

Old and New Year

Christmas Feelings: Part 6 “Old and New Year”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – December 31, 2023

New Year’s Eve

Readings: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Reflection: Psalm 148

Greeting: Lord, you have been our help generation to generation. From past or future, forever to forever, you are God. Fill us full every morning with your faithful love! Let the kindness of the Lord our God be over us!

Prayer: Merciful God, renew us in your grace and mercy. May you guide us in celebrating the years past as we celebrate the new year to come. Help us once more to remember the nativity, and that we may rejoice in the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer. Prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas that you stir with your steadfast love and strengthen by your faithfulness that endures forever. May you build us up with feelings of renewal and continued hope as we carry with us the celebration of the birth of our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, from this day forth and forevermore. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 148

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 148 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 148 and hear of praising God. That we remember the amazing things that God has done and that we should celebrate all that God is for us today. That we sing God’s praises as a sign of our thankfulness. How do you praise God in your heart? How do you remember what God has done? How do you prepare for what God will do in the coming year? How can we share in the blessings of our savior? What are the feelings that you find as

we move from Christmas to the New Year? How do you carry the miracle that is Christmas forward in the coming year?

Prayer: Lord, prepare our hearts for the feelings of Christmas this New Year. That we come before you this day experiencing your grace as we prepare for the coming year. May your Holy Spirit guide us from darkness into the light of your love. As we come before you today, we bring to you the joys and concerns that we have spoken aloud together and shared in this place. We come to you silently with the worries and celebrations of our hearts. We pray you will help us to grow in faith through both sorrow and gladness. That through our laughter and our tears you will be with us. May we experience your mercy as you guide us in remembering the old as we usher in the new in a celebration of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 61, verse 10 through chapter 62, verse 3.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my whole being shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a beautiful crown in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
(Isaiah 61:10-62:3 NRSV*)

Our next reading is from Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir through God.
(Galatians 4:4-7 NRSV*)

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 2, verses 22 through 40.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy

Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too." There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:22-40 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today is New Year's Eve. So, we are looking back as we begin to move forward, which is something we do every year at this time. Mostly because we can't help but reflect on the year that was as we move forward into the unknown year ahead. And we try to use what we have learned along the way so that we are better prepared for the future. Part of that is the meeting of old and new, as well as this in between time as we are in the 12 days of Christmas, the 12 days from Christmas to Epiphany. And Epiphany rounds out our nativity story because it is there that we have the addition of the three wise men into the narrative. In this between time I wanted to think about this old and new year that we have, because I think it very much reflects the way that we often process things as we enter something new. And part of that is just the idea of understanding what was to prepare for what will be. And we see that in today's reading. That when we are looking at Luke, this is one of the little bits that we get before we jump to Jesus as an adult. Because there's not a lot about Jesus' childhood in the Bible. We get the birth, we have the dedication in the temple, and we have one more short story of Jesus as a child at about 12 years old. And that's it. Today we have the dedication and there's an interesting number here. It is not mentioned directly in the reading, but it is in our text. I thought it was appropriate for the idea of moving from something old into something new. It is the amount of time that we have for the purification. Because it is a time prescribed under the law and it is 40 days. It reminded me of the way that number ties into other accounts. It brought to mind how Christ spends 40 days in the wilderness preparing for public ministry. It brings to mind how long the Israelites spent in the wilderness with Moses. When we think about old and new together, we might think about Noah's ark and the 40 days it was on the waters. The one thing all these accounts share in common is the passage of time helping to prepare for the future. There is thinking about what was to prepare for what will be.

