

I.N.I.

New Year's Eve
Dec. 31, 2018
Selected texts

In Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today and throughout everyone of our tomorrow's, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the reasons for worshipping on this last evening of the old year is to take the time to reflect upon the past. We examine our past year's activities, we repent of the past year's failures and faithlessness and we also rejoice in the past year's blessings. We give thanks to God for His loving protection, guiding hand, forgiveness of sins and rich abundance to us in the past. And then we look forward to the future with confidence that the same will continue, because our Lord says: **"I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU." SO WE MAY BOLDLY SAY: "THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID"**

This evening we will look back upon the worship services and sermon texts of 2018, read some of the passages from those sermons, sing some hymns from those various church seasons and remember other congregation events. So come along as we journey through the services and events of 2018 and see how many you remember. We began with Epiphany Sunday and the Wise Men seeing Jesus. Our sermon theme was

: **THE GLORY OF THE CHIRST-CHILD IS REVEALED**

I: By the STAR. II: By the WORD. III: By the Worshipping WISE MEN.

We read a portion of the sermon: *Genuine Christian worship does not come naturally for any of us. By nature we are more important to ourselves than others, even God. Therefore we need God's Word to show us what we really are, what we need and what He has done for us. The Wise Men knew what they were. They knew that they were lost sinners. They knew that by themselves they could not stand before the God of Creation and expect to be granted eternal life in heaven. They knew that they had broken His commandments and deserved nothing but death and damnation. And so do we. We have had the Law of our God come crashing down on us and reveal to us all of our shortcomings, our failures, our sins in stark reality.*

These wise Men also knew what they needed. They knew that God provided in this Baby their Substitute; their atoning Sacrifice who would live perfectly for them and die sacrificially as one of them. That is why they willingly, lovingly traveled all of those miles to worship a baby. To the world, that is nonsense! But to the believer that is essential! They prostrated themselves before Him, giving Him praise and glory as their God, as their Messiah, as their Lord, as their Savior and King. They gave of their time, their treasures and of their hearts. We see that from the costly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

During the Epiphany season we heard of Jesus defeating Satan in the wilderness. We heard Paul encourage all of us to take part in the "REAL" Olympics for the "Crown of Life" which requires continual spiritual training.

Levi Timothy Schaser and Jameson Marcus Albrecht were born and then reborn through the Sacrament of Baptism. We began a Sunday morning Bible class looking at how God used politicians of the Lutheran Reformation to spread His Word.

Let us sing Hymn **127 (1-4)**

This past year's mid-week Lenten series pulpit exchange was entitled: **"Return from Exile: a Lenten Journey"** We went from *Sackcloth and Ashes to Robes of Righteousness; from Eden to Heaven; from the Tree of Life to the Cross; from the Wilderness to the Promised Land.*

In our Sunday morning Lenten services we heard about the "IRONIES of the Passion." We quote from one of our Lenten sermons when Jesus appeared before King Herod. The irony was Herod had been wanting to see Jesus for he hoped to see a miracle but God wanted to show him his Savior. *Herod thought Jesus could answer all the hard questions, perform amazing miracles, be a wizard or magician, but Jesus wouldn't play the game. While Herod was trying to enjoy his prisoner, the leaders of the Jews were there **VEHEMENTLY ACCUSING HIM.** They were trying to distract Herod. The worst thing they could imagine was Jesus doing a miracle*

and getting Herod on His side. But they need not have worried. Jesus had no intention of showing off, of doing any miracles for Herod that day. So Herod did what all spoiled children do when they get bored. He and his soldiers mocked Jesus. They hung a royal robe over His shoulders and insulted Him. And then Herod sent Jesus away without ever understanding what he had missed and to whom he had been really speaking.

Jesus didn't have to hold His tongue when His enemies accused Him. He didn't have to let this evil ruler and his soldiers abuse and insult Him. If He had offered a defense, no one would have blamed Him. But since Jesus loves us, He allowed this man to abuse Him, to mock Him, and then send Him back to Pilate. This was all another step to the cross for Him and to life for us. Unfortunately, Herod never saw that and neither did Pontius Pilate, who had sent Jesus to him hoping to get rid of a political headache. Neither man made a real effort to understand who Jesus really was. So both men missed seeing their Savior that day.

