

## Final Research Paper – Connecting Threads

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On September 1, 2019 my daughter Janae Nunes was baptized at First United Church of Jesus Christ in Brooklyn New York. After weeks of debating my husband and I both agreed to get her baptized. During her baptism she wore an ivory silk mid length dress, decorated with a translucent floral bottom piece with rimstones in the middle of each flower, a silk white bow wraps around the middle and drapes in the back. Paired with her semitransparent newborn christening bonnet that ties on the bottom of her chin that looked identical to her dress. She wore plain white baby dress shoes that completed her outfit. Our decision to Christian Janae was my husband idea. I grew up as a Jehovah's Witness and my husband grew up as a Protestant, we both are Christian, but our beliefs and practices are completely different.

Growing up I was taught that in order to get baptized you to give your life to Jehovah to show your dedication to him. When it comes to baptisms, it only occur three times a year at conventions surrounded by thousands of witnesses to make a public declaration. My husband grew up as a Protestant, and religion is extremely important in his family. Even before our daughter was born her baptism was planned ahead of time, my husband family believes that a baby should be baptize before they are 1 in order to be blessed. Jehovah Witnesses see baptism as a public declaration, it's proving to others Witnesses that they have dedicated their whole life to Jehovah. Protestants see baptism as a sacrament that was instituted by Jesus Christ with God's grace. I agreed to Janae baptism because of how much his family wanted her to get baptized.

The Greek meaning of christening is "to dip" or "to wash". Immersion is used to baptize adults and pouring water also known as christening is for infants. The holy water that is used represents renunciation of evil and spiritual cleansing from sin, the death of the old life of sin and the beginning of a new life with God.

The sacrament is done in front of the parents, the godparents, and the priest during service. The parents affirm their faith and answer for the baby, next the baby is anointed with oil by making the cross sign on the baby forehead, eyelids, nose, ears, lips, chest, hands, and feet.( Helicon, 2018)

Swaddling bands was popular from 2000-2600 BC until 1790's. The first mention of swaddling bands was found in Luke 2:7 King James Version with Mary and Jesus baptism, "And she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes..."( Bible Gateway, n.d.) Swaddling bands were long strips of fabric wrapped all around the baby to keep them warm and restrict baby's movement. Blue and white colors were popular in wealthy families because it symbolized royalty and a status symbol. Families that were wealthy decorated their children's swaddling bands with embroidery trimmings of lions, lambs and a tree of life that represented the tribe of Judah, poor families wore plain colors.( Children's Formal Attire,2018) In Europe during the 1700's christening set was established creating more style for the baby's attire, babies started wearing christening bonnet, bibs, forehead cloth, mittens and sleeves, by the 1800's the idea of changing christening from full immersion to no immersion began, with that change came two new changes in christening fashion. The first was realizing that the swaddling band was dangerous for a baby to wear, the second was christening clothes started to change into a traditional Victorian christening gowns like how they are today, instead of the long strips of fabric, christening clothing was made from silk or satin. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century christening gowns design patterns were identical to adult christening outfits, they became more fashionable; a high short bodice, low scooped boat neck adjustable and a high gathered waist adjustable with drawstrings that were made to be wore with a petticoat. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century using white linen or cotton fabric to make christening dresses became popular.( Buckingham Vintage in Antique & Vintage Clothes,2014)

In the 1600's English settlers came to America to escape religious persecutions. When they came to America, they brought the concept of christening attire to America changing the value on what christening gowns meant to christening ceremony. Christening gowns were given as heirlooms that were passed down from generations. Over the years the styling of christening gowns has evolved. Christening gowns were produced in bearing cloth that was made with fabrics like silk, satin, and velvet. Each gown had its own unique style of embroidery. Families that decided to christen their children made their outfits out of expensive materials because they wanted to preserve it. There has been a dramatic shift from handmade christening gowns over the years. Christening gowns aren't being handmade like they use to, if the gown is handmade it's not the family making it, it usually someone else. With that shift in how the christening dress is being made creates a disconnect between the christening gown and the family, because there is no value or honor in the gown. When christening dress were made by the family that was christening their baby, they had a personal connection with the gown, they honored and put thought and representation of their family values into their work. Now that christening gowns are being made by big companies it loses that value of what a christening gowns means to the family, there is no longer the idea of keeping christening gowns as an heirloom because it can be bought again. Finding christening gowns are more accessible now then it was back in the day.

