

I.N.I.

New Year's Eve
Dec. 31, 2014
Selected texts

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

One of the reasons for worshiping 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, repent of the past year's failures and faithlessness and 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.

This evening we will be doing what we did last year on New Year's Eve. We will look back upon the worship services and sermon texts of 2014 and read some of the passages from those texts as well as sing some hymns from those various church seasons. So come along as we journey through the services and events of 2014 and see how many you remember.

We began with Epiphany Sunday and our sermon text was from Isaiah 60: **ARISE, SHINE; FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME! AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON YOU. FOR BEHOLD, THE DARKNESS SHALL COVER THE EARTH, AND DEEP DARKNESS THE PEOPLE; BUT THE LORD WILL ARISE OVER YOU, AND HIS GLORY WILL BE SEEN UPON YOU. THE GENTILES SHALL COME TO YOUR LIGHT, AND KINGS TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF YOUR RISING.**

Our theme and parts were: **THE GUIDING LIGHT**

I: Notice how the Light has shined upon you personally

II: Be active in letting your Light shine out to others.

That is what we were encouraged to do as we began 2014. Now as we look back upon 2014 we need to ask ourselves, "How active have I been in letting my Light of the Gospel shine out to others?" Has that been a major part of my past year? Have I been using that Light of the Gospel on a daily basis so that I am moved to let that Light shine? If not, then turn to "the Light of the world" Jesus seeking forgiveness and asking for Him to empower you to do that in 2015 to His glory.

During the Epiphany season we heard sermons based on the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We learned: **WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE MAKE UP A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION.**

Not the worldly wise, influential, and mighty, but the foolish, weak and lowly who boast in Christ alone and who believe that in Christ they have righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Paul wrote: **FOR YOU SEE YOUR CALLING, BRETHREN, THAT NOT MANY WISE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, NOT MANY MIGHTY, NOT MANY NOBLE, ARE CALLED. BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN THE FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD TO PUT TO SHAME THE WISE, AND GOD HAS CHOSEN THE WEAK THINGS OF THE WORLD TO PUT TO SHAME THE THINGS WHICH ARE MIGHTY; AND THE BASE THINGS OF THE WORLD AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE DESPISED GOD HAS CHOSEN, AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT, TO BRING TO NOTHING THE THINGS THAT ARE, THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE. BUT OF HIM YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO BECAME FOR US WISDOM FROM GOD -- AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION AND REDEMPTION -- THAT, AS IT IS WRITTEN, "HE WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD."**

In January we also held our third "Salt & Light" Evangelism workshop. Also in January Elinor Gbedey's mother was taken to her eternal home. In early February Ruth's father, retired Prof. Roland Gurgel was also taken to his eternal home with Jesus.

Let us sing Hymn **381 (1 & 3)**

This past year's mid-week Lenten series pulpit exchange was entitled: **"Walking with Jesus" ...in Peter's Shoes.** We meditated on these thoughts: 1. It's All about Pride 2. It's All about Complacency 3. It's All about Misunderstanding 4. It's All about Distant Discipleship 5. It's All about the Company You Keep 6. It's All about Denial

In our Sunday morning Lenten services we learned of Jesus' "Names of Wondrous Love."

1. Jesus---2. Immanuel---3. The Truth---4. The Way---5. Christ Crucified---6. King

We quote from one of our Lenten sermons on the name **Christ Crucified**: *This morning we again look at the cross. This is indeed the greatest story ever told. It speaks of full payment for the world's sins. It speaks, it shouts, of full payment for my sins. The cross, even though it is a cruel and painful instrument of punishment, is a throne of wondrous love from my Savior, Christ Crucified!*

*Down through the ages since Calvary that cross has stood as an invitation to sinners, not as a condemnation of sinners. Countless millions have heard the Crucified Christ invite them through His Words, **THE ONE WHO COMES TO ME I WILL BY NO MEANS CAST OUT.** (John 6:37). You and I have received this glorious invitation so many times in our lives that it perhaps doesn't seem so grand anymore. We've heard about that wondrous Savior from sin so often that we might be tempted to respond, "So what else is new?"*

*This Lenten season it's back-to-the-cross time. It's time to kneel beneath that cross, confessing our sins and then rejoicing in our Savior's forgiveness. It's time to marvel again at the wondrous love behind the name Christ Crucified and those wondrous words, **"CHRIST CRUCIFIED FOR ME."***

Let us sing Hymn 154

Early on Easter Sunday morning our children reviewed those "Names of Wondrous Love" in our sunrise service.

