

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
New Year's Eve, December 31, 2011
Isaiah 12:1-6 NASB



¹ Then you will say on that day, "I will give thanks to You, O LORD; For although You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, And You comfort me. ² "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For the LORD GOD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation." ³ Therefore you will joyously draw water From the springs of salvation. ⁴ And in that day you will say, "Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; Make *them* remember that His name is exalted." ⁵ Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things; Let this be known throughout the earth. ⁶ Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

With New Year's Eve a Saturday – and tomorrow – New Year's Day a Sunday morning we are having different services – different sermons. The traditional way to do that is – tonight we look back – and then tomorrow morning – we will look forward! We sing, "Our God, our Help in ages past – our hope for years to come!" So – tonight we look back. The end of the year – looking back – one cannot help but be reminded, "**All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall – but the word of the LORD endures forever!**" A week ago today Kim Jung Il passed away – the dictator – the "Dear Leader" of North Korea. The news showed lots of video of people – their faces contorted – painfully twisted with grief and sadness. One commentator however pointed out – all these people are supposed to be crying – and yet what's the one thing that is missing? Tears! There were painfully few actual tears running down anyone's face. Was it possible – he suggested that these people are supposed to be sad – and yet were not able to fake the tears?! How sad is that? Who was this little man – ruling they said with an iron fist over one of the largest standing armies in the whole world? Who was this little man who drank literally gallons of the world's most expensive brandy – while many of his people were literally starving to death? Who was this little man who loved Michael Jordan and American movies? Jesus died to pay for all his sins! Did he know that? Did he believe that? Only Jesus knows! This New Year's Eve:

Praise the LORD for His Blessings!

- 1. Thank him for spiritual blessings**
- 2. Thank him for earthly blessings**

¹ **Then you will say on that day, “I will give thanks to You, O LORD.”** We will say, **“Give thanks to the LORD!”** Just the other day—a man named Christopher passed away. Just about everybody said Christopher was so smart—he had so much insight—he was such an interesting and clever speaker! He wrote a very popular book called, “god is not **Great**—How religion poisons everything.” His attack is especially against Christianity—but also against any and every religion. He says the problem has four parts. That religion completely misrepresents the creation of people and the universe. That because the origin of *people and things and stuff* is messed up we have “*the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism.*” Do you know what solipsism is? It’s the idea that the only things you can really sure of—are things that have actually literally happened to you! The only things you know for sure—are the things that you have seen and touched and smelled and tasted! Everything else—that you have only been told—or only read—cannot be relied upon to be true. No leaps of faith! Atheists say that religion has completely messed up the whole concept of “hugs and kisses”. And finally faith is “ultimately grounded on wish-thinking!” Just part of the problem with Christopher’s contemptuous atheism is—every little bit—he throws in examples like the Aztec concept of daily human sacrifice—or the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition or the most horrible offenses of church workers as proof positive that this world would be much better off if there were no sacred writing, places of worship and priests—no doctrine. He says again and again horrible evil has been perpetrated in the name of religion. That our God must be the ultimate narcissist—that is someone in love with Himself—to insist that we thank and praise him for what you would expect any creator to do for His creatures. That there is something seriously flawed about the Lord Jesus who gave sight to some blind people—without giving sight to all—cleansed some people without wiping out leprosy. Christopher quotes Dostoyevsky’s the Brothers Karamazov—that says, “*Peacefully they will die, peacefully they will expire in your name, and beyond the grave they will find only death...*” If around Christmas time—you were in the break-room where you work—and one of your friends or neighbors said, “I am reading “*god is not **Great!***” –and he says death is the end—what would you say? Would you say the Apostle Paul defeated this argument in God’s Word? Would you know to say, “Read the great resurrection chapter—1 Corinthians 15, ¹² **But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** ¹³ **If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.** ¹⁴ **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** ¹⁵ **More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.** ¹⁶ **For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.** ¹⁷ **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.** ¹⁸ **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.** ¹⁹ **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.** ²⁰ **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Jesus died and rose again to save us from all our sins. Eternal life is ours for sure and for certain by grace alone through faith—worked by the Holy Spirit!