During March Matt Starland conducted a Christian Apologetics Seminar and Shelby Sabel became a communicant member by transfer. Let us sing Hymn 153

On Easter Sunday morning we heard the angels ask: **“Why Do You Look for the Living Among the Dead?”** We read a portion of our Easter sermon: *The angels rebuked these women because the angels were holy. They had the same perspective God has. They were speaking in God's place. We can make all the excuses in the world for these women, but that won't change the fact that their faith wasn't strong enough to cling to God's promises at this horrible moment in their lives. Why would we want to defend their sinful weakness? Well, that's obvious, isn't it? We identify with these women who did love their Lord. For our faith is often weak too. When we hurt, when troubles fill our lives, when life seems unbearable, or when death is looking us in the face—our own death or the death of people we love—the natural response for us is simply to try to cope. It's natural for us to tell ourselves that trials, troubles and even death are all just a part of life. The natural response is for us to be fearful, doubting, filled with sorrow and grief and just focus on the practical needs at hand. We can easily leave Jesus and His promises out of the picture.*

*Is that so very different from what these women did when they looked for their Lord in a tomb? The angels owe us the same rebuke. But remember what they said in the very next breath: **HE IS NOT HERE, BUT IS RISEN!** In His great love, Jesus did the impossible. He died on the cross and paid for our sins and then rose from the dead. Now death does not win in our lives. All those who die trusting in Jesus will live with Him forever—even if their faith is weak like it was for those women on that first Easter morning. Day by day, the power of the resurrection—the Gospel—is a living force that changes our hearts. It is the source of strength for our faith, especially on the days when life is a mess or death comes.*

Let us sing Hymn 206 (1-2 & 9)

40 days after Easter we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord and King. Our theme was **“Every Christian is a Martyr.”** The word “martyr” means “witness.” Christian faith and witnessing for Christ go hand in hand. The Holy Spirit fills us with the Good News about Jesus so we can tell others about what He has done for us all.

Ten days later we celebrated Pentecost and heard from the prophet Joel. **And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters**

shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. Our theme was; **“Praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit!”** We read a portion of that sermon: *The work of the prophet was not just to receive God’s Word, but to reveal it to others. So also we are not just to read and hear God’s Word but we are to proclaim it to others as well. We see the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled the believers and enabled them to speak in languages they had never learned so that the visitors to Jerusalem could hear the Good News of Jesus in their own language. He does the same today when our little children proclaim to us the Christmas story on Christmas Eve, or sing songs in our worship services. He does the same through you men and women when you teach in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School the wonderful works of God in Christ. He does the same when you, young and old tell your neighbors and friends about Jesus. That same Spirit opens the mouths of God’s people to speak like prophets of old to witness, and He does that without respect to race, gender, age, social or economic status.*

This gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to you, and to me--the gift of faith in Jesus Christ; the gift of knowing that all of our sins are forgiven; the gift of learning His Word; the gift of being able to witness and testify to the truth of His Word and to profess what we know and believe in our hearts. The gift of the Spirit that will continue to prepare your hearts and mine through faith to be able to stand on that last day with confident joy relying upon the life and death, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus alone for our salvation.

Let us sing Hymn 225 (1-3)

Confession of Faith-----Offering of our Thankful hearts---Hymn 792

In July Kirsten & Nichole Brandle went on the Mission Helper trip to the continent of Africa where they spread the Good New of Jesus especially to the young. Member Elinor Gbedey suffered a stroke on the way to Africa but God strengthened and healed her. She has completely recovered and is presently living with her daughter in South Carolina.

In August and September Seminary student Nick Naumann served the Lord as our vicar and also traveled with me to Luther Memorial where the Lord had me serve as their vacancy pastor. We also celebrated our 45th anniversary, by God’s grace, as a congregation. Also in August the Lord in His mercy took the soul of our beloved brother in Christ, Duane Riggert, to his heavenly home.