In our 10:00 a.m. Easter service we heard of Jesus, the Light. It was a dark night for the women and the disciples. It was a gray dawn when the women came to the tomb and they saw the glorious Light of the resurrected Christ. We read an excerpt from our Easter sermon: *Dawn doesn't last long. It's only that short period between night and light. So also that first Easter day. Soon the glorious SON appeared and with Him all His glorious light. In the dawn Mary had seen the stone rolled away and had run back to report her fears to Peter and John. Later, in the daylight, she had returned to the tomb to weep and seeing the angels told them the same story, **THEY HAVE TAKEN AWAY MY LORD, AND I DO NOT KNOW WHERE THEY HAVE LAID HIM.***

Then it happened! As she wept, she turned and noticed a man standing behind her. Through tear-dimmed eyes she didn't recognize Him. But when He said, "Mary," her heart leapt for joy. "Rabboni--Teacher," she said in amazement. This was her Lord. She was not in the dark anymore. She had seen them lay His dead body in the grave, and now she saw Him with her very own eyes alive. With amazing suddenness her tears were dried and the weight was lifted from her heart. All past sorrows were gone. Darkness had vanished. Now it was "My Savior lives."

Easter's glorious light lifts us above our daily battles and puts a spring into our step.

Easter's glorious light brightens our darkest days and keeps the smile of faith on our lips.

Easter's glorious light gives a meaning and a purpose to our lives and to our service for our Savior and to one another.

Easter's glorious light shines down on our deathbeds and puts a light that cannot be extinguished into our graves.

*And long after our graves are forgotten and the etching on our gravestones has faded, this Easter light will still be shining. As long as the world stands, people of God like us will find their greatest joy in the risen Savior, who said, **"I am the LIGHT of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"** (John 8:12).*

Let us sing Hymn 196 (1 & 4)

During the six weeks Easter season our sermons were based on the Apostle Paul's powerful words from the resurrection chapter I Corinthians 15. Our theme was **HOLD ON TO YOUR EASTER ASSURANCE!** We read a few verses from I Cor. 15: **BUT NOW CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND HAS BECOME THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. ..BEHOLD, I TELL YOU A MYSTERY: WE SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED -- IN A MOMENT, IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE, AT THE LAST TRUMPET. FOR THE TRUMPET WILL SOUND, AND THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED INCORRUPTIBLE, AND WE SHALL BE CHANGED. FOR THIS CORRUPTIBLE MUST PUT ON INCORRUPTION, AND THIS MORTAL MUST PUT ON IMMORTALITY. SO WHEN THIS CORRUPTIBLE HAS PUT ON INCORRUPTION, AND**

THIS MORTAL HAS PUT ON IMMORTALITY, THEN SHALL BE BROUGHT TO PASS THE SAYING THAT IS WRITTEN: "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY." O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? O HADES, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY?" THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN, AND THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW. BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, BE STEADFAST, IMMOVABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD, KNOWING THAT YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD.

40 days after Easter we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord and King. We heard our Savior encourage all of us to: **LOOK TO OUR HEAVENLY HOME.**

Ten days later we celebrated Pentecost and the Confirmation of Kaitlyn Brandle and Josh Gerbitz. From Acts 2 we read about the Holy Spirit's special outpouring on the disciples and asked "How can these men do such great things?" The answer: "They were filled with the Holy Spirit." We then asked Kaitlyn and Joshua: "How can you do great things for God?" The same answer: "You have been filled with the Holy Spirit!"

Let us sing Hymn **230**

Offering of our Thankful hearts---Hymn **792**

Our summer Sundays were filled with words from Matthew's Gospel pointing us to **JESUS, OUR ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOR.**

We welcomed our vicar, Ben Libby who proclaimed the word of God to us through August and September before returning to ILC for his second year of Seminary training. In his sermon based on Jesus' words from Matt. 15 he asked: **Are you a dog or a sheep? Dogs are undeserving. Sheep are lost. Because of Jesus---BOTH are saved.**

In September the Lord united Bruce Templeton and Edith Coulthard in holy matrimony.

