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AN OLD NEW YEAR'S BLESSING

Numbers 6:22-27, Luke 2:21; New Year's Eve; December 31, 2025

If I had not grown up attending church on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, I would find being here tonight strange. By the low attendance of this New Year's service, it's clear that being in church for this occasion is not even on the radars of most members. What are we doing here tonight?

You probably fall into the category of someone who believes, "If the church is holding a service, if at all possible, I'm going to be here." You resonate with what David wrote in Psalm 26. **"O LORD, I love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells"** (26:8); you make being in church your habit.

Yet, it is more than just habit or a sense of obligation that brings us here tonight. We are here to receive from God "An Old New Year's Blessing." The "old blessing" for the new year comes from the Old Testament Reading in Numbers six, the familiar blessing we hear at the end every divine service. It is the blessing God commanded the priests in Aaron's line to speak to His people, the blessing of receiving God's personal name, the LORD-*Yahweh*.

**"Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,
The LORD-*Yahweh* bless you and keep you;
the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.
"So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will
bless them."**

This is a very old blessing, about 3,500 years old. God gave it during the Exodus to the promised land. The Old Testament people who received it were already living under an old covenant promise and blessing given to Abraham and his offspring, sealed in the circumcision of all eight-day-old baby boys. God blessed Abraham and his seed going forward and from him would come a blessing to all people on the earth: God's own Son, Jesus. **And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.**

The New Year falls seven days after Christmas, the “eighth day” in Bible-speak. On the eighth day the Church commemorates “The Circumcision and Name of Jesus.” Old Testament Law commanded that baby boys be circumcised into God’s covenant and given their names on the eighth day. When Jesus was circumcised, He fulfilled that covenant promise in His own flesh, by the first shedding His blood. There is no longer any theological reason for circumcision. God has not commanded any baby boys be circumcised since Jesus; it is not forbidden, but it is also not commanded by God.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were marked as God’s people by the covenant of circumcision and put under God’s blessing. St. Paul wrote in Galatians three that until Christ came, we were all under the Law, of which circumcision was the outward sign, but now the sign has changed. What is the mark of God’s blessing for the new Israel, Christians in the Church? St. Paul wrote in Galatians three:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Baptism into Christ is now the sign of blessing, whether you are a boy or girl, man or woman. Whereas only boys and men were circumcised in the Old Testament, by baptism into Christ, all of God’s people are spiritually God’s sons as much as Jesus is God’s Son. **“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”**

The way LORD God blesses us is by placing His name on us. In the Old we hear God say, **“So shall [the priests] put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”** In the New we hear God’s Son command baptism **“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** In both cases, God blesses us using His name. In the Old, the name is the LORD. In the New, the name is Jesus, which means, the LORD-*Yahweh* saves.

In the Old, God blessed using His name three times: **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.** In the New, the one Lord gives a more complete revelation of His trinitarian name in baptism. **“In the name of the Father (who is LORD) and of the Son (who is LORD) and of the Holy Spirit (who is LORD).** The one Lord and God is also three Persons.

We receive God's name of blessing in Christian baptism much like we received our names from our parents when we were born into this world. The ones who name the child claim him or her as their own and take responsibility to care for that child as a family member. Birth certificates include not only personal first and middle names, but the family name of the parents. God does that when He puts His name on us as His children in Baptism. We are baptized into the name and family of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Using God's name as blessing functions as "bookends" for the divine service. The service begins in the trinitarian, baptismal name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the name of the one Lord and God who is also three Persons. The service ends with a triple blessing using God's name, the LORD, which is our focus tonight.

In the weakness of our flesh, our attention might wander if we don't concentrate on these words of blessing each time we hear them. The old and familiar are easy to ignore and dismiss as unimportant, but this would be a grave mistake. The LORD blesses us by His name with what we need and what we can get only from God Himself. Try your best to focus on the final blessing in the service, reminded of what it means to be a child of God receiving such blessings.

The LORD bless you and keep you – before we leave this place and go our ways, God puts His name on us to **keep** us, guard and protect us under His loving care. God guards what is most precious to Him, us. He has claimed us as His own so no one can take us from Him.

The LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you – God looks on us like a proud and loving father or mother looks on their child held in their arms. We can expect God's loving-kindness and favor as His sons through faith in His Son, Jesus, who saves us.

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace – we have been blessed with peace with God the Father through the forgiveness of our sins, peace with each other by being reconciled in Christ Jesus, His Son, and with eternal peace by the Spirit of peace.

I'm glad you are here tonight for this Old New Year's Blessing. Amen.