**Sermon, December 8, 2024**
**"Sweaters of Righteousness"**
**Second Sunday of Advent**
**St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine**

It's a good bet John the Baptist never wore those colors.

Jesus – nope – white and brown

Mary – seems to always like blue

Joseph – no another brown guy

Angels – white and gold for sure

Shepherds? Hardly – just thank God they wore something and whatever they wore never came close to any Tide PODS in their lifetime

Magi? Possibly had the wealth for a more expansive wardrobe but have never seen it.

So OK we've just named all the characters of our basic Christmas story and none of them are depicted wearing what color? Advent purple and rose? No bah humbug, red and green of course!

Because if you're going to a Christmas party, concert, gathering, what's the color you see the most? Red and green. The tradition of green seems to have come from evergreen trees that became popular decorations in northern countries. Red comes from the holly berry and a 1931 ad for Coca Cola that first showed Santa Claus in a red suit and since then red has been the color of both Santa and Coke – God Bless America.

And what are you going to wear red and green on? Why you may have already dragged out those Christmas sweaters, ugly or not – all a matter of interpretation – but you find that red and green combo, tie, something, that you would never wear the rest of the year.

Why do we do it? OK to fit in sure, but I also think we do it because somewhat like a Halloween costume, we want to change our persona a bit – into what? More joyful? More celebratory? More expansive? The holiday spirit – hey if you don't have it – what are you Scrooge?

We have opposite ends of the holiday spirit and holiday fashion trends in our lessons today.

The Book of Baruch is part of the Apocrypha and like most of those books was written very late in the Old Testament period, somewhere between 100 and 200 years before the birth of Jesus. But it was written in a very gloomy time in Jewish history, just after the desecration of the Jewish temple. Very gloomy time? Geez does it have anything to say to

us today? The verses we heard this morning are a Message of Consolation. We are instructed to take off the garment of sorrow and affliction and put on the robe of righteousness and on our heads the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. A robe of righteousness? Maybe the Christmas sweater of 150 BCE?

Contrast with John the Baptist. Luke doesn't tell us about his wardrobe but Mark described it as a rough coat of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. And next week we'll hear Luke synthesize his basic message to "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." In other words be generous.

Maybe those are words hard to hear right now. But that word "generous" seems embedded in today's lessons. Let's go back to our friend Baruch who exudes generosity.

> *God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

In the epistle, Paul writes from prison to the community at Philippi. Paul expresses his love for the community and expects this caring to increase among them all. Such love will help them to discern what is best for them, so that they will be able to present themselves as pure and blameless in the coming day of Christ, "having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God"

And even in the gospel, Luke introduces John and the coming of Jesus as a special time in world history. Luke intentionally places his "orderly account" of the life of Jesus on the stage of world history in an identifiable time and place. Likewise, the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist is also set within an historical context, which Luke establishes by identifying the political and religious leaders of the time—individuals who would play an important role in future events in the lives of John and Jesus. What Luke is saying is all the stars and planets have lined up for God's generosity to break into the world in a unique and unprecedented way. But to get ready to receive that generosity, to see it and understand it for what it is, we need the message of John the Baptist.

So if we could read our capacity to be generous right now as easily as we can read the oil level in a car engine, what would your dipstick read? I've heard some of your engine lights are showing you're almost out of oil. I know we're asking a lot of you right now. With our Angel Tree we asked you to buy food for the hungry in the area and the kitchen is overflowing right now with Tuna Helper. I never knew there were so many varieties! And today is the ingathering of our pledges, our annual appeal to help us plan for next year where we ask you to be generous not only with your finances but also with yourselves – throughout the year to do what you can for St. Luke's and our Wilton community. And in

six days we have Santa's Workshop where we ask your generosity in two ways – to contribute gifts for children to give to their parents, to teach them the meaning of giving, but also we need you on Saturday to companion and guide those kids around the room, to be a loving adult presence in their lives even if only for ten minutes. And on top of that our church hall is a mess and we need some help after service today to try to get it in some semblance of order so that Santa's workshop can happen.

That's a lot of generosity. But can you hear these words in Handel's Messiah?

> *Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'*

Most of our other seasonal Advent/Christmas music is intended for us to open our hearts. God has been generous to us and we are called likewise to be generous more to ourselves and others. If wearing your favorite Christmas sweater helps you do that, good. Maybe it will remind us what those colors really mean. Put on your robe of righteousness, your diadem of the everlasting glory, your ugly Christmas sweater of generosity.

So what does wearing red and green mean? Bottom line – learn to say "yes" more and "no" less. Instead of closing doors, open doors. Instead of closing your heart, open your heart.