

The First Sunday After Christmas - Year B
December 30, 2018
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- SERMON -

Well, 2018 is almost over! How do you feel about that? Are you excited for a new year – 2019? Or are you sad that 2018 is ending?

A couple more questions for you, if I may. Ask yourselves, “This time last year, what goals did I have for myself? Were they accomplished, realized?”

What do I see for 2019? What can make 2019 a good year for me?

These are all questions I think we ask ourselves every year when we’re about to experience another New Year’s Eve, right?

I heard someone say, “My New Year’s resolution is to stop hanging out with people who ask me about my New Year’s resolutions.”

Then there’s the guy who said, “I raised my left leg before the ball dropped so I could start the New Year off on the right foot.”

There’s always a lot of concerns and anticipation when a new year is about to begin.

But today is more than the anticipation of the birth of a new year. It was only a few days ago when we celebrated the birth of a new baby. And not just any baby, but the Baby Jesus, who was born of the Holy Spirit. A newborn who came in such an unusual way. Brought to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph to satisfy the requirements of a census, but was left with no place to sleep except someone’s barn. Today that would be like having a young couple, sleep in your garage, even though the woman was obviously about to give birth.

And yet we’re told that this birth was special enough for angels to announce it to shepherds out in the field. And after the shepherds saw the young couple and the baby, they were so excited they went and told everyone about it, then returned to the field, “Glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.”

And today we are reminded that eight days later, as was the Jewish custom, the boy child was circumcised and named.

It’s interesting to note that this is done “on the eighth day”.

I read a synopsis recently that is interesting. Let's go back a bit... Way back... To Genesis Chapter 1 which says that on the first day, God said, "let there be light," and there was light. On the second day, God separated the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. And there were things God did on the third day, the fourth day, etc. On the sixth day, God made man. On the seventh day, God rested. Nothing is mentioned about any further "days" of creation, but it's interesting that God placed a symbolic ceremony on the eighth day of a newborn, and Luke remembered to place this in his writings.

This is not the eighth day of creation we are talking about. This is the eighth day of the incarnation of Jesus, our God and Lord. Eight days after Jesus was born, He was circumcised and named. It just so happens that this day falls on the same day that America celebrates as New Year's Eve. Ironically, these two days do have a few similarities. No, there wasn't a parade when Jesus was circumcised. There were no college bowl games on the plains of Jerusalem. But nonetheless, there are a few similarities.

The Eighth Day was like New Year's Day in that it was the completion of something old. Usually when a new year begins, people will like to show the highlights from the year before. Just recently the news media made their judgments on what they thought were the most memorable things of 2018.

- North and South Korea vowed to formally end the Korean War
- Cuba announced a new president, ending the 59-year Castro leadership
- Iraq had its first parliamentary elections since the defeat of ISIS in the country
- Mexico is selling its \$218.7 million presidential plane to use funds for poor communities

This is good stuff.

So, we pay our final respects to the events of 2018, and we move on.

When Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, God was closing the book on something old. Not something that was done for only a year, but something that was done for approximately 1,500 years.

In Genesis God had taken Abraham outside and said to him, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Later on He said to Abraham, "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised."

Along with the circumcision was the naming of the child.

The naming of a child in the ancient Hebrew culture was ceremonial, particularly if the child was the first-born male child. After eight days, the child was circumcised and given his name. Then the family travelled to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate the child to God and to give an offering of thanks for God's blessing.

The name given to Jesus was not chosen by Mary and Joseph. His name was chosen by God and told to them before the baby was born. The significance of God's choice is evident in the name. In the gospels, he is called Jesus, but that is the Greek form of his Hebrew name.

The gospels were written in Greek because it was the literary language of the time. The Hebrew name of Jesus is Joshua, more properly pronounced Yeshua, which means 'The Lord saves' or simply 'Saviour'.

Similarly, the word, 'Christ', is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word, 'Mashiakh', which means 'Anointed One' or 'Messiah'. As early as the first century, Jesus was called 'Joshua Mashiakh' or 'Jesus Christ'. We commonly refer to Jesus as Jesus Christ. If we were to call him by his Hebrew name, it would be Joshua (Yeshua) Mashiakh. In either language, his name means 'Saviour, the Anointed One.'

The significance of his name was understood by his early disciples and followers. His name meant that he was anointed by God to bring salvation to the Hebrew people. His name, Joshua, was more than a reference to the ancient hero, Joshua, who led the Hebrew people into the promised land. HIS name meant that he would save the people again, but not with military power. The Israelites were looking for a Messiah to bring a military-type salvation, one who would do battle and win against the Roman empire.

But THIS Joshua would save the people by restoring them to the covenant between God and God's people, the covenant made with Abraham by God. Joshua Mashiakh was the anointed one sent by God to lead the people into a new salvation, leading them into a renewed spiritual relationship with God, free from oppressive religion. When God's angels told Mary and Joseph to name the child Joshua, God had a special plan.

We read this morning that God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

A new salvation, leading to a renewed spiritual relationship with God.

We are going into a new year. Whatever 2018 meant to you, you can enter 2019 with hope, peace and a clear purpose.

One of the biggest areas of need we have in life are in our relationships. The University of Minnesota has done research in the area of taking charge of your health and wellbeing. They have found that a major part of healthy living is in our personal relationships. According to their research they have found that healthy relationships can help us:

- Live longer
- Deal with stress easier
- Be healthier
- Feel richer

If healthy relationships with others can help us in these areas, imagine what a healthy spiritual relationship with God would do for us.

Paul and Timothy wrote to the Philippians just what we need for entering our future. An example to set before us, when they said,
“In your relationships with one another,
 have the same mindset as Christ Jesus
“Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used
 to his own advantage;”

Instead, as a human, he was obedient to God and he served others.

What a most excellent example to follow.

So, here's a thought. Why don't we use this as an example, as individuals and as a church family. Why don't we enter the new year, the year 2019, glorifying and praising God just as the shepherds did, and enjoy a renewed spiritual relationship with Him. Can you imagine how that might just allow us to:

Live longer
Deal with stress easier
Be healthier
Feel richer

But be careful! It might just encourage us to serve and have better relationships with each other.

Now, there's a New Year's resolution to consider.

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