² **“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For the LORD GOD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.”** A man named Robert Ettinger died last year. *Bob plans to return.* He was a physics teacher and science fiction writer, who believed that someday people will become so smart we will outsmart death. And then we will be able to thaw out frozen people and make them alive again. Bob’s 92-year-old body is now stored in a vat of liquid nitrogen at a building outside Detroit, waiting for medical technology to restore him to good health. Bob has about 106 neighbors along with bunches of dogs and cats that hope to be thawed and reanimated! Again—how sad—to hope that one day medical doctors and lab technicians would restore you to live in this sin infected world. That would be like the tree of life—making it so you never die—only live on and on and on in this world of wars and rumors of wars—sickness and disease—crime and violence—natural and man-made disasters—wickedness and evil that it is a shame even to mention! We have eternal life—because of the Christ-child not forever here—but forever in the wondrous rest and peace of Heaven! That’s the salvation that Jesus came to bring!

Alan Haberman passed away. Alan was a person who wanted to make checking out at the grocery store more pleasant! Back in the day—when you bought something the price had to be stamped on the can of soup. You had to look at the price then punch it into the cash register—like an adding machine! Sometimes it took forever! Alan figured out this barcode thing—so all you have to do is scan it—beep! Next? They say more than 10 billion bar codes are scanned in this world every day! That’s a lot! It just goes to show one person can make a difference—one person! By the grace of God—you could be that person—sharing your faith! That would make a difference not for a world full of “things and stuff”—but for eternity! This past year—when you were in line at the grocery store—were you patient? Did you show Jesus’ love in your heart when you were buying groceries? Every time last year—when by the grace of God we were patient—we gave glory to God. And every time we were impatient—that was a sin—a mistake Jesus died to forgive!

⁵ **Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things; Let this be known throughout the earth.** ⁶ **Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.** A Santa Clara County, CA provider of homeless services held a memorial in San Jose honoring the lives of 61 people who died on the streets this year. The names of the men and women, ranging in age from 35- to 69-years-old, who died on the street, or in shelters were read out loud. This year, there were 10 more than last year! They say some 7,000 people are sleeping on the streets in and around San Jose. What do we know of homeless people? What do we know of people that have all their earthly goods in a grocery cart—all their things and stuff in trash bags so they don’t get wet? What do we know of people who look for a quiet place out of the wind and the rain—where they can curl up and sleep. What do we know of people who must beg for a few dollars--that might be spent on food—more likely spent on drugs or bottles of cheap alcohol wrapped in a brown paper bag. Before we feel ever so superior to the physically homeless street people—we ought to realize we are spiritual street people—eternally homeless were it not for the grace and mercy and forgiving love of Jesus! We are more wretched than people dressed in filthy sweat stained and worse physical clothing—we are dressed in the filthy rags of our own self-righteousness. Jesus came to dress us in the robes of righteousness that only his flawless life and tortured death could buy. Jesus died and rose again so we will have a glorious wedding garment in Heaven!

⁶ **Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.** This past year people like Muammar Kaddafi and Osama Bin Laden and Anwar al Alaki died and you often hear people say, “Good! I’m glad they are finally dead.”

Very famous singers died – one just 27 years old and people said, “Just like Janis Joplin and Jimmy Hendrix and Kurt Cobain – from their drugs and alcohol! Another very gifted singer died in part because even after working very hard into the wee hours of the morning – still he couldn’t fall asleep. Still he couldn’t just climb into bed and fall asleep. And again you would hear people say, “I’m not perfect – nobody is. But at least I’m better than those guys!” It’s tempting to think that way. To read about the people guilty of snatching small children off the sidewalk on their way home from school and doing unspeakable things to them. It’s tempting to think those are the bad people. I am one of the “good guys” who comes to Church all the time! It is when we realize the debt of sin I owe – that I begin to appreciate God’s amazing grace!

⁶ Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. Some 40 people were put to death in the United States this past year. 13 of them were in Texas and 5 from Ohio – some other states had 2 and some had none! White people, black people, Latino people were put to death – some having exhausted all possible appeals – and some had not. Some wanted to be put to death – to be put out of the misery of being imprisoned for the rest of their natural life. Some said they were at peace with God – and with themselves – while others seethed with anger and bitterness and hatred right to the last moment that a lethal drug combination stopped their heart and their lungs. The wondrous good news of the Christmas and Good Friday and Easter Gospel is – our sins like scarlet are washed whiter than snow. Our sins of bitterness and anger – as hurtful as murder itself – have been forgiven for Jesus’ sake. It is Jesus’ forgiving love that has forgiven us all the mistakes of the past year – and makes us confident in his mercy for as many days of the new year Jesus gives us. God bless us everyone for Jesus’ sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

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