On the last Sunday of September Pastor Norm Greve proclaimed to us: **TODAY GOD CALLS YOU TO—Thankfully recognize what He has made you and to seriously consider why He has done this based on I Peter 2:9-10: BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, HIS OWN SPECIAL PEOPLE, THAT YOU MAY PROCLAIM THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT; WHO ONCE WERE NOT A PEOPLE BUT ARE NOW THE PEOPLE OF GOD, WHO HAD NOT OBTAINED MERCY BUT NOW HAVE OBTAINED MERCY.**

On Reformation Sunday we meditated on Psalm 46:1-3: **GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE. THEREFORE WE WILL NOT FEAR, EVEN THOUGH THE EARTH BE REMOVED, AND THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS BE CARRIED INTO THE MIDST OF THE SEA; THOUGH ITS WATERS ROAR AND BE TROUBLED, THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE WITH ITS SWELLING. SELAH**

Our theme was: A Psalm of **HOLY CONFIDENCE** in a world of sin, turmoil and uncertainty! **GOD'S PRESENCE IS OUR HELP**

Let us sing Hymn **774 (1 & 4)**

As we approached the end of the Church year we heard from our Savior's words recorded in Matthew to **BE READY FOR GOD'S HARVEST DAY!** And the last Sunday of the Church year we heard that **Judge Jesus will come in glory for Final Judgment and will give the Final Judgment based on the evidence of Faith-Filled works.** Our Savior Jesus will proclaim to us believers on that great and awesome day: **COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.**

On Thanksgiving Eve we gave thanks to our God by **SHOUTING FOR JOY TO THE LORD: I: Because He has made us. II: Because we are His people. III: Because He is merciful and faithful forever.** We based those words on Psalm 100: **MAKE A JOYFUL SHOUT TO THE LORD, ALL YOU LANDS! SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS; COME BEFORE HIS PRESENCE WITH SINGING. KNOW THAT THE LORD, HE IS GOD; IT IS HE WHO HAS MADE US, AND NOT WE OURSELVES; WE ARE HIS PEOPLE AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE. ENTER INTO HIS GATES WITH THANKSGIVING, AND INTO HIS COURTS**

WITH PRAISE. BE THANKFUL TO HIM, AND BLESS HIS NAME. FOR THE LORD IS GOOD; HIS MERCY IS EVERLASTING, AND HIS TRUTH ENDURES TO ALL GENERATIONS.

Let us sing Hymn 44

In our mid-week Advent pulpit exchange, we prepared for our Savior's coming by **BEHOLDING OUR GOD!** The three themes were **Behold and Tell; Behold and Marvel: Behold and Shine!**

In our Sunday morning Advent services we listened to Jesus' Advent call to us to: **I: Be an ALERT Christian, beware of indifference. II: Be a RESPONSIBLE Christian. II: Be an EXPECTANT Christian.** We also heard John the Baptist call us to repentance and tell us that the Messiah, the Savior Christ has come!

And last week our children, choir and narrators told us that we are: **"CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER"** With wonder and awe we heard these words of the angel sung to us: **FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD.**

We heard one of the narrators say: *These words that have come joyfully pouring out of the mouths of our children are the words that are active in their hearts. They proclaim what they believe—that Jesus Christ came into the world to make us children of God. The youthful faith of our children is not beyond us. The same Spirit that created faith in the hearts of our children created faith in our hearts through the simple proclamation of the Gospel. And now that Gospel is ours to share, just as the shepherds did.*

We then continued our joy-filled celebration on Christmas morning hearing from John in his first Epistle: **BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS BESTOWED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD!** Our theme: **He Became a Child to Make Us Children of God!** We said in that Christmas morning sermon:

There is that word again that we mentioned in our mid-week Advent service, "Behold." It means "to pay attention to, to carefully examine, to contemplate." Carefully examine and contemplate that love that we did nothing to earn or deserve. It is a love that God freely gave us. That's what God's agape love is. It is a love that is a gift; a love that He chose to give, not a love that we chose or merited.

Do you want a simple child-like faith? Behold and look no further than the manger. For in that manger is a Child who came for the one purpose to make you and me and everyone children of God.

Jesus came for you and for me. He came to make us children again. Without Christ, we cannot call ourselves children of God. We came into this world as sinful enemies of God, children of Satan. So Jesus Christ came into this world and became what He was not---a condemned sinner---so that we could be what we were not—children of God.

Jesus knew what He was doing. Nothing was hidden from Him. He knew exactly what He would be facing. He knew that He would be rejected by His own and all people, even by His Father. He knew He would be arrested, ridiculed, beaten, and finally crucified. He knew He would die and be damned. That baby in the manger was not ignorant. He saw this world as it really was, He saw what He really had to do for us, and He still came.

Let us sing Hymn 785

What an amazing year of blessings from God's Word 2014 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.