So, I was thinking about all of that as I read through this to prepare for New Year's Eve. One of the other things that we have is Simeon. Simeon is there to make a proclamation because it's revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he will see the Messiah. When they bring Jesus in he picks up the child and praises God. He praises God because he now knows that he has seen the Messiah and that his journey is complete. The Messiah is to be salvation for the people, a light for revelation to the gentiles and glory for the people of Israel. Redemption for all people everywhere. Simeon proclaims it right there in the temple at the dedication. But it comes with a warning. A warning that things won't be easy. That no matter how amazing the thing Simeon is saying is that there will be opposition and there will be trouble. Something that I was reflecting on is that the knowledge that there would be difficulty in trouble does not change all of the good. All of the good is still going to happen. All those wonderful things are still a part of the story. It's just that part of that story too is that it won't all be wonderful. Because some people don't want the good news, because it's good news for the people that they oppress. It's good news for the people they want to hold back. It's good news for the people they want to tear down. And so, it's not good news for them. And Simeon is not alone in proclaiming the child's greatness. Because we also have a prophet, a messenger of the word of God is there as well. This is Anna, an elderly woman never leaving the temple but worshiping and fasting, dedicating herself to God. She begins to come and praise God and speak about the child. She declares that this child is going to be the redemption of all the people.

Now you might be wondering at this point what any of this has to do with New Year's Eve but I can explain that. See, the one thing that we have today in our reading is waiting. Because one of the things I wanted to point out is that all this is said when Jesus was but a child. And the reason that matters is that these are all things that people will have to wait for. They will have to wait for this child to grow and to learn, to become strong filled with wisdom. They have to wait for him to come forth and begin his public ministry. But it doesn't lessen the joy that Simeon has. It doesn't lessen the joy that Anna has. And neither of them will see this child grow and begin his public ministry. Neither of them will live to see his life, his death, and his resurrection. Yet, they are still overjoyed. When I thought about that, it made me think about the fact that they were overjoyed because they knew good things would come. And they had faith. Faith that they could believe and trust that there was something wonderful on the way. Something good that was coming for the people. And that they were simply overjoyed that God had given them even just a glimpse of this glory. They wouldn't know exactly what was coming but they knew that there were good things on the horizon. Because they had faith. And part of that faith was knowing what had been proclaimed before and what was set to come after. And I started thinking about that in the way that we think about the year to come. We can easily see heartache and grief in years past. We can also see joy. And I was thinking about our Christmas feelings, because we haven't quite left those behind, nor should we. I was thinking about our Christmas feelings because they help us to prepare for celebrating the year that was and celebrating what will be. Because we know that God was there with us in the year that we are closing out. And we know that God will be with us in the year to come. That we too are called

to have faith that we can trust that God will be with us every step of the way. But God has also given the reminder that we are there for each other in the good and the bad. That we are together in the joy and in the sorrow. We are there for each other as witnesses of God's love and God's mercy each and every day. That we don't have to know what's coming to know that God will be with us. Because we have the reminder of Christmas that God is always with us. The reminder of Christmas that God's love is always there for us.

That even our readings today shows how God's promise is carried with us. We are children of the promise and heirs to the kingdom. That we have seen all that God has done and know the joy of knowing all that God will do. That our Christmas feelings will carry us through from the old year to the new. Through what was to what is and will give us support as we ponder what will be. It is a reminder that there's always something more for us to know. That we are bound together in hope, in peace, in joy, in love, and drawn together in celebration of the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. That the Holy Spirit is there to remind us of our Savior and the joy that we have because he is with us. We have our Heavenly Father always watching over us, in years that have fallen to memory, in the here and the now, and in the year that is to come. Because the promise of Christmas is that God always is with us. Salvation is always ours. Redemption is always at hand. And love is there every step of the way. Because the miracle of Christmas is how God is always with us. So let us celebrate the year that was. The heartache and the triumph both. We learn and we grow through laughter and tears. Through it all, we continue to move forward with our God and one another. Let us keep those Christmas feelings with us all year round, that we may celebrate God's love throughout every moment of this year, knowing that God is with us. So may we carry forth the feelings of Christmas and may I wish you blessings. May the Lord be with you in the year to come. And may we all have a Happy New Year. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God’s love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Christmas Feelings

Our Advent and Christmas series is called “Christmas Feelings.” We will be looking at the feelings we have from Advent, Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Epiphany. Each week takes on a different feeling and how we carry them with us as we look forward to another year with Christ. Let’s celebrate our Christmas feelings!

12/3: Hope of Advent	12/10: Peace of Advent	12/17: Joy of Advent
12/24: Love of Advent	12/24: Celebration of Christmas	
12:31: Old and New Year	1/7: Gift of Christmas	

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Calvin St. Michael	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams		

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