

To all of you, a blessed Year of Our Lord, 2012. As the words of the hymn sang, it is “Another year of grace.” Another year of grace where Jesus’ favor rests upon you. Another year of grace where Jesus shows you His goodness and mercy. Another year of grace where Jesus gives you His peace, the peace which the world cannot give. Another year of grace where Jesus loves you and leads you beside still waters, restoring your soul.

Many people think nothing of a new year. They think to themselves, “It’s just another year that will bring gladness and sadness; and probably more sadness than gladness”. Other people hope that this year will be better than the last. What about you? What is your hope? What is your desire? What is your wish?

Will your desires be fulfilled? In Christ Jesus, as baptized children of God, the answer is most certainly “Yes.” The year of our Lord 2012 will bring all sorts of good things for you, whether in the body or in the spirit, whether temporal blessings or spiritual blessings; 2012 will be a good year. What guarantee do you have? Consider the blessing that I will speak to you at the end of the service this morning: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Those words mean something; they are God’s word of promise and hope and comfort to you today, throughout this year and until Jesus comes again.

With Jesus Virgin birth, with God becoming flesh and dwelling among us; Jesus is now equal to us men, He is one of us. He has taken upon Himself the same flesh that we have, enduring the same burdens and pains and sorrows that we endure. The same moon and stars that lights the night for us, once lit the night for the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. The same sun warms our day, beat down on Jesus as prepared to die on the cross in Jerusalem. Jesus is true Man, He knows what pain is. Jesus is true God, He knows how to fix it and He does.

Our Lord knows what it means to live in an evil world. Herod spread His terror, attempting to slaughter Jesus. At Jesus birth the order came down from Herod that all male children, two years of age and under, were to be destroyed. The Christian Church calls that the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents. Some think it was a tragedy to kill all those babies, but in reality, God permitted this tragedy to spare these little ones from living in an evil world. The same is true when someone dies in the faith; God is delivering them from all suffering, pain and need, bringing them to be with Him. This is an example of God’s amazing grace.

Even now the days are evil. The slaughter of innocent children continues with the horrible act of abortion. Diseases, fires, floods, earthquakes, the wickedness of man, and the powers of darkness threaten you in the New Year, just as it did in the Old Year past. But do not be afraid, God the Father protected His Child Jesus, even at the hour of His death. He also will protect you. He covers you with His wings. He richly and daily provides you with what you need. He takes care of you. *The Lord blesses and keeps you!* He is your shade and your shield. He encamps His angel hosts all around you. He never slumbers nor sleeps. His eye is ever watchful, always upon you. Jesus fills every second, of every minute, of every hour, of every day, of every year with His good, with His grace. This is “Another year of grace.”

Even if you are as poor as Jesus was during His earthly life, do not worry about what you will eat or drink, you will be filled. You are a child of God, the kingdom of heaven is yours. Even if you suffer pain and loss as Jesus did, do not worry about it, you will be comforted, you will see God. You are God's child, your name is written in the Book of Life. You live under God's blessing: *the Lord blesses you! He keeps you!* He blesses you coming in and going out of this house of prayer. He blesses your work and your rest. He blesses what you have, even when you have little. He keeps you in His loving arms. He is with you always, until He comes again to bring you to be where He is. Your cup runs over, goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life.

*The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you!* Entering the Year of Our Lord 2012, we remain sinners in need of God's grace and mercy; nothing has changed, not our need, not Jesus desire to give. What if this is the year that Christ comes again to judge the quick and the dead? Will the glory of the Lord shine upon us in terror? Or should we expect to hear the terrible words, "Depart from Me, you cursed ones?" The answer to that question is a resounding "No!" And as your pastor, I better not hear, "I hope not." God's grace and favor has rested upon you and fills you in the waters of Baptism. God's grace and favor has rested upon you in the Words of forgiveness and in the body and blood of His Supper. That is why you hear, "*The Lord make His face shine upon you.*" The Lord Jesus Christ does not come to judge but to forgive, to set His people free; not because of something you did or didn't do, but completely because of what He did and does for you. God made flesh, laid in a manger in Bethlehem, now sits upon the throne of majesty at the right hand of the Father; His face shines upon you with favor and peace. Jesus face is a friendly face, a loving face, a compassionate and gracious face.

The Son of God was given the Name JESUS. The Name Jesus means: "The Lord saves." As the angel Gabriel explained to St. Joseph, "He is to be named Jesus for He will save His people from their sins." He delivers you from your bondage to sin, death and the power of the devil. He makes you His own through the waters of Holy Baptism, bringing you into His body the Holy Christian Church. He washes you clean, forgiving you through the word of forgiveness and peace. He feeds you with His body given and His blood shed. He will bring you into the promised land, into your heavenly home.

This Baby, born in a manger, born of the Virgin, is God of God and Light of Light, Very God of Very God. The Baby, Who was circumcised on the eighth day, Who endured the requirements of the Law, tasted the wrath of His Father with the shedding of His blood, both as a baby and as a man. For the blood that Jesus shed with His circumcision points us to the blood that He would shed on the cross on Good Friday. Jesus endured the punishment and wrath of God for our sin. Jesus gave up His life unto death so that you and I would not have to. Jesus is your Savior. Jesus endured suffering and pain so that you and I would partake of the blessing: *the Lord be gracious unto you.* The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will console you in the New Year in all times of distress, in all times of trial and tribulation, even at the hour of your death. That is why Jesus has come to you; this is "Another year of grace."

*The Lord lifts up His countenance upon you and give you peace!* If Satan would have stopped what Jesus came to do for us sinners, then this poor world would have remained condemned. But thanks be to God, not even Satan could keep quiet the angel on Christmas night who proclaimed, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Or even the angel at the empty tomb who proclaimed, “He is not here, He is risen!” But the Devil still attempts to silence the pure preaching of the Gospel in this and every place. But thanks be to God, His gracious countenance, His good favor shines upon us sinners, blessing us. In this New Year, the devil will continue to use false teaching, lies, slander, doubt, and temptations of all kinds, trying to deceive us and lead us astray; but they will not overcome, He will not succeed. Jesus, the Name above all names, our Mighty Redeemer, will fulfill His blessing among us. *The Lord will lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace!* Jesus, the Light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome, through His Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments will overcome. Jesus is a shield for the defenseless, a hope for the sorrowful. Jesus will deliver us from temptation and all evil. This is “Another year of grace.”

*Just as we call Jesus by His name, so too does He* also calls us by our name. He knows each and every one of us, and He knows what we need: *peace*. Thus the blessing of His *peace is upon us*. This peace is higher than all reason. It is the peace that the world cannot give. God’s peace is peace is in the battle with Satan, the struggle world and your sinful flesh. It is also the peace into which you will die. In Jesus there is victory. In Jesus there is eternal peace and rest. It is found in the forgiveness of sins, it is found in the promise of Baptism.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the blessing of the Lord remains upon you in 2012 as it did in 2011. In the shedding of the blood of Jesus, there is cleansing of all sin. In the shedding of the blood of Jesus, there is sure and certain hope for joy in eternity. Happy New Year in Jesus Name, the Name of wondrous love, the Name at which every knee shall bow and tongue will confess. In His most holy and precious Name. Amen.