

Isaiah 61:10

Today we light the pink candle on our Advent wreath. There may be some who see this and wonder, “Does this mean that it’s a girl?” Throughout Advent we see the blue color before us. But today, on the Third Sunday in this penitential season, there is a glimmer of pink. It’s the only time in the Church Year that we see this color. We see green, white, red, purple, and blue, but never do we see pink, until today, just days away from Christmas. The blue of Advent can serve to remind us that a boy will be born in a stable. Yet when this male Child is fully grown, He will suffer and die on a cross for His bride, the church. And so how fitting that today, even as we look for the birth of Christ, we light the pink candle. Let it serve to remind us that everything Jesus did, He did for us, His precious bride.

We had a bride standing up here before God’s altar yesterday as Scott and Amanda were joined as husband and wife. Now everyone would agree that the groom looked good. Handsome, they would say. But it’s the bride, they all say, who is beautiful. Never does the groom outdo the bride. You look at any wedding photo, and the groom always looks sharp, but compared to the bride standing next to him, he’s nothing at all to look at. People don’t “ooh” and “aah” at a wedding over the groom. They gasp with delight when they see the bride.

I recall at the time of my wedding that the photographer took a special picture of just my bride. But there was no picture taken of just me. Where would that have hung? Certainly not on the wall of our home. The groom has to be at the wedding, but people are there to see the bride.

And so it is that the Prophet Isaiah says in our text: *“He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest...and as a bride adorns herself..”*

As I stand up here looking out at you this morning, I can say that without a doubt, you are the most beautiful bride there ever was. This pink candle is for you. Whether you are male or female, you are Christ’s bride and you are beautiful.

But don’t get a big head. People do not gasp at a bride’s appearance the day before her wedding. They marvel at her beauty when she is adorned with her wedding dress. And so your beauty comes from that which you wear-- *“the garments of salvation,”* says Isaiah, *“the robe of righteousness.”* Take away this wedding garment, and the beauty goes away with it.

What I’m saying is that you and I are not born beautiful. We are born ugly, full of sin, marred in our appearance because of what sin does to us. Even though your parents thought you were a beautiful baby, God did not. He did not take one look at you and exclaim, “Oh, how beautiful!”

You were not born beautiful, but Jesus was, for He was born without sin--holy, innocent, and righteous. But friend, in your baptism into Christ, you are reborn as a beautiful child. There in the waters of Holy Baptism, God laid upon you the garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness. He covered you with Jesus, for He is your Salvation and Righteousness.

Your beauty, therefore, is nothing apart from Christ. But in Him you are also, as He is, holy and blameless, innocent and righteous, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 5. This means that there are no wedding pictures of just the bride. For the bride by herself has no beauty. Our beauty comes from Christ our Groom.

When you see wedding photos today, the groom is usually wearing a tuxedo. He looks sharp, but not as beautiful as his bride. What does Jesus wear in our wedding photo with Him? Not a sharp looking tuxedo, but a sharp, splintery cross. This is His garment. This is what He wears to your wedding.

And He must. For only by wearing the crown of thorns, the stripes and wounds of the whips, and the nails holding Him to the cross, does Jesus make you His beautiful bride. The garment you wear today, salvation and righteousness, is yours to wear only because Jesus covered Himself with your sins. He exchanged His beauty for your ugliness. He traded His holiness for your wretchedness. That's why the cross is ugly. That's our ugliness up there. That's our filthiness, our death. But that's why you are so beautiful to God. For He sees you now covered in Christ.

Every bride eventually removes her wedding dress. She puts it in a box and stores it away. No bride continues to wear her wedding gown day and night for as long as she lives. But you do. Once God clothes you with Christ, He never unclothes you. You never outgrow your baptism. It never yellows or becomes moldy. And it never sits in a box up on the shelf. The garments of salvation and righteousness are yours to wear forever.

But not everyone believes this. Their baptism never leaves them, but there are Christians who leave their baptism. And how sad. For a wedding gown must be worn. It does us no good up on the shelf. Christ did not die for you so that you would put Him in a box up on the shelf--getting Him out to try on every now and then just to see if He still fits.

He does fit...always. We never get to a point in our life when Jesus cannot cover us anymore; when His cross has no more meaning; when our baptism into Him is old fashioned and outdated. Christ is always for you to wear. His blood is always enough to cover your wrongs. So you're a sinner. Yes, so am I. And maybe last week was a bad one. Maybe even the last few months. There is no sin you have done that Jesus did not carry to His cross. There is not one of you whom God has not forgiven. God forgives all of you. Every one of your sins is forgiven.

Take your wedding gown down from the shelf. Remember your baptism daily. Wear the garments of salvation and righteousness which belong to you. Put on Christ, for He is yours. He is your Groom and you are His beautiful and holy bride. Today is your wedding with Christ. Soon, soon comes the reception in the halls of heaven. Amen.