

## **New Year's Eve "Remember" December 31 2020**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be pleasing unto you, O Lord. our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

If you are a news or history junkie, you probably enjoy this time of year when it seems like most of the major news publications put out their "2020 Year in Review" lists where they recap major news stories from this past year. While most of the lists, and perhaps your memories, go back to all those things having to do with the pandemic and the election, I will avoid those things...if you will excuse the expression, like the plague. For there were many things that we should be thankful for in 2020 as well.

The good things you may remember best may be things that never made the headlines. Instead, they may be events from your personal life, a birth or a wedding, a family vacation or reunion, or a graduation or some other milestone. In addition, through thick and thin, this church has been blessed to continue all its ministries, missions, services, Bible studies, office hours, preschool, weddings, funerals, and support to missionaries both here and abroad.

But lets' face it: although there are many joyous memories that you cherish from the past, there are also many sorrows that cling to your heart. Dealing with social isolation, new ways of doing business, new ways of communicating may have thrown you for a loop. Or perhaps you remember a period of loneliness or depression, the loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, or the loss of a home. Perhaps you remember a failure, or even a sin you committed against somebody or even against yourself.

Tonight, most of the world will celebrate with almost unrivaled revelry. Smiling faces and swirling confetti will fill the television screens. The sounds of cheers, party favors, horns, singing and fireworks will assault our ears. And for at least a few hours, people all over the world will rejoice in the expectation of a new start and a resolve to make the coming year better than the past. As they did the year before and the year before that, ad infinitum.

But what if your heart is filled not with joy but distress? After all, if we look back honestly to remember the sins of the past year—all those ways you materially participated in behavior that damaged your relationship with God, and with others—can lead to regret and sorrow, guilt and shame. And that is especially true when you know and feel in your heart the indictment of God's holy and just Law and its accusation rises against you as an uncorrupted judge, revealing the height and depth of your iniquity. The Law reveals such things as holding grudges against one another, harboring hate in our hearts, not forgiving others when we have been forgiven so much, or persisting in some act that we know is not God pleasing. No resolution for the new year can undo the sin that has been done to us; no resolution for the new year can erase the harm we've already done to others.

But tomorrow is not only the secular New Year's holiday (the Church New Year began on the first Sunday in Advent); tomorrow is the celebration of the naming and circumcision of Jesus. This is when we remember that the angel said that this child of the virgin Mary was to be named Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. And it is the day that the baby Jesus shed His first blood for us in his circumcision, foreshadowing the blood He would shed for us on the cross.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, although it is a just and holy work of God's Law to prick your conscience and reveal your sin, it is the work of Satan, the accuser (Rev 12:10), to stir up your conscience to guilt and shame, even though you have confessed your sin and received absolution from the pastor as from God himself. We should remember that our Lord Jesus has forgiven us **all** our sin with the sprinkling of his blood (Heb 10:22). And though we've **received** forgiveness for all of our sin in the blood of Jesus, Satan delights in bringing to our remembrance those sins of our past, that we might doubt the extent of God's love for us—or question whether he could love us at all. Satan delights in replaying the sins of our lives in our minds so we might doubt God's promise that our transgressions are truly removed from us, as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). Satan delights in pricking our consciences and bringing forth feelings of guilt so that we might live under unending feelings of condemnation and shame.

St. Paul tells us when the sins of your past trouble you, do not be anxious, but turn your hearts and minds to remember that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, and the God of peace will be with you (Phil 4:6-9). Tonight, I invite you to specifically think upon the Word of the Lord that was spoken through King David in Psalm 103:

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives **all** your iniquity, who heals **all** your diseases, who **redeems** your life from the pit, who **crowns** you with steadfast love and mercy, who **satisfies** you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (vv 1-5).

When your spirit is downcast, remember all that the Lord has done for you in both body and soul. He has given you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses, and still takes care of them (Small Catechism, First Article), which is to say, not only has God given you body and life, but He also grants you daily health (v 3) and strength (v 5) and breath. If this were not enough, He also gives you every good and perfect gift (v 5; James 1:17), and He works justice, caring for the oppressed and governing in righteousness (Ps 103:6). Everything that you have ever needed, the Lord has provided. He has provided for your physical needs abundantly, giving far more than any sinner deserves (103:10).

But above all else when your heart is weighed down by the sins of the past, David invites you to remember that your iniquity is forgiven: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives **all** your iniquity" (vv 2-3). In Baptism (yours and His in the Jordan River), Jesus claims your sin and iniquity as his own so that he can bear it to Calvary's cross, where your sin was put to death in his suffering and death. Jesus suffered and died, experiencing rejection from God and man so that your sin would be removed from you, which is to say, that your sin would be forgiven and remembered no more by God. Thus, you may believe and joyfully sing, Bold shall I stand in that great day, Cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay; Fully absolved through these I am, From sin and fear, from guilt and shame. (*LSB* 563:2, *Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness*)

The atoning work of Jesus frees you from your sin. That is your eternal joy because you have been baptized into Christ. But there is more! As the hymnist notes, because you are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus in the cleansing flood of Baptism, you are also freed from guilt and shame. You are given a good conscience (Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21), a restful heart, and the blessed tranquility of soul that Christ brought forth with him from the grave and bestowed on his disciples, even as he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). You have been washed in Christ's forgiveness and purified from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9). Therefore, you now have peace with God and have received his good will (Lk 2:14). In Jesus, God remembers your sin no longer; he will not accuse you or act upon it in any way.

When Satan uses the memory of your past sin to accuse you and bring sorrow and doubt to your heart, you may take comfort in the water of your Baptism, where Christ blots out the accusations levied against you. You may take comfort in the supper of Christ's body and blood, given for the forgiveness of your sin, which you do in remembrance of Jesus and the forgiveness He brings. Though Satan is a powerful, devious, and relentless adversary (using even your heart and mind against you), Jesus (who made satisfaction for the sins of the **world** by his sacrificial death upon the cross) is even more powerful. Jesus absolves, liberates, and saves you by defeating the old evil foe, not only upon the cross, but also in your very life, granting you peace and hope through his Word, his sacred baptismal washing, and his holy feast. Thus, the truth of God's love is proven, as the apostle John writes, "Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart" (1 Jn 3:20).

Tonight, you will turn the calendar page from 2020 to 2021, and you will be the same person in the new year as you were in the old one: "a poor, miserable sinner." You will still bear in your flesh and in your memory the effects of that reality.

But remember also that you are so much more:

**You Are And Will Continue To Be Christ's Beloved Child: Redeemed, Baptized, And Forgiven.**

If you have chosen to make resolutions to live a better life or to strive for a more holy life in the new year, may God grant you success. But as you make resolutions, do not make them to try to make up for your life of sin and guilt, a life of which Satan delights to remind you. Make your resolutions in light of Jesus and his sacrifice. Jesus has already dealt with your sins upon the cross in his Baptism. Your life of holy living in this new year is merely a response to remembering what Jesus has done for you.

So as 2020 passes away and 2021 dawns upon us, remember. Remember not the sins or accusations laid against you, but remember the grace of God. Live in daily repentance, in Jesus' forgiveness, in new life, and in his steadfast love for you. God's grace sustained you throughout this past year, and it will surely sustain you in the next. For the steadfast love of our eternal Lord is from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear him.

Always be ready for the coming of the Lord. Remember whose child you are. And He will come to take you to the place He has prepared for you...because He said so!

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps 103:1). And may the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen.