

April 3 – Wrapped

Good Friday

[Luke 2:1-7](#)

TRULY
LENT IN REVERSE
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY 2026 – REV. RYAN MATTHIAS

The collision of two moments happens today. Birthing and burial cloths come to the fore.

Mary's exhaustion and another Joseph who is worn out also (this one of Arimathea) walk carefully with prepared linens. They are linked by frantic love. Mary wraps a baby grabbing his first incarnate breaths, mewling in a manger. Her eyes filled with weariness and joy. Joseph (and Nicodemus, we dare not forget him) wrap Mary's son all these years later after his breath has been taken from him.

These tender moments swirl like a helix around Jesus' life from the first seconds until the last. Linens have been prepared for both times. Mary chose them for her firstborn-miraculous one. After the hardship of birth, Jesus was whisked into the clean cloths, swaddling and cocooning him in her love. She has done the work. The Savior of the World has been born. We rarely visualize these first occurrences, though "Away In a Manger" probably moves us to romanticize everything.

My kids (as well as most likely yours) were born in a sterile hospital with nurses to do most of the hard work. The beeps, bells, and whistles went off to keep you alert while you wanted to sleep. There were diapers galore. Powders and creams helped to keep the newborn comfortable. You stared down with love, even as the twelfth doctor or nurse came by and told you that your newborn was the most beautiful they'd ever seen.

This was not Joseph and Mary's experience. In the candlelit, cold, cave, the Son of God was born. And then he was clothed with common swaddling clothes. His life began in such a meager way that we can't possibly understand. Imagine Mary looking down at

Jesus, (God in the flesh) with worn-out eyes, and grabbing his tiny arms and legs, encompassing the limbs with the cloth to keep him tucked in for the night. Darkness.

Finally, she can rest for a couple of hours, maybe. The first night after birth is uneasy, exhaustive, and painful. It is possible that every few minutes, one of her sleepy eyes flutters open to look over to make sure that he is still alive. Such are the beginnings of love. There he stays, lying in the manger, breathing with the soft huffs of an infant. Eyes closed. Can you imagine what this newborn Son of God dreamed?

But then we fast forward to the day of his death. So much has happened. People began to call it Good Friday, but now he was bound in burial cloths, this time covering even his face. Joseph and Nicodemus had brought a hundred pounds of spices to fill the tomb for eternity. We can't imagine the pain and patience they had when they cloaked Mary's son, GOD's son, in this tomb. He was the fulfillment of their dreams.

Now, though, there was no soft breathing. Jesus' body was cold and still. The wrapping was not meant to keep him warm but settled. Both manger and mnemeion (Greek word for tomb) cradled his body; one in hope, the other in hopelessness.

The angel had told Mary through the words of Simeon: *"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed, (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also) so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."* (Luke 2:34-35) The sword had pierced. Her son lay in a tomb shrouded in death.

The world asks, "For what?"

This:

“These are the one coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14)

Even at the very beginning, God was in the business of clothing his people—wrapping them. Adam and Eve would have been frustrated in their attempts to cloak themselves with fig leaves. Each day, each leaf would be a symbol of their futility of trying to cover their sin. God clothed our first parents with the robes of sacrifice.

At the end, he garbs us in the swaddling cloths of grace—robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. Garments of righteousness. Baptismal raiment from birth to burial chamber and then beyond. Our hope rests in all that Jesus has done from cradle to cross, and when he is draped by Joseph and Nicodemus this day, our grace is stayed in him. We know the end of the story, but we dare not whisper it yet. We must linger in this swaddled moment.

We began our journey at the beginning of this Lenten season looking up with the centurion at the unwrapped Jesus, the Son of God. Now it ends at the cradle. It is so unsettling. The babe came for wrapping, but far more than we could have ever imagined. And now, quietly at the cradle in the shadow of the cross it is silent.

And we are wrapped in the love of God.

Truly.

Jesus, son of God, wrap us in love today and every day. Amen.