

WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Happy New Year
- Mosaic Baby Bottles are available on the credenza in the Foyer

HYMN No. 379 "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

**Oh, come, All ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
Oh come Ye, Oh come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels
O Come let us adore Him,
O Come let us adore Him,
O Come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!**

**Highest, most holy, Light of light eternal,
Born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;
Son of the Father Now in flesh appearing!
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!**

**Sing Choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God... In the highest:
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!**

**Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee.. be .. glo....ry giv'n!
Word of the Father, Now in flesh appearing!
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!**

INVOCATION

**P: In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C: Amen.**

OPENING SENTENCES Psalm 150

**P: Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary;
C: praise him in his mighty heavens!**

P: Praise him for his mighty deeds;
C: praise him according to his excellent greatness!

P: Praise him with trumpet sound;
C: praise him with lute and harp!

P: Praise him with tambourine and dance;
C: praise him with strings and pipe!

P: Praise him with sounding cymbals;
C: praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

P: Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!
C: Praise the LORD!

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P: Let us now make confession of our sins to God, our gracious and heavenly Father.
(Moment of silence for self-examination)

P: Eternal God,
C: we confess that by nature we are sinful people. We have transgressed Your Law in many ways, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not always been wise in our thinking and our speaking and our actions. Our motives and thoughts have not always been pure. We deserve Your punishment now and for eternity.

O God, in Your mercy forgive our sin and restore us to a full and joyful relationship with You, through the merits of Jesus, our Lord. Direct all that we do by Your Holy Spirit that in the year now beginning, we joyfully follow Your will and gladly obey Your Commandments as Your redeemed people.

p: In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it. Be at peace.

C: Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"

God rest ye merry gentlemen Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Savior Was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's pow'r When we were gone astray

Oh tidings of comfort and joy Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy

From God our heavenly Father A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born The Son of God by name:
Oh tidings of comfort and joy Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy

But when to Bethlehem they came, Where at this Infant lay,
They found Him in a manger, Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling, Unto the Lord did pray:
Oh tidings of comfort and joy Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy

Now to the Lord sing praises, All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas All other doth deface:
Oh tidings of comfort and joy Comfort and joy
Oh tidings of comfort and joy

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Let us pray.

Almighty Father, You have shined on us the new Light of Your Word made flesh, who lived among us. Cause us to find in Jesus, this Light, who and what is really important in life, and grant us Your blessing as we follow Him; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING *1 Kings 3:4–15*

(Solomon prays to God for the gift of wisdom.)

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE *Ephesians 1:3–14* (We are gifted with God's spiritual blessings.)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

VERSE *Luke 2:40*

P: Alleluia. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

C: who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Alleluia!

HOLY GOSPEL *Luke 2:40–52*

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the second chapter

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

HYMN No. 905 "Come, Thou Almighty King"

**Come, Thou almighty King, Help us Thy name to sing;
Help us to praise; Father all glorious,
O'er all victorious, Come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.**

**Come, Thou incarnate Word, Gird on Thy mighty sword;
Our prayer attend. Come and Thy people bless,
And give Thy Word success, And let Thy righteousness
On us descend.**

**Come, holy Comforter, Thy sacred witness bear
In this glad hour! Thou, who almighty art,
Now rule in ev'ry heart, And ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of pow'r.**

To Thee, great One in Three, Eternal praises be
Hence evermore! Thy sov'reign majesty
May we in glory see, And to eternity
Love and adore.

SERMON "2021: Fireworks or Fizzle? To the Praise of His Glory"
Pastor Vern

Ephesians 1:3-14

How was your New Year's Celebration: Fireworks or Fizzle? It certainly wasn't your typical Midnight Toast and singing of Auld Lang Sine to be sure. How much fun was it to watch a dozen people in Times Square revel in the dropping of the New Year's ball.

While there certainly are things to get excited about as the Calendar recycles again to Jan 1st - The Hope of a vaccination and the end of the pandemic. But we all know, life will continue to bring tough times and challenges long after this virus is gone.

For instance: Will the end of the Coronavirus eliminate poverty in the world, hunger, Crime, Cancer, Drug Abuse, Mental Illness and the host of other societal problems we had before the virus? Will the vaccine put an end to our political divisions that seem irreparable today? One vaccine isn't going to solve these problems. Let's get real about what we will still be facing in 2021 and every year after.

Maybe mentioning a few Disney movies can help us out here. Our family was having a discussion about films we had recently seen and somehow we drifted into Disney films and their ability to pull you in emotionally. The reason they pull those emotional strings in our hearts is because we can identify with the characters, even if they are just cartoons.

Walt Disney famously said, "Life is composed of lights and shadows and we would be untruthful, insincere, and saccharine if we tried to pretend there were no shadows." I think Disney was onto something.

