

Happy New Year! It is a joy to gather with you this day to worship our Lord and hear from His word.

Indeed this is a wonderful place to begin our New Year and I hope I can help you get off to a great start.

A "new year," after all, is a time to put aside that which made us unhappy last year
and to take up new resolutions, new hopes, new aspirations for the year before us.

Here's a little CARTOON to get us started: "This year my resolution is to be a better person
in every respect, where possible I am planning to do this from the comfort of my arm chair."

Ahh, the difference between making resolutions and keeping them -- unfortunately,
we humans can be a little weak when it comes to change and improvement.

But don't lose heart – while the world celebrates yet another New Year, we gather as the church to celebrate again
and anew a whole new age begun in Jesus – the birth of Emmanuel, God with us – at Christmas.

And with Jesus every day is a new day and a new opportunity for good things, for positive change!

So I propose to you today a different way to deal with change and improvement, turning from sin and being better
people this new year. Dr. Calvin Miller, a Baptist preacher, writer and professor put it this way:

"The best way to deal with sin is not to attempt reform, but to adore the Savior....

Worship ... points our hearts and minds in a totally different direction."

Worship – gathering to praise our Lord Jesus; hearing His Word and receiving the sacrament –

Worship – daily devotion, Bible reading and prayer.

Worship is the best way to deal with sin and to find new direction.

Our Bible readings today are uniquely qualified for worship – and to pointing our hearts and minds to adore God.

So today, as you step into your new year, I give you three phrases to take with you – phrases inspired by
God's word, ways to go into a new year as one called to worship and adore the Savior.

The phrases are: "I am surrounded", "I am blessed", and "I am saved." – surrounded, blessed and saved!

Please open your bulletin to Psalm 8 on page 4 (5, *at contemporary*).

Psalm 8 is a glorious psalm of praise which speaks to who we are and whose we are.

Now the book of Psalms was the hymnbook of Israel, written for use in worship. Psalms are also wonderful poetry

and as is often true of poetry, Psalm 8 has a rhythm, a pattern which points to its meaning. PAGE 2

It starts and ends with the outburst of congregational praise of God's name –

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

Within those verses, come praises of God's particular work – overcoming foes and blessing humans

“crowning them with glory and honor and dominion.” And at the center a question – who am I?

Who are we? “When I look to the heavens ... what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

In its context this question stands not as a lonely question of despair but rather surrounded

by the gracious and protecting works of God and the congregation gathered to sing God's praises.

Therefore the surprising answer to the Psalmist's question is: “I'm surrounded” –

surrounded by God's gracious works and the gathered community of God's people.

And so are you!! And it is a good and safe place to be; a place where we are not left to our own devices

to figure out who we are, but are given a place in relation to God and His world and to God's people.

So your first phrase for the New Year today: “I'm surrounded!”

Turning then to the lesson just before the Psalm from Numbers,

we hear further confirmation of our place in God's community and how God regards us.

This wonderful lesson takes us back into the history of the Israelites. God gave this blessing for use in worship.

As the people prepared to leave Mt. Sinai and continue their journey through the wilderness to

the Promised Land, God put His name on them in the form of a blessing, for use over and over again.

No conditions attached – this was purely a gracious move on God's part to His undeserving people –

His face glows, not glares – is lifted up, not hidden. The people thus blessed are claimed and named

as part of something larger than themselves, as part of God's bigger purpose and plan. And so you too,

as one joined to God's people through baptism, can say: “I am blessed;” blessed for my journey

through the wilderness to the Promised Land – the Lord will keep me, be gracious to me and give me peace:

For I am His & am blessed – I begin my new year with blessing! “I am surrounded, I am blessed!”

Turn now please to the Gospel lesson on pg. 6 – this lesson gives today the title: Name of Jesus.

At his circumcision, like every Jewish boy, Jesus received His name. The name Jesus literally means

“The Lord is salvation” – it was the name given by the angel. But what does it mean for you? for me?

The name Jesus is the same as that of Joshua, the Old Testament hero who led Israel into the freedom

of the Promised Land. The name of Jesus points us to our Savior, the one who delivers us, PAGE 3

rescues us; leads us into a land of freedom, into a different way of life now and eternally!

How do we know this? Well, just as circumcision was the sign that Jesus joined the people of Israel,

so baptism is the sign that we are part of the family of God – that we are saved!

Through baptism Christ saves us from slavery to sin and adopts us into His family –

we become His children and heirs of eternal life.

Drowned to sin, we die with Christ; and then we rise again, joined to His resurrection. You can say:

“I am saved” – I am sealed by the Holy Spirit and

Marked with the Cross of Christ forever! And that makes all the difference!

Today in worship we gather to begin this New Year with Jesus & find in worship direction and hope for our hearts

and minds. Now each of us can say: “I am surrounded” by God’s gracious works and the church

“I am blessed” for my journey each new day & “I am saved” fr sin, freed for some better living this year!

Like Mary – treasure God’s word and your place in His family; ponder what it means in your heart to live for Him.

And like the shepherds – glorify and praise God in worship and with your life.

Make known your Savior and Lord so that others can know Him too.

Because, in the infamous words of an old funny man, Flip Wilson, “It’s later than it’s ever been!”

Get out of your arm chair and get to work you blessed, saved, heirs of God!

I’d like to end with a poem, a copy of which you will receive on the way out today.

The author was a nineteenth century English poet and hymn writer Frances Havergal.

Another year is dawning, Dear Father let it be, In working or in waiting, Another year with thee.

Another year of progress, Another year of praise, Another year of proving Thy presence all the days.

Another year of mercies, Of faithfulness and grace, Another year of gladness, The glory of thy face.

Another year of leaning Upon thy loving breast, Another year of trusting, Of quiet, happy rest. PAGE 4

Another year of service, Of witness for thy love, Another year of training For holier work above.

Another year is dawning, Dear Father, let it be, On earth, or else in heaven, Another year for thee.

AMEN