

The Train of His Robe

Isaiah 6: 1-10

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**January 10, AD 2021
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Once upon a time. Once upon a particular time: 740 years before the birth of Christ. Once upon a particular time in a particular place: the Jerusalem temple. Once upon a particular time in a particular place a particular person, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of cosmic significance. He saw into the heart of Reality. Isaiah went into the temple and the stone structure dissolved into the very throne room of heaven. Isaiah recounted his experience, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” To the first readers of Isaiah’s book, this account would have been shocking. The LORD had clearly told Moses centuries before, “for man shall not see me and live” (Ex. 33:20). Yet here was Isaiah writing about it. Special revelation had been given to the prophet. And, as we shall see, this vision is the model for our encounters with God as well.

Let’s step into the details of this vision. Inside the great temple, Isaiah saw the LORD seated on his throne. He was the King of All actively reigning over his realm. The glory of his presence shone from that throne. The power is palpable to us as we hear the description. God is high above us. Exalted. Radiant. Majestic.



In those days, the glory of a king was symbolized in the length of his robe. The part of the robe that goes beyond his feet to the floor is called the train. We see it more today in the train of a bride’s wedding gown. At every rehearsal I tell the father of the bride, “Now after you present her, be sure not to trip on the train as you go back to your seat!”

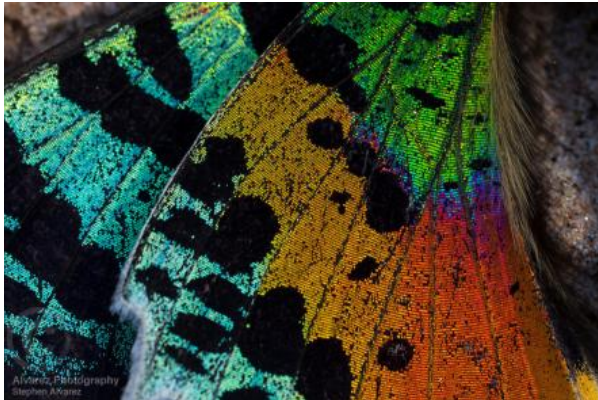
Isaiah says that the train of the LORD’s robe filled the entire temple. The glory and power of the true King encompasses everywhere that he is. Earthly kings have long trains made of rich fabric. What material does the Creator use for his robe?



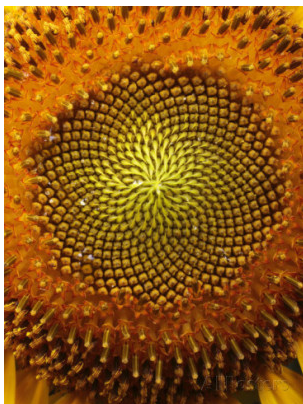
A beloved hymn declares, “O Worship the King all glorious above... whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.” That song imagines that the vastness of space is the canopy over the throne of God and the train of his robe is all the light in the universe. So God’s robe is adorned with the pattern of galaxies, with billions of stars the stitches in the

fabric.

Writer Nancy Ruegg imagined many ways in which creation adorns the train of God’s robe. From the pattern in a butterfly wing:

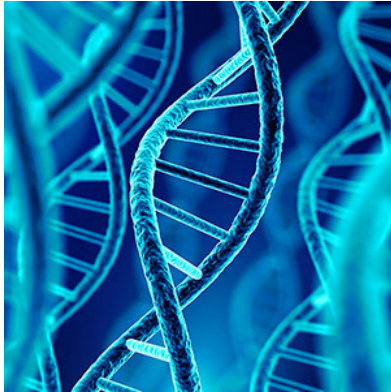


To the double spiral of seeds in a sunflower: To the pattern of frost on a window:



(Nancy Ruegg, <https://nancyaruegg.com/tag/the-train-of-gods-robe/>)

I might add, the double helix in a DNA molecule. The formation of birds in flight:



Any of these wonders seems more glorious than any fabric robe we could weave. But what if the train of the LORD's glory is made of something even rarer and more precious to him?

I've told you before how my life was changed at a Promise Keeper's event a quarter century ago. Over the three days, several times that stadium of 40,000 pastors sang the Graham Kendrick song, "Knowing You." Based on Philippians 3, we sang with increasing intensity, "To become like you in your death my Lord, so with you to live and never die. Knowing you, Jesus. Knowing you. There is no greater thing. You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness. And I love you Lord." The raw emotion of that chorus got round all my sophisticated defenses. God cracked open my heart. He returned me to my first love for Jesus. I surrendered my heart to him anew, and he transformed my life and ministry.



A couple years later, Promise Keeper called for a nationwide rally in Washington DC. Nearly a million men came for this Stand in the Gap event. Can you see me in this picture? At one point, the speaker called us to prayer. He asked us not to just bow our heads, but to get on our faces. Lying with my face in the gravel of the Washington Mall, it struck me: this is the train of God's glory! This is what his robe is made of: hearts that are yielded to him. We are what the King chooses to be his royal fabric. Our wills freely given to him are what he prizes most. Every soul offered to the King becomes a golden stitch in the train of his glorious robe.



