

Dear Fellow celebrants of the Savior's birth,

If you listen to the radio or watch TV *at all*, you know that you can hardly make it through a commercial break without hearing an ad for a weight loss program (and, under normal circumstances, a fitness center). We have just feasted for the Thanksgiving to Christmas season and the New Year provides a great opportunity for a new you.

At the same time, we've just come off one of the biggest festivals in the Church Year, the festival of Christmas. And what a glorious time of the year this is! For the last four weeks of Advent we've been reminded that Jesus has come to save us from our sins, that he comes to us daily through his Word and that he will come again to take us into his kingdom of heaven. Praise be to God! And after all this feasting on Good News, we turn to the Apostle Paul for some advice on the new you. Only this isn't about how lose something. No, its about putting it all to good use.

Since this is our first text from the book of Colossians this new church year, it is good for us to quickly review why Paul wrote this letter in the first place. The letter to the Colossians is one of four letters which Paul wrote during his first Roman imprisonment. Epaphras had come from Colosse in Asia Minor to visit Paul in Rome. He had expressed to Paul some grave concerns about the condition of this troubled congregation.

Interestingly, the apostle had never visited this congregation before. Imagine having to write a disciplinary letter to a bunch of people you knew only by reputation. In the letter Paul counters the destructive ideas of Judaism, legalism and ritualism on the one hand, and the "enlightenment" of Hellenistic philosophy on the other. Basically, the Colossians were being lured away by what they *thought* was a more complete spiritual life than the gospel alone could offer them. Clearly, they needed a letter of encouragement. They needed to be reminded about the love God had shown them.

In our text for today, Paul is encouraging holy living among the

Colossians. As Paul points out in the verses just prior to our text, the believer wants to live a holy life because the Holy Spirit has given you a **new self...renewed...in the image of its Creator.** (3:10) This **new self** gladly and willingly accepts the fact that **Christ is all, and is in all.** (3:11) The believer's Christ-centered life strives always to glorify the Savior.

What a fitting text for us today. Think about it: We have just heard the gospel message in some of its most beautiful form the last few days: God sent his only Son down to this earth to suffer and die for us that we might live with him in eternal paradise. What a Christmas gift! How can we ever say thank you? Thanks to the Lord's inspired letter through the Apostle Paul to the Colossians, we have our answer.

**Therefore, as God's elect, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.** <sup>13</sup> **Bear with one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone else. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you.** <sup>14</sup> **And, in addition to all these things, put on love, which ties things together in perfect unity.**

Imagine, for a moment, that life is a party, despite the effects of sin that are ever present. In fact it's a very special party, one that very important people will be at. You've been to this party before in years past but it's different this year because the Holy Spirit has given you a "**new self.**" This will be the first and may be the last time that these people will see the **new** you. You want to make a good impression. And now you have to decide what you're going to wear. That's always a tough decision isn't it? All you know is that you want to look you best. After all, you were invited – **God's elect, holy and dearly loved.**

Billions of people in this world, and God has chosen you. What a privilege! What an honor! And what's even more astounding, is that he didn't just choose you randomly but specifically, simply because he loves you. But he didn't choose you because you're special. No, you are special because he chose you!

So here you are, chosen to attend this ball, this party, and now you have to find something to wear. Do you have anything?

Relationship counselor Emmerson Eggerichs makes this distinction between men and women. He says, when a man looks in his closet and says, "I have nothing to wear," what he *really* is saying is, "I have nothing clean to wear." And when a woman looks in her closet and says, "I have nothing to wear," what she *really* is saying is, "I have nothing *new* to wear."

But don't worry. Not only is your closet full of clean and new clothes. It has all been designed specifically for the new you. Paul takes us through the fashion show: **clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.**

**COMPASSION** is what the Samaritan felt toward the man who fell among thieves (Lk 10:33). It is what Jesus felt toward the crowds who **were like sheep without a shepherd** (Mk 6:34). It sees the hurt of others and is moved to do something about it.

**KINDNESS** is a goodness found in God and demonstrated by God in his saving acts. It is also a quality demonstrated by the believer as he forgives his fellowman (Eph 4:32).

**HUMILITY** was demonstrated by the tax collector, who would not even look up to heaven (Lk 18:14) and by Jesus, who gave up full use of his glory and came down to earth as a servant and was obedient to death (Php 2:8). Christian Apologist said that humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking of yourself less.

**GENTLENESS** is a characteristic which Jesus ascribes to himself (Mt 11:29), which makes his followers willing to come to him and learn from him. It is a magnetic quality that attracts cautious people rather than polarizes them.

And **PATIENCE** is what makes us willing to suffer long, even as the Lord suffered the pangs of hell for us and continues to tolerate our sinfulness.

Wow! What an outfit! If you walked into a party wearing this you'd really stand out. But it's still not complete. We have to accessorize.

**Bear with one another and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint against anyone else. Forgive, just as Christ forgave you.** Paul reminds us that none of us will be wearing our Christian clothing ALL the time. He reminds us that because we are sinful, there will be problems and strife even among Christians. But rather than take revenge, rather than be jerks to those who have offended us, we are to remember how Christ has forgiven us. This will make our **compassion, kindness, gentleness, humility, gentleness, and patience** shine all the more.

But there is still one more item to go. The one item that brings the whole outfit together. In fact, it is so essential that you dare not enter into the party without it: **in addition to all these things, put on love, which ties things together in perfect unity.**

Yes, love makes the outfit. It is the one thing that ties everything together in perfect unity. We can try to be **compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient and forgiving** but it won't be sincere unless it comes from love.

The word used for love in our text today means a love that *constantly* gives and that doesn't look for something in return. It is the love that God has shown to us. It is the love that moved God to send Jesus to be born in a manger. It is the love that moved God to give up the life of his only Son for you and me. It is the love that moved God to say, "Here, take my salvation, it's a free gift with no strings attached. "You don't have to pay me for it. "Your debt has been removed." It is the love that God constantly shows to us no matter how many times we wrong him. It is the love that lights up our heavenly Father's face when we arrive at his spiritual party, dazzling in our spiritual clothes, ready to celebrate and give thanks with him. After all, this is the new you. And you are spectacular in Jesus.

So, take a look at yourself. Take in the **new** you. And enjoy the person that God has made you to be in Christ: **clothe[d]... with heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience...Forgiv[ness] ...And...love...[tied] together** with Jesus and one another **in perfect unity.** Welcome to the party! Amen.