquility, serenity, calm.

What peace do you need to discover in the New Year? Resolve to connect more with the Prince of Peace, to recreate daily that moment when "all is calm and all is bright", to discover the peace of Christ that rules your heart. At Christmas, we say yes to peace and we need to wear it into the New Year.

And we say yes to joy. It's the third candle of our wreath and Paul has a description for it. He says joy happens when "...the word of Christ dwells in you richly... and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God." (Colossians 3:16) Joy is more than singing your favorite Christmas carol or jumping up and down because Santa was good to you. Paul sees joy as gratitude in the heart that comes with living in the word and knowing it is alive in you. It is the joy of Christmas; the joy of faith.

Where will you find joy in 2020? Will it come in living in the Word? Will it come in the spring when reminded of the new life we have in the resurrection of Jesus? Resolve to let your heart be filled with gratitude and joy. At Christmas, we say yes to joy and wear it into the New Year.

And we say yes to love. Of all things, we are to wear love into the New Year. Paul says: "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Colossians 3:14) We have the power to love others. Husbands, wives, children, parents, friends. But do we love enough to love the world? In the birth of Jesus, God demonstrates His love for us, God's desire to be closer to us, to bridge the distance that has grown up between God and God's beloved children, us.

Where do you need to express love in 2020? Is it in a broken relationship that needs God's healing power? Is it for someone unlovable in your life that presses and tests you in every encounter? Where has distance grown up when what you want is to be closer to someone? At Christmas, we say yes to love and wear it into the New Year.

If you say yes to hope, peace, love, and joy, you'll receive the perfect gift, chosen by God for you. When you have hope, peace, love, and joy because

you've got Jesus. Paul says it this way, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17) That's another way of saying, you are wearing the uniform of Christ. You are a representative, an ambassador.

Do people see you wearing the clothes of Christ? Do they witness in you, in every word and deed, the manner of Christ? Do you draw people to him by being yourself? What would it look like if we wore the clothes of Christ?

I don't know what we'd look like but whenever I see the crazy Colts fans dressed up, painted up, and tattooed with horseshoes, I think, "There is no mistaking the commitment that these fans have to their team, even in a poor season." When it comes to Jesus, do people see the same in you?" We all need to resolve to wear our Christmas clothes into the New Year.

Howard Thurman was the dean of the Rankin Chapel at Howard University, a great theologian and witness in the 20th century. He died in 1981 but the years before that, those who knew Thurman knew that he wore his Christmas clothes year-round. It is no wonder that he wrote this challenge, something of a New Year's resolution for you and me to live by.

 "When the song of the angels is stilled,
 when the star in the sky is gone,
 when the kings and princes are home,
 when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
 the work of Christmas begins:
 to find the lost,
 to heal the broken,
 to feed the hungry,
 to release the prisoner,
 to rebuild the nations,
 to bring peace among the people,
 to make music in the heart."

We've said yes to hope, joy, love, and peace at Christmas. We've said yes to God's perfect gift of yes of Jesus. Now, let's clothe ourselves in the uniform of Christ-likeness, let's wear our Christmas clothes into the New Year, the new decade, and beyond. Let's feed the hungry, shelter the lost, work for peace, respect the earth, and share the love of Jesus with our families, friends, and enemies. Resolve to do that today and the new year you imagine will be the one you get.

¹ Statistics on New Years Resolutions, <http://www.proactivechange.com/resolutions/statistics.htm>

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/953560/new-years-resolution-us/>