



**Advent Reflection for Friday, December 22, 2023**

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**Isaiah 61:8-11**

For I, the Lord, love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.  
Their descendants shall be known among the nations  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.  
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;  
my whole being shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the earth brings forth its shoots  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

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**Today's Reflection is by Max Thorn**

Can you remember a time when someone you love surprised you with an item of clothing as a gift? Maybe it was a pair of shoes for your birthday, or some other special occasion. Maybe it was a coat for Christmas. I remember how it felt as a child to get socks for Christmas. "How boring!" I thought.

Reading today's passage from Isaiah, I surprised myself by returning to the clothing imagery:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;

my whole being shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

These verses mark a subtle shift in voice that I nearly missed on my first reading: the prophet moves from speaking God's message to God's people, to speaking for himself in the first person and his relationship with God. It's always a bit risky when reading prophetic literature to identify with the prophet, rather than the audience. Yet in this case, I can't help it. And it has to do with clothes.

That's because recently, I got married. And for me and my partner of ten years, Emma, as for many other couples, our wedding was an occasion to relish in choosing what we wore. Months before the ceremony, in a midtown tailor's shop, I thumbed through books of black wool swatches to find just the right thickness and texture for a tuxedo. I discovered I have strong opinions about peaked versus notched jacket lapels. I splurged on a pair of patent leather pumps to round out my look. I was very satisfied. And when the time came to deck and adorn ourselves in our special garments, Emma and I dressed slowly. I savored the anticipation of our impending union. As we made the short walk together, just the two of us, to the church where our relationship would be consecrated, I felt a level of solemnity, joy, and awe that I simply wouldn't have felt if I had thrown on the jeans I wore the day before and the first t-shirt I saw in my drawer.

Like that slow walk to the church, Advent, for me, is a season of solemnity, joy, and awe. It is a time of anticipation and watchfulness for God's restorative work in the world, of which God's incarnation in human form as Jesus was a signal, shining like a flare in the night sky. As I've listened to the prior reflections these past three weeks, I've heard some rather harsh words from Isaiah, whom God used to call God's people back to integrity. Prophets are not usually very popular, but they are necessary. In reflecting on today's reading, I've met a softer side of Isaiah. God clothes Isaiah with salvation and righteousness. And Isaiah, looking for a metaphor to help explain what this felt like, compared God to two people putting on their finest clothes and jewelry in anticipation of their sacred union. When, as we pray, "God's kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven," how much more so will God delight in dressing each one of us with righteousness and salvation, and we in him? Amen.



Max Thorn is our Ministry Associate at Holy Apostles. He is currently in the diocesan discernment process to become a priest. He previously worked as an academic librarian at Queens College-City University of New York, where he was also an active organizer in his labor union. He is married and lives in Crown Heights.