

## Two New Year's Gifts.

Text: Luke 2:21

Suggested Hymns:

552, 554, 35, 36, 161

1) A Great Gift Which God Presents To Us

2) A Small Gift Which We Should Present To God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 2:21, <sup>21</sup> ***And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

***“And when eight days were completed,”*** says our text. Eight days since when? Since the birth of Jesus. And this is the eighth day after the joyous festival of Christ’s birth. So the reason why this Gospel was placed on the church calendar for the day is, because the occurrence corresponds with the date.

And what date is this? It is the first day in a new secular year, New Year’s Day, a day of joy and jubilation, a day greeted with delight and hailed with gladness by Christians and non-Christians.

It will certainly interest us all to know that there was a time when this day was not celebrated in the Christian church as a festival. In the first centuries of the Christian era the Christians observed this day as a day of fasting.

On this day the heathen had a great celebration in their way, offering great sacrifices to their gods, eating, drinking, dancing, and being merry. And the Christians were careful not to appear as if they took apart in those festivities of the heathen.

Augustine, who lived in the latter part of the fourth and in the beginning of the fifth century, says, *“On this day we Christians fast and sigh for the heathen who are joyful.”*

But when in the course of time heathenism was dethroned and Christianity was made the religion of the state, the Christians made a festival of the day which formerly had been a day of fasting.

It is only for about eight hundred years that New Year's Day is celebrated in the church as a joyful festival. And why do Christians hail this day with joy and gladness? Because, as we are informed in our Gospel, the Lord God did for us a great thing on this day. He conferred upon us a great gift, a priceless treasure.

And the solemn importance of the day reminds us that we should consecrate ourselves to God and thus present also to Him a gift on this memorable day of our earthly lives. Accordingly, the subject of our meditation is "*Two New Year's Gifts.*" May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. A Great Gift Which God Presents To Us**

While with the children of men Christmas Day is the day of gifts, New Year's Day is with them the day of good wishes. And there is a New Year's wish for us all, written by God and extended to us in His divine word.

That New Year's wish is our simple and brief Gospel which reads, "*<sup>21</sup> And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*"

Now we must know that God's wishes are not like the wishes of men, not simply cheering words and hopeful expressions. When God wishes us anything, He, at the same time, imparts, and presents to us that which He wishes.

David, therefore, says, "*You have blessed it, O LORD, and it shall be blessed forever.*"<sup>1</sup> The fact is that God on this day had His beloved Son shed the first drops of His precious blood to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins, and that in the darkness before us, in the dim future, which our eyes cannot penetrate, He writes the sweet name of JESUS in flaming letters to dispel all the darkness and to illumine our path.

In the first place, let us note that Jesus was circumcised on this day. Now that seems to be a very foolish thing in the eyes of man, that Jesus should submit to this old Israelites rite and sacrament. But such are God's institutions, foolish in the eyes of man.

It is the same with Baptism, which in the New Testament has followed in the wake of Circumcision. And why did Jesus submit to Circumcision? Did He have to do that? or did He do that for His own sake? No; Jesus was not under the Law. He is Lord of all. And yet He placed Himself under the Law and was obedient to the Law for our sakes, because by the Law we were all condemned.

We are all sinners, and eternal condemnation is our doom, because we do not fulfil the commandments. However, Jesus came to fulfil the commandments in our stead and to pay the penalty for our transgressions.

And on this day He made the beginning to atone for us by His precious blood. This day He shed the first drops of His blood, to be followed by His holy sacrificial offering on the cross, when as the Lamb of God He bled and died for us all.

This day, the first day of the year, God extends to us in His New Year's wish a general pardon for all our transgressions, for all our sins in the past year and for all the sins of the new year; a general pardon by the blood and righteousness of His beloved Son.

And to this grand New Year's gift God adds something more. As in Baptism the child receives a name, so the Son of God received a name in Circumcision. And what is that name? Jesus. Why the name Jesus? Because it was "***the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.***" And what is the meaning of this name? The angel said to Joseph, "***you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.***"<sup>2</sup> Jesus means Saviour, Redeemer.

Now in His great New Year's wish God presents to us the name of Jesus, and that is not an empty name. In the dark future before us, the name of Jesus boldly stands forth in shining letters, more bright than gold, and silver, and sparkling diamonds.

Jesus will guide our way and illumine our path. Jesus will be with us in the new year, as He has been in the old. Jesus will be in our hearts, in our homes, in our humble little church, in our assembly. His grace will not depart from us, nor will the covenant of His peace be removed.

