

First Sunday of After Christmas January 1, 2022

THE LORD'S BLESSING IN THE NEW YEAR

Numbers 6:22-27

Scripture Readings

Psalm 90

Galatians 4:4-7

Hymns

76, 123, 125, 653

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ *In the Name of Jesus Christ* +

Prayer of the Day: *Eternal God, we commit to Your mercy and forgiveness the year now ending and commend to Your blessing and love the times yet to come. In the New Year, dwell among us with Your Holy Spirit that we may always trust in the saving name of our Savior Jesus. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. 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 lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."' So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them." (NKJV)

"*The LORD bless your New Year!*" That is a nice thing to say and it's a nice thing to hear from your pastor, or from a Christian friend or family member. But how do we know it's not just a mere "wish" when we hear someone say that to us? Many people are happy to see 2022 come to a close. For so many in our country and around the world it's been a year full of difficulties, tragedies, and lost loved ones. But what assurance do we have that 2023 will truly be a "blessed" year?

Well, what if it was God Himself who spoke or wrote that blessing to you? Would that help your confidence—would that give you the assurance and certainty of **The LORD's Blessing in the New Year?** The good news is we have all been assured of **The LORD's Blessing in the New Year**—not because the pastor said it, or because some well-meaning Christian friend of ours said it—but because the LORD said it! In fact, He blesses us with this blessing and promise, not just at each New Year, but after every worship service.

Our sermon text for today is the words we have come to know as the "Benediction," which simply means "*blessing*." Isn't it interesting that the LORD commanded this blessing to be used to end the worship services of His Old Testament people? It shows how serious the LORD was—and still is—about blessing His people. His blessing not only reminded them of their

dependence upon Him, but also assured His people every time they worshiped that it was His good and gracious desire to help them.

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. 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 lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.’” (v. 22-26)

This is a very fitting blessing for us, God’s New Testament people, to receive after each one of our worship services as well. The turn of a New Year is a fitting time to examine the words of this blessing and remember that these are God’s Words of blessing to us!

When we take a closer look at the familiar words of this blessing we notice, first of all, that the name **“LORD”** (Hebrew: *Jehovah*, or *Yaweh*; God’s personal name) is used three times. This is almost certainly a reference to the fact that God, *Jehovah*, is “Triune;” that is, “*three in one*”—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Beyond that, however, the content of each of the three phrases in this blessing relates to the work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity as revealed to us in the Bible.

In the first phrase of the “Benediction:” **“The LORD bless you and keep you”** (v. 24), word **“bless”** means “*to cause to prosper*,” and the word **“keep”** means “*to guard, to watch over, to preserve*.” The basic idea of this word **“keep”** in Hebrew is “*to exercise great care over*.” (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Bible Works 4.0) This is a great description of what our Heavenly Father does for us! The thoughts behind this statement, **“The LORD bless you and keep you,”** include all of the blessings we need for our body and soul. These blessings flow from the hand of God our heavenly Father. The Apostle James tells us, **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father...”** (James 1:17) When God commanded that this first portion of His blessing be pronounced, He was reminding us that our earthly success is not primarily the result of our own efforts. While we certainly want to work hard and use the gifts God has given us, our success is ultimately dependent upon God’s blessing. Solomon very wisely wrote in one of his psalms, **“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guard the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”** (Psalm 127:1)

The second phrase of the “Benediction” is: **“The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.”** (v. 25) When we speak of God being gracious to us, that is, giving us His grace, we think of Jesus. God’s face graciously “shone upon us” when He sent Jesus into the darkness of the world to shine with the light of salvation. It was Jesus, who in love for us offered up His life on the cross for our sins. When God commanded this portion of His blessing to be pronounced, He was reminding us of the fact that without Him we are lost spiritually and would have no future at all beyond this life. The only reason God’s **“face shines upon us,”** like a proud father “beaming” with delight over his children, is because of Jesus. By faith in Christ we are covered with His perfect righteousness. God no longer sees our sins; He sees the righteousness of His Son. That makes the LORD’s **“face shine upon us!”**

The third phrase of the “Benediction” is: ***“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”*** (v. 26) The word for ***“countenance”*** in the Hebrew is the same word for ***“face”*** that was used in the previous verse (v.25). So, to “lift up one’s countenance,” or “face,” essentially means “to smile,” or “to look with favor on someone.” This phrase expresses much the same thought as the phrase in the previous verse, ***“The LORD make His face shine upon you.”*** (v.25) However, this phrase ends with a blessing of God’s ***“peace.”*** That ***“peace”*** is given to us through the Holy Spirit. He is the one who revealed to us, through the Gospel, the grace of God and the ***“peace”*** of forgiveness in Christ. He is the one who brought us to saving faith in Jesus and keeps us in that faith. Leading us to know by faith that Jesus Christ has taken away our sins; moving us to lay out all of our cares and concerns, our dreams and our plans before the LORD; assuring us that the LORD is watching over us and will bless us; that is how the Holy Spirit works His absolute ***“peace”*** within our hearts. That is ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”*** (Philippians 4:7)

The final verse of our text also reveals a very precious and comforting thought: ***“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”*** (v. 27) Notice that God combines His command to give this blessing, this ***“Benediction,”*** with **His promise that He will bless His people when it is used!** This is what can and should give us hope for success in the future! God promises to bless us as we willingly and joyfully entrust ourselves to Him and follow Him. God cannot and will not fail to fulfill His promises, but rather will keep them all. We do not have to look into the future in fear or uncertainty in spite of the fact that our futures may pose many changes and challenges, many questions, and even many problems. Our LORD is greater than all of them! He is the one who created and now controls heaven and earth for our good (cf. Romans 8:28-38). With Him all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). He has ***“put His name”*** on us—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and sealed us as His own at our baptism. He has promised to bless us. With His power and His guidance everything that is necessary for us to accomplish as individuals, as a Christian congregation, and as a church body will be done.

In this New Year may He move us to carry out our duties joyfully and faithfully, and may He lead us to trust in His promises confidently. The LORD, will bless us and keep us. The LORD, will make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The LORD, will lift up His countenance upon us and give us His peace. Amen.

—Pastor Luke Bernthal

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