The christening gown that my daughter wore has not been circulated yet. When I bought the dress I had the idea of keeping it around as a tradition. I never grew up with traditions, so the thought of my daughter dress being an heirloom made me keep the dress. Starting a tradition in my family with the christening dress allows me to see the benefits to having an heirloom because there will be a story to tell every time the gown is being worn and it will show a representation of my family values. The christening gown connects us with our relationship with God. It connects us because regardless of what group we're in or our beliefs we

all have made the decision to dedicate our child in order to cleanse their bodies, begin a new life with God, and have God watch over and protect them. God gave us the gift to bear our children and to show our appreciation and love for him, we bless our children and give him Thanks and grace.

When people were making their children's christening gowns they created identities to show how dedicated they were to God by making their outfits in expensive material, it also distinguished which religion you were in. If you went to an Eastern Orthodox Church or an Eastern Catholic Church children would be wearing a white bonnet, and be placed in a white blanket. Every Christian group has a different way of sacrament, and a different style of christening attire. New cultural forms is shifting how christening gowns are being produced. Christening gowns today are more disposable because gowns are being bought rather than handmade. There is no longer the idea of keeping the gown in the family because it can be bought again. The idea now is the christening gowns are temporary, and that it's only going to be used once and after it's used there is no need to keep it. Before the idea of a disposable christening gown, christening gowns created a relationship across national borders by what the christening gown represent to everyone. Everyone had the same mind set when making a christening gown, they wanted it to represent their family values and making the gowns in the best materials to show how dedicated they were to God.

Even though my daughters' gown wasn't handmade, selecting her dress was extremely important to me. It took three months of researching and online shopping to find the right one. I knew that I wanted her gown to have floral design because floral represents happiness, abundance, joy, beauty, and purity and that is the best way to describe what she represents as a person. There are flower in the lower part of the dress, some of them look like its blossoming and others are fully blossomed and I related that to my daughter, she is a delicate flower blossoming into a beautiful person. The process of finding her dress was stressful and rewarding. The stressful part was finding the right dress, I saw a lot

of dresses online and in stores but it wasn't to my expectations. Most of the high end gowns was decorated in blue, pink and different colors, and the cheaper ones were all white. At the end it was rewarding because my daughter looked very beautiful in her dress. I felt that her dress was designed for her, it made all the running around worth it.

Looking at all the different christening gown made me feel that the state of the modern religious clothing industry is fading and what the christening gown represents doesn't hold value like it did before. Trying to find a dress close to a traditional christening gown was very challenging, a lot of the gowns seemed more modernized to make it appealing, and it's losing it traditional ways. Before gowns were made in white to symbolize purity but now the gowns are in different colors and look fashionable. The gowns were shorter than I expected, in the stores there was all the way in the back of the store collecting dust, they weren't covered in sealed bags to preserve the color and sealed from dust. It felt like the meaning and understanding of what the christening gown didn't matter, it was seen as another piece of clothing. The religious clothing industry is fading because the values and belief in christening is changing. Parents that Christian their children back in the day did it because they were told to, and it was more of a generational tradition, now parents are breaking away from christening their children because they don't see it as important anymore.

I learned more about the history of christening, how christening gowns were made and what is represented to the families, and how christening gowns have changed over the years. I learned that the first infant baptism was found in Luke 2:7, and the first christening gown was originally a swaddling band. When I first learned of the swaddling band it made think about the swaddle's parents use for their babies. Thinking about that and how it was originally used to christen infants shows how clothing changes and how clothing is used changes also. What I took away from this research is how sacred baptism is for infants and adults. It's a personally connection between the person being baptized and God.

It represents renunciation of evil and spiritual cleansing from sin, the death of the old life of sin and the beginning of a new life with God. That makes it so unique that in that moment you are finding peace within yourself and giving yourself to God.

This research has changed my mindset on the christening dress I see the value in what it means, and how it represents the family. It made me wish that I would have put more thought into my daughter's dress, learning about how people would hand make their dresses for their children made me wish that I had my daughters dress made instead of buying it in the store because of the relationship with the gown. I also learned about how the christening gown style has changed over the years from more traditional to modernize. I want to know how other churches perform their baptisms, and what their baptisms means to them? I know that different churches ceremony aren't the same and it would be interesting to know how each group goes about it. Also is it just Christians that do christening, or are there other religions that practice it?

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