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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
1/1/2016, The Name of Jesus
Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 2:15-21

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I love New Year's Day. I love having a fresh new year before us. On this good day, let's begin with the last verse of our Gospel Lesson. It speaks of the name of Jesus. The verse goes this way:

²¹And 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. (Luke 2:21, RSV)

Some names are mere happy collections of sound connected with a person. The sounds themselves have no particular meaning. They just point to somebody and identify that person. But the name "Jesus" is not like that. The name "Jesus" has a particular meaning connected with it. It is a meaning that was specified by the angel of the Lord before Jesus was even born. The angel had been speaking with Joseph, encouraging him to go ahead and marry that lass who had won his heart, explaining to him that the child Mary shall bear is a holy child. The angel specifies the name for this holy child and explains the meaning of that name:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall *save his people* from their sins. (Matthew 1:21, KJV)

The name Jesus means "Savior." It is as the Christmas angel declared to the shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over the flocks by night. Those shepherds were frightened by the glory of the Lord shining round about them. They were "sore afraid," the Bible says. But the angel invites them to fear not, for a Savior is born unto them:

¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Saviour*, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11, KJV)

This is the good name with which you and I get to march forward into the year of our Lord 2017: Jesus, Saviour, the one who shall "save his people from their sins."

I love preaching about Jesus on New Year's Day! It's the best thing a preacher can say to his flock at the start of a new year: Fear not, for unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. He will be with you in this coming year. So, be not afraid.

This sermon, then, has three simple points: First, it is great to have a new year before us. By God's grace, we have reached this point in life, and we have a fresh new year before us. Second, Jesus will be with us in this coming year, and so let us go forward boldly. And third, let us bear the name of Jesus with increasing integrity this year. Let us try to bring credit to the name of Jesus this coming year.

So, first, it is great to have a fresh new year before us.

Morning by morning, our breakfast prayer for Carol and me goes something like this:

Thank you, heavenly Father, for seeing us safely through the nighttime. And thank you for this food and for the day that stretches ahead of us. Let it be a good day for your church and for our family, in Jesus name. Amen.

That's how I feel on this New Year's Day: I want to take this prayer and write it larger, thanking the Lord that you and I have made it thus far in life and asking that this coming year will be a great one for our church and for our families.

I have told you before about the joy it gave me to realize that I had survived open-heart surgery. That was about three years ago now. And the joy I felt was not simply that I had survived the surgery, but even more, that I had survived *all those earlier years*, to make it safe and sound to the surgery. A whole lifetime had preceded that surgery – a lifetime in which I was carrying on with a very rare structural anomaly in my heart, the usual first symptom of which was, to use the words of my cardiologist, “sudden death.” Now, I had always known *as a principle of faith* that God deserves the credit for keeping us alive. To the Lord goes the glory for every good and perfect gift, including the gift of life. I knew that as a matter of faith, as a matter of doctrine. But making it through the preceding sixty-two years and then through the heart surgery itself made the whole doctrine much more alive for me. The privilege of life is not to be taken for granted. To our Maker goes the glory for life. I understand this now better than I ever did before.

So it is with this new year stretching before us. All of those earlier years were in the hands of God. Some of you are young, just barely getting on in years. Some of you are getting older. I say that for each of us, it is good to still be kicking! It is good to have reached this stage in life, with a new year stretching before us. We have not arrived here by chance. We have arrived here by the definite will of our Maker, by the definite plan and providence of

our God who knows us each one, who loves us each one, and who gives us each one this year lying before us. I am delighted by it all!

So, that is the first point: It is good to be facing a fresh new year. We have new chances before us to receive and to do some good on this earth.

Second, as we go forward into this new year, we go with the company of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are lots of “saviors” in this world – people who deserve genuine thanks for helping to keep us alive and happy. I am grateful to my cardiac surgeon, Dr. Ramachandra Reddy, for example. He helped save my life. I think of him as one of the Lord’s angels sent along to help save me. There are many people who have helped us in life: parents, teachers, lifeguards, soldiers, police, firefighters, physicians, nurses, financial counselors, attorneys. Many people might have contributed to our lives. They have been saviors for us in some measure – saving us from sickness, from ignorance, from financial or legal setback, from all kinds of disasters in life.

But Jesus is greater than these good folks. He is not simply a savior; he is *the* Saviour. All the dignity of the Word that St. John spoke of on Christmas Morning belongs to Jesus. Our Jesus was in the beginning. He was with God and was God. All things were made through him and without him was nothing made that was made. All these elevated teachings concern the Man who walks forward with us into this new year, 2017. We have a mighty Saviour at our side. This is going to be a good year! The One who made all things, and without whom nothing was made that was made – this One is well able to make this a good year. We go forward with Jesus at our side, and so we can go forward joyfully. For Lutherans like us, we can hardly keep ourselves from thinking of those great verses in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. We think of that defiant verse four, for example:

God’s Word forever shall abide,
no thanks to foes, who fear it;
for God himself fights by our side
with weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house,
goods, honor, child, or spouse,
though life be wrenched away,
they cannot win the day.
The kingdom’s ours forever!

And so, as we march ahead into the year 2017, let us remember that if we be Christians, we belong to Jesus. As we face the changes and the chances of 2017, he speaks of peace to us. If we should worry about our lives and the necessities of life, he says to us:

²⁵ ...I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25-26, RSV)

And if we should worry about clothing and fashion, he reassures us:

²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6:28-29, RSV)

As we move forward into 2017, we do not go alone. We are not in this battle alone:

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
(Matthew 10:30, KJV)

My first point, then, was that it is great to have reached this stage in life and to have this new year before. My second point has been that we should go forward into this new year with confidence and joy, for a Saviour has been born unto us.

My third point is simply this: let us bear the name of Jesus with dignity in this year now ahead of us. About this, please notice how the angel phrased things when speaking with Joseph: He said of Mary's Child that he shall 'save us from our sins.' Note that the angel did not say he would save us from the *punishment* of our sins, but something simpler, something much more profound: he will save us from our sins. That is what is on the heart of Jesus as we set forth into 2017: he desires to save us from sinning so much. He desires that we should sin less this year than last year. He desires a sacred separation between you and me, on the one hand, and our sins, on the other.

That is, Jesus wants only our good. It is nice to be forgiven of sin. That is an option available in the church. There is such a thing as private confession and absolution. Many people have availed themselves of that over the years, and I hope that you will know that it is available for you too. So, that is good. But it would be even better to sin less in 2017. If we could do that, we would spare ourselves, our families, our neighbors, even strangers... we would spare them some damage and the suffering that sin brings.

St. Paul states the good rule in this morning's Epistle Reading: In the year of our Lord 2017, let us try to have more of the mind of Christ:

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:5, RSV)

The apostle would have us seek a new mind. The apostle would have us to be discontent to continue with our old mind and our ways and our values and our old choices. Instead, the apostle invites us to view this coming year of our Lord has an opportunity to change our minds about things – to become more humble, more willing to count others as important as we count ourselves, to become more gentle, more patient, more kind in this year before us. In this way we will bring glory to the name of Jesus, who, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit deserve all the glory we can offer. Amen.