

Whatever Shall We Wear A Message Preached by W. Dale Osborne

December 30, 2018 Lectionary Texts: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

Merry Christmas to one and all! I am grateful to God that you are here in worship today. I praise our Divine Creator for bringing us together in this place at this very time. My voice praises the God of Love who calls us together in safety and harmony no matter our grievances with any family or friends who failed to deliver the gift we were dreaming of on Christmas Eve. I praise the Living God for rain and sunshine and the sounds my hound dog makes when she recognizes the scent of a human friend she has been missing. Our voices can sing for joy every time we recall the hope of the poet who sang Psalm 148 thousands of years ago.

Now, I have a question for you - did you receive clothing in any form this Christmas? Did you find socks in your stockings or gloves in a gift bag under the tree? Maybe you received a sweater, fancy shirt or a new pair of bib overalls. All of these are significant and practical gifts. Much to be thankful for if you received any such gift of apparel. Now, a more specific clothing question – did any of you find a linen ephod under the tree this year? Hmmmm, not so many hands on that item. An ephod is a garment mentioned several times in the Old Testament. It is primarily considered a garment worn by a Priest of Yahweh who was associated with the temple. It was a considered a fairly intricate piece of clothing. Sewing together a linen ephod would have been no small task for a seamstress or tailor working painstakingly with only their fingers as tools of the craft. The fact that none of us received a linen ephod this Christmas does not mean we are unloved. It simply means that they have gone out of style in the Judeo Christian world.

In our text from 1st Samuel which Stephanie read for us we are exposed to the term linen ephod. Much more than that specific term though, we are exposed to two parents who showed great love to their child and to the God who gave them all life. Hannah, a mother who longed for a child to love and support has given her young son Samuel to the service of God in the holy temple. Samuel is a young boy training to become a high priest for the Jewish people. Eli is his old and constant teacher. His training takes place miles and miles away from the parents who love him and who must long to see him. So every year Hannah and Elkanah make the journey to the temple to offer their sacrifice. Because Samuel is a growing young boy, each year Hannah crafts a lovely little robe for him. It will fit better than the last one as he has grown in stature and service to God. It will fit better than the last one for it has new and abiding love sewn into its fabric by Hannah. It will fit Samuel better than last year's robe because it represents and covers the true sacrifice that she is making to God. Her sacrifice is the fruit of her womb. Hannah's sacrifice is a little boy barely weaned from his mother's comfort and sustenance. Her sacrifice is Samuel, time and time again. Samuel chose to wear a robe and a linen ephod. Whatever shall we wear?

In our gospel lesson from Luke we are made aware of another young boy who was destined to wear clothing he might not have fully chosen for himself. Mary and Joseph, like Hannah and Elkanah before them make a yearly pilgrimage. The latter made a journey to Shiloh for sacrificial giving. The former make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to remember the Passover and make a sacrifice they may not fully understand. While in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph and all the faithful Jews who gathered there made their way to the temple. It was their custom. It was their familial and cultural ritual. This trip, from Nazareth to Jerusalem was not unlike the trip from Tennessee to Pennsylvania in search of homemade pumpkin pie. Sometimes there's no place like home for the holidays. For Mary and Joseph and Jesus, there was no place like Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. God had provided their ancestors, the Israelites, with a way out of bondage in Egypt.

Their lives of slavery, plagues and dominant oppression brought on by Pharaoh's hardened heart were moving to a promised land. The angel of death had spared their first born children hundreds of years prior to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. They took Jesus to Jerusalem as was their custom. While they were there, Jesus spent hours in the temple speaking to the teachers and priests because that was the clothing this gifted young rabbi chose to wear. The clothing of knowledge given and received. The clothing of travel from village to village. The clothing of teaching, healing and prophetic speech. The clothing of sacrifice. The clothing that would eventually become robes of gambling gain won or lost by soldiers who guarded Jesus' crucifixion. We all know that Mary and Joseph left Jerusalem and traveled a full day's journey without Jesus. They assumed he was somewhere in the caravan of faithful travelers. Losing their son for a day caused Mary and Joseph much anxiety and parental fear. Perhaps it was a ritual of preparation for them. They were wearing the clothing of concern even as Mary treasured these things in her mother's heart. Have you worn that clothing of concern for a child or loved one who for a moment or an eternity felt lost to you? Whatever shall we wear?

A letter was written to a small young church thousands of years ago. Attributed to Paul, the letter to the church at Colossae was filled with instruction and warnings for it was rumored that its members preached some heresies connected to angel worship. Written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the letter holds some solid truths for our church today. It answers, in its own way, the question posed by my sermon title. The next time you are not sure what fabrics to place on your body prior to work or school or church, consider its teachings on fashion. The next time you say to yourself, "Whatever shall I wear?", remember Paul's faithful instructional answer –

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.

Thanks be to God, with these instructions in mind, we need not fear the fashion police nor the future that the Divine One is revealing to us.

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His mother Hannah used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD"; and then they would return to their home.

Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people.

Colossians 3:12-17

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. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Creator through him.

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 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. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Creator's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.