Vicar Nick preached for our annual Mission Festival on John 4 with the theme: **“God’s Gift of Living Water---He has given it to us so that we can share it with others.”**

In an effort to reach out to the children of our area we began hosting our Children’s Play Group gatherings every other Wednesday morning.

On Reformation Sunday we hosted the Joint Reformation service where we heard Pastor Sauers proclaim: **“Behold the Beauty of the Cross—The necessity of Christ’s and the privilege of our own.”**

Let us sing Hymn 523 (1-4)

Mrs. Diane Hofricther was received as a communicant member in November. We hosted a seminar on Islam and Christianity conducted by former Missionary Dave Koenig. On Thanksgiving Eve we heard from the Lord through Moses tell us: **When you have eaten and are full: REMEMBER THE LORD, OUR GOD!**

We read a portion from the sermon: *When we have bought and refurbished our beautiful homes; when we have worked and multiplied our bank accounts, investments and all of our material things; and our hearts are lifted up and we forget our God who set us free from the slavery to sin, death and the devil; and forget our God who gives us our daily bread and we start to say, MY POWER; MY MIGHT; MY INTELLECT, MY TALENTS gained me this wealth---we need to*
REMEMBER THE LORD, OUR GOD!

Thanks-living includes all that we think, say and do in our everyday life. Remembering the Lord our God in whatever circumstance or situation we are in—at work, home, school, recreation, and competition. And thanks-living of course includes a daily, sincere confession of our sins, acknowledging our own unworthiness of all of these blessings and from the heart praising our God who graciously bestows them all.

*The Pilgrims used 5 kernels of corn to remind them to give thanks. May these words of our loving God through Moses ever remind us: **WHEN YOU HAVE EATEN AND ARE FULL, REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD AND BLESS HIS NAME.***

Let us sing Hymn 793 (1 & 3)

In December Kyla Hyland was baptized and confirmed in her Christian faith and became a communicant member. In our mid-week Advent pulpit exchange, we prepared for our Savior's coming by meditating on Isaiah 9:6 with the theme **"What's in a Name?" Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

On Christmas Eve Jonathan, our narrators, and choir declared that **"Christmas Does Make a Difference."** It made a difference to Adam & Eve, Abraham, David, Isaiah & Zacharias, John the Baptist, Mary and the Shepherds, the Wise Men and Simeon and it does make a difference in our lives as well.

We heard our narrators conclude: *We have been changed from lost souls with no home but hell, to saved souls with an inheritance undefiled that does not fade away, heaven itself. The Christmas message has changed our hearts so that we are moved to serve our God in all that we do. God grant that we may always appreciate the difference Christmas has made in our hearts and lives. May the world be able to see the difference Christ has made for us and in us to the glory of His name so that others may know and believe the difference Christ can also make for them.*

We then continued our joy-filled celebration on Christmas Day reciting the Christmas Gospel from Luke 2 and learning **"What is So Special about Christmas?"** *Every time we hear this Christmas story may we remember that this Baby is the Savior, Christ the Lord and also may we look beyond the manger and see the cross that looms over it. For the cradle without the cross which brought us our peace and reconciliation, would be of no importance at all.*

This was the reason for Jesus' birth, so that He would live for us, die for us and rise again to conquer sin, death and hell for us. That is the Good News to all of mankind:

FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD...GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN. *That is what is so special about Christmas.*

Let us sing Hymn **93 (1 & 4)**

What an amazing year of blessings from God's Word 2018 was! Week after week, month after month God came to us in His Word and in His Sacrament of Holy Communion. With repentant hearts we approached His altar and received the Good News of sins forgiven through His Son's shed blood and the assurance of everlasting life. We were given the powerful Word to give us the courage and confidence to live for Jesus, glorify His name and spread the Good News in all that we said and did this past year and prayerfully we will continually do that for all the years to come until He takes us to be with Him in our heavenly home.

Let us close with reading **Hymn 110 (1, 2, 4, 6)**

Amen.