

Sermon & Prayers for December 26, 2021  
First Sunday of Christmas, Year C  
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Prayer of the Day

Shine into our hearts the light of your wisdom, O God, and open our minds to the knowledge of your word, that in all things we may think and act according to your good will and may live continually in the light of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Colossians 3:12-17

<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>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.

Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup>Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." <sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, beloved children of God, from God our Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

What are you wearing for New Year's?

“As hard as it is to believe, 2021 is finally coming to an end,” says In Style Magazine online, “which means that if you haven't figured out what you're wearing for New Year's Eve just yet, now's the time.”

The article goes on to offer encouragement to “switch things up” this year: “While there's nothing wrong with putting on a glamorous dress for the occasion – which you can do regardless of whether you're attending a big bash or staying in – why not switch things up by rocking a jumpsuit, skirt and top, or pair of dressy pants?”<sup>1</sup>

Believe it or not, the scripture texts for this First Sunday of Christmas have some fashion advice for the new year as well, encouragement to switch things up a bit...

How about sporting the swaddling clothes of the baby born in Bethlehem?

Or the dust-ridden sandals of the world-walking Jesus?

How about the towel in which the foot-washing Savior wrapped himself?

Of course, there's always the crown of thorns of the crucified Christ or the bright white robes of the risen One.

What will you be wearing as the new year begins?

The fashionista otherwise known as the Apostle Paul suggests clothing ourselves with Christ.

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

As those who have been washed by the water and the Word, marked indelibly with the cross of Christ and sealed with his Spirit forever – chosen, holy, beloved – we, like the near-adolescent Jesus, are called to first and foremost be about our Father's business and to wear the uniform that reminds ourselves and those we meet who and whose we really are.

We are called to clothe ourselves in ways that reflect Emmanuel, God with us and for us, and with and for every person we will encounter throughout the new year, clothes like:

...the swaddling clothes of compassion and kindness,  
...the dust-ridden sandals of humility, and meekness, and patience.

And, as hard as it is most days in our demanding, divided, and dividing world, we chosen, holy and beloved ones are called to wrap ourselves in the foot-washing towel of forgiveness, and bear the crown of self-giving love, and slip over our shoulders and offer to others the mantle of peace.

Of course, we can only put on these clothes in the power of the Spirit, that most holy and helpful valet who dresses us each morning and adjusts our outfits throughout the day. The clothes become more comfortable and more naturally a part of us as we find ways, as Paul puts it, to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in our hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

During this lingering pandemic, I have observed that for many of us gathering in-person for worship had been not only a primary way in which we went to the closet to put on the clothes of Christ, but the only way we paused pre-pandemic amid stress-filled, busy days to let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us.

When we have been unable to gather at all or have had to gather in new and unfamiliar ways, many of us found ourselves floundering spiritually. We developed a tendency to wear other clothes that have been – shall we say – less attractive or life-giving than the clothes of Christ.

This Christmastide and at the turn of a new year is a good time to establish or to re-establish regular ways of letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly and for the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts...to be clothed again with the resurrection robes of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and cross-formed love...as individuals, as families, and communities of faith.

Maybe it's time to take ten minutes of what would otherwise be spent on social media to pray or meditate, give thanks, or engage scripture. Perhaps some of this could be done with others through social media.

Or what about giving up a little of the binge-watching of movies or TV series to sing, or play that instrument that's gathering dust, or to listen to music, or gaze at art that inspires and hums with the harmonies of God's goodness and grace afoot in the world?

We can also take some of the time we give to reading endless newsfeeds or watching our favorite news programs to read or listen to books that are windows into the incarnation of divine grace and glory in human life...and then finding ways to discuss them or share them with family and friends, even at a distance.

And don't forget the spiritual practice of serving others throughout the year as energetically as we have at Christmas.

After a frantic search, Mary and Joseph found Jesus – unexpectedly – in his Father's house, going about his Father's business. Amazed at his understanding and his answers, Mary and the world began to see the truth of who Jesus is for us and for the world. So it is for us when we

engage spiritual practices in search of Jesus and, like Mary, take the time to treasure all these things in our hearts.

Dear people of God, as we stow away the ornaments and take down the shimmering lights, as we drink the last of the eggnog and craft the resolutions that we hope to keep in the new year, may God grant that we will also let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly and the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, that clothed in Christ by the power of the Spirit, whatever we do, in word or deed, we'll do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Thanks be to God. Amen

### Prayers of Intercession<sup>ii</sup>

Joining our voices with the heavenly host and Christians throughout time and space, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

You come to us in gatherings of your church across the globe. Unite us with those who celebrate your birth even when they are weighed down by grief, loss, poverty, hunger, or injustice.

Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

You come to us in the diverse splendor of the universe. Grant us the humility to trust our place in the network of creation, that we live in service to you and the natural world. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

You come to us through relationships of many kinds: families, friendships, communities, and nations. Guide us in these relationships, that we recognize the Christ child in one another and show your love to those most vulnerable. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

You come to us through people whom the world forgets. Poor shepherds and an imprisoned Paul announced your good news. Send your Spirit to all who are imprisoned, struggling with addiction, unwell, or in any need this day, especially those we carry in our hearts this day.

Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

You come to us in acts of justice and forgiveness. Open our hearts to forgive one another, without permitting injustice. Supply us with the wisdom to be clothed with love, binding all things together in perfect harmony. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

You come to us through those who have died yet live with you forever, especially those we name now. We give thanks for Stephen, deacon and martyr, who gave his life to tell the story of your love. Merciful God,

**receive our prayer.**

Rejoicing in your Word made flesh among us, we commend these prayers to you, confident of your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

**Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> In Style Magazine online: <https://www.instyle.com/fashion/new-years-eve-outfit-ideas>.

<sup>ii</sup> Prayers, including the Prayer of the Day, adapted from SundaysandSeasons.com.