

Sermon: New Year

Text: Galatians 3:23-29

Theme: The name of Jesus upon us in the New Year

Goal: To assure God's presence and God's blessing upon us in the New Year

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What are your plans for 2014? Do you have big plans for the New Year? ... ambitious ideas in your professional life: maybe a new job, new investments ... great desires in your family life: a new car, a baby... lovely goals in your private life: Some changes in your attitudes, a personal decision... Will you try to accomplish your plans by yourself? Or do you need the support of others to accomplish them?

The readings for today assure us a very special support for the New Year. The Gospel tells us about the day when the baby born in Bethlehem received **His name**: Jesus, and we learn what this name means for us; the Epistle takes us back to our Baptism, when we were baptized "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" and what this means in our daily life; the Old Testament reading says how God put **His Holy name** upon us in the Blessing; and the Psalm glorifies **the name** of our God. They all remind us of God's promises and blessings because we have been bearing the name of God in our lives since we were baptized. God doesn't want to leave us alone, by ourselves in the New Year; or He doesn't want to let us be ruled by an oppressive and dictatorial boss, like our own conscience or the evil one, who direct us by the force of the Law. God wants to be with us and to guide us into the New Year and along the 365 days of 2014 by His grace, with the freedom and security that belongs to the children of God who bear His Holy name.

I – The name of Jesus

When Jesus was eight days old – just today, a week after Christmas – He was circumcised according to the rites of that time and received His name, “Jesus, the name the angel had given Him before He was conceived” (Luke 2:21). Jesus means SAVIOUR, “because He will save His people from their sins” (Mathew 1:21), had said the angel to Joseph. The name of Jesus describes the purpose of His birth and of His life. His name has a message in itself. He came to solve a problem that we were unable to solve: our sins, and because of our sins, our deteriorated relationship with God. As a Saviour, as a lifeguard, He rescued us from death and condemnation to put us in a safe condition under God’s protection.

Paul writes about the unique meaning of the name of Jesus:

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of JESUS every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

The name of Jesus is powerful and “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21).

II – The name of God upon us at our Baptism

This Holy Name was put on us when we were baptized, together with the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism is not merely a ritual of the church, but it is a covenant between God and us. God comes to us and gives us His name, so that we become children of God. The Epistle for today says: “You are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ” (Galatians 3:26). We bear not only

our name and surname, but we bear also the name of God: Anton, Carol, Joseph, Beth – sons and daughters of God.

The detail of this text is “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ”. *In the early church, baptism signified identification with Christ in such an extent that it was almost as if they were ‘wearing’ Christ, as new clothes. Their lives were taking on the characteristics, virtues, and intentions of Christ, says a Biblical Commentary (ABC 1422).* We have to take up again this fundamental meaning of Baptism in our lives. Sometimes it seems that we are too independent from God, wearing our own clothes of pride and selfishness and not the clothes of humility and holiness of Christ, living our own life according to our will, and not as beloved children of God.

“Baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ” means that when God looks at us, He doesn’t see our sin anymore – because they were paid by Jesus on the cross and were forgiven; - He doesn’t see our failures and dirt, because they were washed away in the Baptism; - but God sees Christ, the justice of Christ covering us like a new dress. We are clothed with Christ! We are Christians, like little ‘Christs’ shining in this world because we bear the name of God.

III – The name of God in the Priestly Blessing

God renews His promises Sunday after Sunday and year after year as we receive His blessing at the end of the Services. When God ordained to Moses and Aaron how to bless His people, He said: “This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.” And God said why the people should be blessed this way: “So they (the priests) will put **my name** on the Israelites (God’s people),

and I will bless them (Numbers 6:22-27).” The name of God is put on His children like a shield to protect us, like a mark to identify us, like a shower to pour out on us His blessings, spiritual and physical blessings. The face of God is shining upon us and is turned favourably toward us. We have a gracious God because we believe in Jesus, who saved us from the sin and from the wrath of God through His sacrifice on our behalf and has guaranteed to us life through His resurrection.

Conclusion: God is jealous on His name. He gives His name to us free, but He wants us to honour His Holy name in our lives as His beloved children. Therefore He gave a specific Commandment about His name: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name” (Exodus 20:7); and Jesus though us to pray: “Hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9).

Psalm 8 praises the name of the Lord when we read: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! ... From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise... O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Will you begin 2014 “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”? Therefore are we gathered in this Service, calling on His name to bless us and to be with us. The name of our God is the best support you can have for your plans and decisions as you enter into the New Year. – Will you commit your plans and your New Year decisions to the Lord? Psalm 37:5-7 says: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your case like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 01 January 2014