

Sermon for New Year's Eve

Date: December 31, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Epistle Reading: Philippians 2:1–13

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:21

Sermon Text: Luke 2:21

Sermon Title: Bow to the Name That Saves



Psalm: Psalm 90:1–12

Hymns:

- LSB 516 – Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying
- LSB 899 – Across the Sky the Shades of Night
- LSB 763 – When Peace, like a River
- LSB
- LSB
- LSB 878 – Abide with Me

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Service of Light (*with The Sacrament from Divine Service I*)



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Text: Luke 2:21

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Tonight marks the beginning of a New Year, another changing of the guard in time. Many will celebrate it. Some with friends or family wearing colorful clothes or a silly hat, and maybe even blow a crazy horn. Most of those celebrations will be cheerful, as we wish the last year good-bye (and with its COVID Good riddance) as we welcome in a fresh new year with hope.

On this night we rejoice in celebrating more than that. We remember two more great actions God did through our newborn King. First: we celebrate today because it is the eighth day after Jesus' birth, the day when He was circumcised and first shed His blood for you. Second: we celebrate this day because our newborn King was officially given His name, Jesus, which means "God saves." In one small verse, tonight's Gospel, St. Luke writes,

At the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.¹

St. Luke is the only Gospel writer to mention Jesus' circumcision, probably because, so many years later, Mary, whom Luke met, told him the account. It is important. Mary and Joseph were very faithful to God. They knew well the Covenant Law of circumcision which God commanded to Abraham thousands of years earlier. This mark on a baby boy officially made him part of God's family, the way Holy Baptism makes us part of God's family under the New Contract, or New Testament. If the baby was not circumcised he was not a part of God's people, God's promises or God's Covenant, just like Holy Baptism for us. Circumcision placed the child under God's Torah Law and God's care and protection.

The eighth day of Jesus' life is an important marker, because on this day Jesus actually begins to deliver on what His name means, "God saves." He began the work to save you from sin, death and the power of the devil. Jesus always rescues you by shedding His blood. You see, even as a Babe, Jesus the holy Christ of God "emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant."² We heard it in the reading from Philippians: "He humbled Himself³" under the Law to keep it for you, because you could not.

Think about the importance of your salvation on the verge of a New Year. The newborn Jesus formally begins to take our place, to fulfill every point of the Law for you. The Son of God exchanges places with you, using His human flesh and blood to

1 Luke 2:21

2 Philippians 2:7

3 Philippians 2:8

save you. This day is special because the first precious drops of Jesus' blood are spilled for you. In this act of shedding blood we get a foretelling of what is coming, a much greater sacrifice at Calvary some thirty later, when a river of blood will pour out from Jesus' side.

That is why we are gathered here. As the new year begins the Babe of Bethlehem begins His holy mission to save you with His blood to redeem you from your sin. That is why He is given the name Jesus, "God saves." St. Paul focuses our attention on the name of Jesus, where he writes:

God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.⁴

Paul says there will be a day when:

every knee will bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"⁵

That means someday all people will confess Jesus is Lord, even those who do not believe. At the end of time, when Jesus comes again, on the Last Day, all will confess that He is Lord.

On the verge of a new year it is comforting to know, as we get closer to the day when all time ceases, "every knee will bow" to Jesus. Even though many knees refuse to bow down to Jesus, on this New Year Eve, in thanksgiving for what He has done for us. That is why St. Paul rejoices, even as he was in prison in Rome. Paul knew his present life and suffering was nothing compared to the joy of eternal life. In the end, St. Paul knew, believed and confessed "every knee will bow" to Jesus.

Paul loved and served the Philippians. He inspired them to do the same, not only bowing to Jesus but also "bowing down" to serve one another. He called on them to have the same mind and purpose, to think of others before themselves and their own self-interests, so that the love of Jesus would go from them to others. With that in mind, you can confidently believe the only reason you live on this earth is to love God and love people, because of Jesus' love for us!

So under the same condemnation of the Law, which Jesus fulfills, let me ask you a some questions which might help you think about some New Year's resolutions:

- Are you always more concerned about your Christian brother or sister than you are about yourself?

4 Philippians 2:9-10

5 Philippians 2:10-11

- Are the interests of your family more valuable than your own?
- As a congregation, are we always united with the mind of Christ, to serve and love those in our community?

The answers to these question is “No, not always!” In fact, our first reaction in life is to serve ourselves, because we are selfish, self focused, by nature! Remember, Jesus , being equal to the Father, willingly submitted to His Father’s will, and left heaven to save you. If we fail to bow down to others in service it will be more difficult for others to see Jesus in us, by what we say and do.

That sounds a bit condemning. It might foster feelings of guilt. It probably should if you are serious about your own self-reflection and the price Jesus paid. However I have good news for you. In spite of our weak and sinful nature, you are here tonight to bow to Jesus. If such worship was not important to you, you would not be here. Every time we come into this house, God’s house, to worship we are, figuratively and literally, bowing down to Jesus. We are submitting to God’s First, Second and Third Commandments, just as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, “not neglecting to meet together.”⁶ More importantly, we are bowing to receive God’s blessings.

Think of how often in worship that is done, bowing down, literally. The reason many congregations have kneelers in their church pews and at their Communion rail, is because kneelers encourage you to bow down and reflect on your own unworthiness. People kneel to confess their sins and to pray. Bowing down forces you to look up for help from outside yourself. You are exposing your vulnerability saying, “God, I need help!”

When you kneel you receive God’s help with the rich body and blood of Jesus, the same blood shed at His circumcision, and on the cross. Remember, He who is exalted to the highest place for you also went to the lowest place for you. Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, was not always exalted. His first bed was a feeding trough. He was raised as the son of poor parents. Jesus lawfully obeyed His parents, even though He is equal to the Father. When He began His ministry, He was questioned, ridiculed, abused, insulted, mocked, and many spread lies about Him to hurt Him and His ministry. Through it all Jesus always faithfully loved and cared for the souls and salvation of the people. That is why He was willing to be led up the hill of Calvary for an humiliating death on the cross. Even there, though, still teaching, still saving, still calling all people to Him, even from the cross upon which we put Him. Jesus submitted to the Father’s will for you. He made Himself nothing, to make you something. You are a forgiven and redeemed child of God.⁷

6 Hebrews 10:25

7 1 John 3:1

Tonight, before the name of Jesus, all other priorities cease, because He willingly shed His blood to save you. Bow down to the name that saves you with His blood. Receive Him at this altar tonight, in humility and shame, but leave in peace and in joy. Do that often throughout this New Year. Count this Sacred Meal and this holy house as gifts from God. Gifts that should be cherished always. May God grant us the peace and joy to do that this, and every, year.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

