

## Liturgical Garments—Part 2: Priest Vestments

The **alb** is the long white robe worn under the other vestments. The word “alb” comes from the Latin word “alba,” which means “white.” Thus, the alb is always white in color. The alb derives from the old Roman *tunica*; itself a descendant of the classical Greek *chitôn*.



Different symbolisms have developed for this vesture: the seamless garment worn by Christ for which the soldiers cast lots at His Crucifixion; the robe placed on Christ in mockery by Herod; and even a reminder of the white garment received in Baptism.



The **stole** is the scarf-like vestment worn around the neck of the priest and serves as a visible symbol of the ordained and sacramental priesthood. The stole is a means of identification and a reminder and symbol of priestly service. At the 4th council of Toledo (633), the stole became required vesture for ordinary bishops and priests as well, worn like the ancient stola or Jewish prayer shawl around one’s neck.

Some historical liturgical documents relate the stole to the scarf or towel

which Christ used to wash the feet of the Twelve Apostles at the Last Supper. It was in this action that Christ established the priesthood and the call to be of service to others. The stole is required and worn (if possible) when any of the sacraments are celebrated.

The **cincture** is the rope-like belt worn around the waist. Traditionally, the cincture symbolizes the virtue of purity/chastity which is to be lived by the priest. Some cinctures have tassels on the end and have taken on the symbolism of the whips/cords used to scourge Christ during His Passion.

The **chasuble**, discussed in a separate feature, is the outer cloak-like garment worn over the other vestments. The chasuble is created in the various colors of the liturgical seasons of the Church year.

This vestment reminds us of a “shepherd’s cloak” common in ancient days as well as the “garment of charity” and the “yoke of Christ” which must be worn by those who have given their lives in service to the Church.

There are distinguishing elements which designate and reveal the office of Bishop — the episcopal ring, the pastoral staff (crozier), the miter, and the pectoral cross.

There are different colors, clothing, and insignia which distinguish those who share in the Sacrament of Holy Orders (bishop, priest, and deacon).

The vestments worn by the priest at Mass visually remind us of how he is to be a shepherd, a servant, a holy loving father who makes sacrifices for the people he serves, and a good example to follow as he models his own life on the One he loves, serves, and imitates—Jesus Christ!



Mosaic of St. John Chrysostom  
from Hagia Sophia