His love will be the same, His mercy the same, His comfort the same. No matter what may be in store for us, in days of joy and in days of sorrow, Jesus

will be with us. Let the dreary days come, let times of sorrowing come, let our best friends desert us, Jesus will not leave us. He will be with us always, even unto the end of the world.

Tell me, my friends, is not this a grand wish and gift for the new year? O how happy, how fortunate we are, how rich, how blessed to have the sweet name of Jesus!

God is the almighty Owner of the earth. If He wished, He could give us all the gold and silver in the world. But what would we be benefited if, at the same time, we did not possess the Gospel of His grace? We would be poor and miserable; for in death we must leave all, and all the riches of this earth cannot purchase the kingdom of heaven.

God could also give us the promise and make true the promise that during the year no illness would visit our homes, no sorrow would come into our hearts, no want would knock at our doors, that all our days would be joyful and happy on this earth. But how do we know that such continuous joy would be for our own good? What are all the joys of life without the grace of God? Must we not all die?

And what is more terrible than the fate of the rich man who found himself in hell and torment, after he had fared sumptuously every day and had received his good things in his life-time? — Indeed, the grace of God imparted to us with the sweet name of Jesus is the grandest gift that God could bestow upon us.

## **2. A Small Gift Which We Should Present To God.**

Having shown you the great gift which God bestows on us this New Year's Day, let me, in the second place, call your attention to a small gift which we should present to God.

Our Gospel says that the name Jesus was "*the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*" And, as we have heard before, the angel said to Joseph, "*You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*" So the very name of Jesus reminds us of the fact that we are sinners, who are in need of a Saviour.

And now what can we give to God as a New Year's gift since we are sinners? Shall we give Him our property, our earthly possessions? I am afraid that perhaps many a Christian would be unwilling to do that.

How some people grumble and complain when they are called upon to do something for God, to give for the church! They can spend money very lavishly for their own amusement and pleasure, but even a small amount for the church is too much for them. And yet Christ says in Luke 14:33, <sup>33</sup> *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.*

A true Christian should not only be willing to give freely for God's kingdom, but should do so without grumbling, should find pleasure in doing so, and thank the Lord when he is able to help by earthly means in the establishment of God's kingdom.

Still, if we would sacrifice all our possessions for Christ's sake, can we really say that we have given God anything? Is not God the real Owner? Does not heaven and earth belong to Him? Are we more than stewards who must give account to God how we dealt with those goods which He placed in our hands on this earth?

What else, then, can we give God as a New Year's gift? Shall we give Him our clothing, when in the shape of a beggar He appeals to us to give Him protection and shelter?

Shall we give Him food and drink when to the poor that are starving, because they cannot procure the necessaries of life, we give nourishment?

All this we are required to do as Christians, and Jesus distinctly says of such deeds done in the faith, *'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*<sup>33</sup> Still, can we really say that we have given God anything when we have ministered to the wants of those that are in need? Is not God the real Owner of all that we possess, also of our food and clothing?

Yet, my friends, there is one thing we have, and which we can really give God as a New Year's gift. It is very small indeed, insignificant compared with the great New Year's gift of our God; but God will gladly accept it, yes, He begs for it, as it were, He asks and demands of us that we should give Him that gift.

In the book of Proverbs He says, <sup>26</sup> *My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.*<sup>4</sup>

O let us give God our hearts. Let this be our New Year's gift. And how shall we do that? The heart is the seat of our affection, the seat of love. To give God our hearts is to love Him.

By nature our hearts are alienated from God. By nature our hearts do not cling to God, but to sin, to the world and its evil lusts. We must, therefore, tear away our heart from the world and from sin and give it to Him who made it, to God.

This we can never do of our own natural power, but only in the power of God. And, therefore, we must call upon God to give us strength from on high. We must be so minded that every day of the year we say in our hearts, *"I do not covet the riches of this earth, if only I am made rich in God; I do not care for the pleasures of this world, if only I am made sure of the pleasures of heaven; I do not desire earthly glory, if only I shall be honoured as a child of God."*

Our motto must be for the New Year, as written in Psalm 73:25, ***"Lord, whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You."*** Behold, then, if we do this, then we have given God our heart, and not a better New Year's gift does He desire.

Let us love Him, then, for He has first loved us. If we remain in this love, we shall also remain in the faith, and if we remain in the faith, the New Year shall be to us a year of grace and blessing.

May the Lord grant us this for the sake of Jesus, His beloved Son, our Lord, to whom be praise and glory forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Chronicles 17:27

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:21

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 23:26