In his vision, Isaiah saw the Temple of God filled with the train of the LORD's robe. The temple was the place where God let his name dwell, the special place of his presence. But God never intended to limit the glory of his presence to the Jerusalem temple. As Isaiah looked he saw angelic beings called seraphim, the burning ones, creatures of shimmering glory. Of course these seraphim are of a

higher order than we are. So descriptions of angelic beings stretch human words beyond their limit. They sound fantastic, impossible, crazy. People sometimes ask, "Do you think this is what seraphim literally look like?" My answer is that the Biblical descriptions give the *minimum* that these creatures are. Do they really have six wings like we think of wings? I think these seraphim are *at least* as amazing as a six winged flying, flaming creature—and probably a whole lot more beyond description!

Well, anyway, these seraphim were flying about the throne, calling out to one another in glorious voices,

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of his glory!

Yes, Isaiah saw the LORD on his throne high and lifted up. The temple filled with God's glorious presence. But the seraphim saw more. The *whole earth* is filled with his glory. Now on the one hand, this was a description. As we saw in the photos, the creation itself reveals the glory of God. But these words were also a prophecy. They spoke of the LORD's intent to increase his glory. To lengthen the train of his robe. To gather more and more human hearts into his loving embrace.

Watch how this happens. In John's gospel, we read of an extraordinary moment in the last days of Jesus' ministry. Right after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, some Greeks sought out Jesus. They had come to Jerusalem as spectators for the great Passover Festival. But then they wanted more. These non-Jews said to the apostle Phillip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." They were Gentile inquirers drawn to the Jewish rabbi who was teaching and healing in such powerful ways Sir, we wish to see Jesus. It seemed to be a signal to Jesus. The gospel was cracking through its Jewish origins and flowing out to the world. Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The glory of Jesus was about

to be revealed. His glory would first be the cross. A few minutes later, Jesus prayed aloud, "For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name." Let my being glorified on the cross increase your glory. Extend your glory through me! Then he told his disciples, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12: 20-33).

The parallels with Isaiah 6 cannot be missed. The LORD was high and lifted up. His glory filled the temple. His glory filled the earth. Jesus came to glorify his Father. He would glorify the Father as he was lifted up. This was a three stage lifting up. 1) Jesus would be lifted up on the cross to die in order to take away the sins of the world. 2) Jesus would be lifted up from death in resurrection as he became the first of a remade humanity. 3) Jesus would be lifted up in glory as he ascended to heaven where he ever lives to intercede for us and send down his Spirit. Even now he continues his promise to draw all people to himself. The work of Jesus in dying, rising and ascending is extending the glory of his Father throughout the earth. Even now the train of the robe of the Triune God's glory is growing.

How? How is the seraphic prophesy of God's glory extending throughout the earth? In the growth of Christ's body the church! The Spirit unites others to Jesus, stitching them into the robe of God's glory as the gospel gets told from person to person. Moreover, in the worship gathering of Christ's body, we form a spiritual house for the LORD every time we meet. Whether it's two or three or five hundred or fifty thousand. Every time we gather in Jesus' name a temple forms. A spiritual house where we offer the worship of praise. By his Spirit, we join the seraphim to declare, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory." It's what happened to me at Promise Keepers. Christ's people assembled. They lifted him up in praise. They told the story of his glorious deeds of cross and resurrection. And his Spirit filled our hearts. He filled my heart.

For every heart is a temple. Every human heart is a field for the glory of God. And hearts are what God prizes most. He wants more golden stitches in his robe. He gathers hearts through the worship of his assembled church and the witness of his sent church. No Christian can worship only in isolation. No Christian can remain content to stay silent about the LORD's glory.

A few years ago a friend sent me a CD by a little known group called Glory Anthem. They have a song called "I will Sing" that brings to the beautiful mystery of Isaiah's vision and Jesus' fulfillment of it. The lyrics are simple:

I will sing to the LORD Almighty
I will sing to the LORD who gives me strength.
Because he is high and lifted up.

And his train is filling the temple.
And his train is filling my heart.

That chorus repeats, and I found myself totally taken up in this vision of the train of God's glory filling out. What struck me is that the train of God's glory fills the temple: it fills the assembly of believers. And it fills each individual heart when we gather. His glory fills our hearts. By the work of the blessed Holy Spirit, the one Gospel story of Jesus suits and fills every unique heart. So the song turns as the lead singer riffs for a bit on his own experience of Christ's glory:

I will sing of the day you took away my life.
I will sing of the day you raised me up with Christ.
I will sing because you glorified me too.
I will sing because you love me,
Sing because your mercies are always new.

And his train is filling this temple,
And his train is filling my heart. (Glory Anthem, 2015).

Jesus said that when he was lifted up, he would draw all people to himself. He is a magnetic force in the world. The Gospel draws the human heart back to the God who made us and loves us. The Triune God of Grace is extending the length of his train. His glorious robe moment by moment adds the golden stitches of hearts released to him. For, his bride, the church are his glory and his prize. He clothes us with the shimmering garment of his own righteousness.

And he employs us now in his magnetic mission to draw all people. By our worship. By our sharing of his story as it transformed our story. Lift up your hearts dear ones. Join the seraphim in worshipping him. Lift up your voices. Speak to others of the glory of Christ. Reach out your hands and gather in the lost and wandering, the prodigal and floundering. Pray that the Spirit would stitch them into his glorious robe and use you to do it!