

Opening the Word: Radiant in glory

Clothing expresses our identity. It shapes how we're viewed in the public sphere. The man who wears a flannel shirt, puffy vest and large plastic glasses appears as a hipster (whether or not he runs an artisanal cheese shop in Brooklyn).

In the prophet Baruch, Israel is dressed in mourning cloth, repenting for her sins of idolatry. She has defrauded the poor, ignored the dictates of the Law and made the Temple an abomination.

She is not the Bride of the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. She is a widow, abandoned because of her sins.

But then something remarkable happens. God gives Israel a makeover. Israel receives a cloak of justice from God, one that points not toward Israel's wealth. Instead, the beauty of the garment of justice is intended to display "the glory of the Eternal One" (Bar 5:2).

[Second Sunday of Advent – Dec. 9, 2018](#)

BAR 5:1-9

PS 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

PHIL 1:4-6, 8-11

LK 3:1-6

Israel will be dressed like a queen, reigning not through her own power. She will be the first fruit of God's radiant glory.

And there will be more fruits. All the children of Israel who left during the Babylonian captivity will come back. The enemies of Israel will come to adore the living God.

God's glory will appear among us, signified through the glory of Israel now clothed in the radiance of divine justice. This is what the prophet Baruch hopes and longs for.

In the Gospel of Luke, what Baruch has hoped for has now been fulfilled: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar ..." (Lk 3:1).

The Gospel of Luke includes such historical detail because Israel has once more been made captive. Israel suffers from the burdens of Roman law, a power-hungry governor in Pontius Pilate, and a puppet king in Herod. Israel is dressed in mourning cloth, longing for God to restore the glorious kingdom that once was.

At this moment in her history, God speaks. He speaks through the last of all prophets, John the Baptist, who declares with a booming voice that it's time to return to Israel.

John, dressed in the clothing of repentance, announces in the very words of the prophet Isaiah that the time of glory is at hand: "The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk 3:5-6).

This prophecy of John is addressed to each of us. God wants to clothe us in the glorious radiance of justice. We are to be bedecked in the self-sacrificial love of the Word made flesh.

Hugh of St. Victor wrote about the Church as a bridal hall, where each Christian is dressed for our glorious wedding to God. The Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, has provided us with our bridal clothing through the Scriptures, the sacraments and the works of mercy.

During Advent, we are to put on the glorious crown of the Scriptures, meditating constantly on the love of God made manifest through Christ.

We are to wear the glimmering jewelry of the sacraments, receiving the grace of confession and the Eucharist. We are to be robed in the glory of mercy and justice as we feed the hungry, clothe the naked and welcome the immigrant.

The Church is embroiled right now in scandal, dressed not in God's radiance but power and prestige. The way forward for the renewal of the Church is to put on new clothing. To be wrapped not in the mantle of secrecy and cynicism, but in God's radiant justice.

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