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January 1, 2012

“A New Day”
Isaiah 61:10-62:4

So, here we are at the beginning of a new year... an event that is celebrated around the world as a most highly **anticipated** and **welcomed** occasion. Marked by incredible displays of fireworks, music, and parties... thunderous cheers for countdowns, and the dropping of big apples and Moonpies. ☺ Why is that? Why all the excitement? Sure, it is a **fresh start**, a time that we can begin with a **clean slate**, and be **optimistic** about what that new beginning will bring. But, it can also be one that can be a little *intimidating; fearful* of a future that we *know* absolutely nothing about... perhaps faced with an *inability to know just where to start*.

And in the same token, that past 12 month period that we may be quickly turning our back on, glad to see it go, can also be a time in our lives that we are **sorry to lose**. Often we want to **hold on** to the **past** because of the **security** and **familiarity** it offers. As we look toward what may be promising in the faraway future, it can still be hard to let go of that which we are comfortable with in the not-so-distant past.

Although the calendar date of celebration may not be until Friday the 6th, in today's worship we are celebrating (among many other things) **Epiphany**. That day most associated with the Magi, or as we like to call them, the Wise Men. These gentlemen were Gentile specialists in the supernatural. (Did you know that they also had another vocation? Firemen. Well, the Scriptures do say that they came from 'a-far.' ☺ Sorry, just couldn't resist...)

Seriously, though, we do know that they traveled a great distance in following a star. Being as astrology, or the study of the stars, was a big part of what these guys did, they had noticed a new star, a **new bright shining light** in the sky over a small town named Bethlehem. They believed this new light to be the harbinger of a great king... a heavenly **sign** of a Divinely-appointed ruler of the Jewish people... those known as YHWH's "Chosen Ones."

These three 'Wise Guys' left the comfort and security of their homes, at great personal expense, to go and follow a 'light in the sky' that supposedly shone down upon the birth place of baby king for a religious sect that they didn't even believe in! WHY? Well, perhaps because they somehow knew that this little Jewish baby boy was in reality much more than that. That in

fact that shining star would lead them to something... some ONE... of greater **wonder** and **mystery** far beyond their limited human understanding; of greater **value** than ANY amount of gold or incense or oil they might bring as a gift. Even as they traveled those many miles through cold and darkness, they yet would find **great delight** and **joy** in the **journey... knowing that what they would find at the end would make all their labors worthwhile.**

We too... you and I... are on a journey. We are all in search of satisfaction, a reward for our labors. It may be financial security. Pleasure. Position. Recognition. Status. A National Championship. Either individually, or collectively as a group, we all are following something. We all strive to accomplish that goal, that destination, which will make our lives worthwhile, full of joy and delight. **And to get to that goal, we should expect to experience something different, something new.**

In speaking to others who were seeking their way in the darkness... who weren't really sure which way to go... Isaiah spoke words of **direction** that most certainly apply to us as well, both as individuals and as a church. Just as he challenged the ancient Israelites, the prophet challenges us to embrace what is important in our journey of faith. Attitudes toward living that may indeed be 'new' or 'different.'

"My whole being will greatly rejoice in my God... for he has clothed me in garments of salvation." No matter what struggles we encounter in our journey of life, we know that God is with us. Emmanuel. Jesus Christ. He IS our 'garment of salvation.' Because of His atoning sacrifice, we need not fear anything on this earth. Because of the Love poured down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ, we need not be afraid of any 'skubala' that the evil one throws at us. Just as a groom loves his bride, so too does Jesus love the church... the Bride of Christ. And for His compassion and care, we should 'rejoice with our whole being.'

"As a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations." Because we have been ***"clothed in garments of salvation,"*** we are to be the fertile soil from which praise of God will arise. We should have the mind of Isaiah: ***"I will not keep silent... I will not rest... until Jerusalem's salvation shines out like a shining torch."*** Just like that star shone in the sky to bear witness to Salvation's Light, so too should the light of Christ that is within US shine for all to see.

And finally, as we struggle with our own failures to be that 'shining light'... for all the times that we do 'in deed' *"keep silent"* and *"rest"*... we must remain confident that God can, and will, use us. *"You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord... You shall no more be termed Forsaken...Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight is in Her."*

My brothers and sisters in Christ, how often do we as individuals, or as this church, want to feel like we are 'forsaken,' 'desolate'? Too often, in the face of adversity and trials, it is easy for our human natures to believe that God has given up on us... Did not even Christ cry out in His desperation, *"My God, why have you forsaken me?"* I believe that was the same humanity in Him crying out that does so in us. But God does not want us to live in that hopelessness. That just as Jesus was raised from persecution and death to final victory, so too will we. Just as the Father expressed His pleasure in His Son, He seeks to be pleased with us as well. He wants us to know, and believe, the words of Isaiah: *"the Lord delights in you."*

And so, as we begin a new year... filled both with the hope... and fear... of new beginnings, let us live as those 'wise guys.' Who were willing to leave the familiarity of their homeland in pursuit of something **wonder-ful** and **worthy** of their all. May God's joy permeate our whole being, so that we can NOT keep silent about His love for us. As that star shone down on the Christ Child, may His light shine through us. Maybe like never before. Let His Light shine. **It IS a new day! Amen?!**

CHARGE & BENEDICTION

We have young, new, 'fresh' members. New leaders. A new year with fresh perspectives, with new ideas. Just like newlyweds, we should look at this new life together with LOVE and HOPE. That as we show forth God's Hope in Jesus Christ, *"the Lord delights in you"*, and we will indeed be *"a crown of beauty in the Lord's hand."* And as your final benediction for this 'new day,' I leave you these timeless words from the Hebrew Scriptures: May *"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace..."*