

*Based on Colossians 3:12-17. Clothing ourselves with hope.*

Sometimes, all it takes is a wardrobe change to bring out a better side of life.

Sweatpants and hoodies can bring comfort for a while, especially in the wake of the holiday hubbub, but one day, perhaps even today, the skirt comes back out, the lipstick comes back on, and you're a whole new you, ready again to face the world with courage and with hope.

The Letters of Paul - and the Letters ascribed to Paul but not actually written by Paul, including Colossians - describe the experience of baptism as a life-changing, personality-altering *communal* wardrobe change.

In baptism, Paul (and pseudo-Paul) says, we are *clothed with Christ*. Which, as the author of Colossians describes, means compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and above all, love. It means bearing with one another, forgiving one another, harmonizing hope with one another, giving thanks for and with one another. It means wisdom.

In this we find our hope, as the seasons change, as the winter takes hold, as the new year emerges and the unknown unfolds.

We have a choice of wardrobe in the days and weeks and months that lie ahead. We have a vision of justice and wholeness, of compassion and peace, of inclusion and hospitality that is bigger than any one congregation, that is broader than any world superpower, that is deeper than any particular moment but that depends on how we clothe ourselves in *this moment that will give [us everything if [we] let it* (as the poet says).

I choose to clothe myself in Signs of Hope in this moment.

Hope in the sign of seventeen shepherds of peace here in Shepherdstown joining thousands around the world holding vigil Christmas Eve for Palestine and Israel, Syria and Lebanon. Hope in the sign of a three year old's giggle fit smack dab in the middle of the Call to Offering in our Christmas Eve worship.

Hope in the sign of a friend's two hour difficult but necessary discussion with a political enemy across the family dinner table on Christmas Day. Hope in the sign of hospital visits to the sick and prayers for the grieving. Hope in the sign of you and me gathered here today in the promise that Christmas is a Season and not just a one day celebration of Santa.

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How are you clothing yourselves with Hope today. What signs of Hope have you seen this season? [Invitation to share]