

What a pivotal day today is! It's New Year's (eve) and this day has so many traditions and memories associated with it. There will be fireworks, parades, balls dropping in light, family celebrations, time spent with loved ones, tv watching, parades and football. There will be the eating of 12 grapes in Spain as they hope for 12 sweet and fruitful months in the coming year, there will be 'forget the year' parties in Japan where misunderstandings and grudges are forgiven and houses are scrubbed symbolizing the cleansing of lives and relationships. Buddhist temples will strike their gongs 108 times tonight to expel their list of 108 human weaknesses in order to lay to rest those weaknesses of the past and to enter into the new year with strength and a clean slate. The Babylonians, as far as history can tell, made the first new years resolutions and Christians carried that tradition forward, all resolving to improve oneself in the coming year.

The Romans had a god named Janus who had two faces looking forward and backward at the same time. Historians say that the name January comes from the name of Janus where we stand together looking backwards and forwards at the same time in our own calendar year. And that's just what we do this weekend. We'll have Father Time passing behind us and the New Year's Baby welcoming the 2012 future in. I remember that image very well because in our family, today is also a celebration with the birth of our first child on New Year's Eve. She didn't get the blessing of being the New Year's Baby, but we did get a whole year of tax credit for having her on Dec 31!

The church calendar also has a lot of ways for us to look at this weekend of holidays. Unlike our daily calendar, where the whole year of newness stretches out in front of us, the church calendar seems to compress and squeeze time this year. In most years, we usually celebrate a few Sundays of Christmas together, as the stores take down their decorations and Christmas becomes a thing of clearance sales. In contrast to that, Christmas for the church begins on Dec 25 and lasts for the 12 days of Christmas until Jan 6th, the Epiphany, which is the feast of the arrival of the wise men. But then again, Jan 1st is the Feast of the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ which we hear about today in our readings as the baby is brought into the temple at the age of 8 days to be circumcised and named. Typically, unless you do daily prayer, we usually don't have church services on that day and instead have either Christmas lessons still or move into the next Sunday celebrating the epiphany. Our wise men caravan moves down from their perch atop the balcony right up to the manger scene in front of the main altar and we move on to the church calendar.

I'm telling you all of this because today, New Years (eve) Day, is a confusion of churching this year. We're still in the Christmas season and that's why we're singing old familiar carols. We're honoring the holy name of Jesus today on his 8th Day of life and we're celebrating the New Year ahead of us while we don't forget that the 12 days of Christmas ends with our Epiphany party on this coming Friday night. Scripture is the story of our ancestors, of our own people, not of store sales. And I don't know how this year we will tell all of these wonderful family stories because of the strange way the calendar fell on days this year.

Speaking of strange calendars and stories, next week in church you'll see no more decorations, no more wise men (they arrived during the work week this year) and we'll be listening to the scripture about the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan when he was about 30 years old. 8 days old this weekend to 30 years old next weekend. Whew! That's what I mean about compressed time. It's a challenge for us preachers to pick and choose from all these themes.

So here's the bottom line for me this year. He was born. God was born as a human. Christmas gift upon gift. He was named. The name given to him was Jesus, which translated means "the Lord saves." Knowing his name means everything in the world. It means that we have a relationship with God that never, before this naming, was possible like this. The Christian blessing is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; naming the names of our creator God, our redeemer Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as our sustainer. As you are blessed, the invoking, the calling on of God's name, is an outward sign of the inward strength, the inward blessing that comes to you as a Christian.

For if we but say the name of Jesus we are with God. God stops, looks and listens whether God wants to or not. Don't believe that? Well, it's true whether we call on the name of Jesus or if we call your name. When someone calls out your name, you are somehow with them immediately. If they call your name, you stop, you look and listen whether you want to or not. The same is true with God. Just give it a try. And that can be a new year's resolution for you and me: just give it a try. Call out; call on, the name of Jesus more and more each day. And when you do, know that you are with God, know that the very name of the Lord itself is a blessing to you as you say it and as you hear yourself say it. You are with God Jesus, and Jesus, our Lord, is with you. That's his promise!

And so the ancient blessing of the Israelites we heard in scripture today is given to us once more as we enter this New Year together: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance, his favor and support, upon you and give you peace." There's no better New Year's prayer than that. *Amen.*