

The Great Vigil of Easter

Genesis 3:1-24

Exodus 14:10—15:1

1 Kings 18:20-39

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia, Christ is risen! Good morning, happy Easter, and welcome to St. Anne's Episcopal Church for the Great Vigil of Easter.

As you know, it has been one *rainy* Holy Week, and the weather man has promised that today will be just as rainy, too. If you think about it, that's probably just as well because, after all, we have come here to baptize little Nellie Riddle into the Body of Christ. We might as well *all* get a little wet today and remember the purpose and promises of our own baptisms, too. So I say, let it rain!

The one thing about a rainy Easter Day is that it probably does make you think twice about what you're going to wear. Chances are that today many of us had to trade in our Easter bonnets for our umbrellas and our seersucker suits for big rubber boots. And while I am absolutely certain that God does not care about what we wear on this day or any other, I can't help but notice how often clothing comes up in the story of our life with God.

Here's what I mean . . .

Just a little while ago, we began all this with the story of Adam and Eve. You know this story. But have you ever noticed who it is who makes the first set of clothes for humanity? I'll give you a hint: it's *not* Adam and Eve. I mean, yes, they throw together some fig leaves to cover the essentials, but it is actually *God* who reaches down and dresses them. "And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and he *clothed* them." God, who seems so big, so remote, so far away—who was so angry with them—looks down and sees their vulnerability, sadness, and shame. And before he banishes them, out of what must have been a deep and intimate sense of compassion, God reaches down and covers them. God gets down there with them, pulls out his divine sewing kit, and *clothes* them. I'll be honest: I had never noticed that until this year.

And of course, the stories of the Bible march on from there, and clothing comes up again and again. Joseph and his many-colored coat, which makes him the envy of all his brothers. Exodus and Leviticus with their endless laws about the clothing of the priests of Israel: their tunics and turbans and ephods, in purple and scarlet and blue. And of course, there are all those people throughout the Bible who don disguises in order to spy, swindle, and steal others' blessings.

Then fast forward to the story we just heard: the story of the resurrection. On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, but he ain't there. So they go and tell the apostles, and Peter is the only one who will believe them. He runs to see for himself, and there, where Jesus' body should be, is nothing but his burial shroud . . . his clothes. Y'all, Jesus has risen, and he is nekkid!

I guess we can assume that he must have found some clothes at some point after the resurrection, but when Jesus conquers death—when he rises up and takes away all the vulnerability, sadness, and shame we had been carrying since Adam and Eve—in that moment, *all* he has on . . . is our *humanity*. *Christ* has put *us* on, and as in the days of Adam and Eve when people walked naked in a garden, Christ restores us to our innocence.

This is why, long ago, when the first Christians started the first Easter Vigils, their converts came to be baptized naked and unashamed. Like newborn infants passing through the womb, like the dead rising from the grave without a shroud, those early Christians understood that Christ has clothed himself in our own flesh, and now we clothe ourselves in Christ.

Tyler and Jenna Claire, we have baptized that beautiful baby of yours, and you are to raise her to understand and know that she is *covered* in Christ. You are to teach her that as hard and ugly as this world can be, she needs no costume, no disguise. She need not ever hide in shame. For the same flesh and blood that clothes her soul is the very same flesh and blood that clothed the soul of the living God. Today, Nellie has put on Christ, and she is perfect, just the way she is.

Brothers and sisters, no vestments can ever make us holy.
No armor can ever make us strong.
No Easter bonnet or seersucker suit could ever make God love us more.

We have been clothed in Christ.
Let us never be ashamed.

Amen.