Whenever Disney films come into our conversations, (it happens a lot because of our grandkids) I get picked on because back in the Neanderthal age when Marty and I were dating, we saw Dumbo. I imagine you know the story but I'll just pick out the moment for which I have been ridiculed.

Dumbo has these enormous ears and has become the laughing stock of the circus. Dumbo's mother goes into a rage when she sees her child being abused and ends up in a trailer that looks like a prison. When Dumbo sees his mother in lock down, he is moved to tears. She picks up her little one with her trunk thru the bars and rocks him as if in a cradle.

To set the record straight, I was not crying. There may have been a tear that slid down my face but I was not crying. The point is, that separation of mother and child is heart-stabbing even to the most hardened person.

Here's two other examples. These depict the reality of death. Parents will die. And that truth, though violently expressed, was the story of Bambi whose mother was killed by hunters. And then there's the story of Simba in the Lion King whose father, Musafa, was killed in a stampede trying to save his son.

According to my daughter-in-law, Jayni, Disney used these heart-rending stories to help kids who had experienced real-life tragedies, feel that they're not alone. Jayni understood that having lost her own mother when she was 2 years old. The truth is, we all have these real-life tragedies. There's no escaping those dark shadows of life. And while there is usually a good ending to those movies, the truth is death still reigns in this life. And when it is a family member or close friend, there are certainly no FIREWORKS going off. We feel our spirits begin to fizzle!

In light of these realities, as I look to the New Year, it makes me wonder how the Apostle Paul can be so uplifted in his spirit? The letter to the Ephesians is what we call one of the 4 Prison Epistles along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Yes, that's the context of this incredible passage of Praise to God.

Why was he so uplifted in his spirit? Actually, that's the answer right there! Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, WHO HAS BLESSED US IN CHRIST WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES!"

Paul was not an escapist, a daydreamer who lived in a fantasy world in order to forget about the everyday and unpleasant realities of life. Paul had a spiritual reality which brought him out of this world's sadness and gloominess into the Praise of HIS GLORY, God's Glory.

Now it would take multiple sermons to expound on the 12 verses before us from Paul's letter. In the Greek, it is a single sentence. Paul cannot stop to take a breath before the breath-taking glory of God he is relating to us today. I want to take a moment just to break this passage down into 3 brief points so that You will understand just why the Apostle begins his letter with an outpouring of Praise to God! I hope it also gives you encouragement as we walk through the various shadows of this life.

The first spiritual blessing can be summed up in the phrase, "He Chose US!" In that choosing before the foundation of the world, Paul points us to the will of God that we should be holy and blameless before Him. A difficult achievement for sinners, but what is impossible with man is possible with God. God's will was to adopt us to Himself as SONS and DAUGHTERS through Jesus Christ!

Sin separated us from our heavenly parent. Sin made us Orphans. Worse yet, we were dead to God. As spiritually dead people we were lost forever. Except God in His mercy and in His glorious will, ordained us to be sons of the Most High God. This intent and desire and will to adopt sinners is the glorious grace for which Paul praises God. IN love He predestined us to become sons and daughters. Paul knew in the depth of his being that "nothing can separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus. We have been chosen. We are God's people, by GRACE!

The Second Spiritual Blessing which follows is our REDEMPTION. "In him, (in Jesus) we have redemption by His Blood!" While I said that God's adoption of sinners was impossible with man but possible with God, that doesn't mean it was an easy fix. Forgiveness can only come by blood sacrifice, but because of our sin, it cannot be our own sacrifice.

This is the reason for Christmas... God became flesh for this reason, to redeem us sinners and to make us holy and blameless before Him. Not by our own sacrifice or efforts, but by our Lord's death on the cross. What richness of GRACE has been lavished upon us through Christ! And His death brought wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will. This precious death of Christ was God's purpose and plan not just for a day, but for the fullness of time.

The 3rd Spiritual Blessing Paul sums up saying: "In Christ (when you heard the word, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him) YOU also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY!

This sealing involves our preservation till that great and glorious day. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee that God will keep us in Christ until the day of our resurrection and entrance into the Kingdom of Glory, the New heavens and the New earth. These will not be two separate kingdoms or places. What Paul is declaring here the unification of heaven and earth. Heaven and earth, as ONE entity will glorify God. The separation we now endure will be undone!

To sum up, we have been chosen by God the Father whose will will be accomplished! We have been redeemed by Christ, lavishly graced upon by His forgiveness, purchased with His own precious blood. We have been sealed by the promised Holy Spirit through Baptism, and HE will keep us safe and secure in Christ to the day of the Resurrection when we will receive our eternal inheritance to the Praise of His Glory.

I feel that I could quit here but it's nice to have some flesh put on our words. Paul hasn't been the only realist to Bless the Blessor. Paul is not the only one to explode in Praise to God for His Rich Blessings. History tells us of the Martyrdom of Polycarp who was facing execution for his faith in Christ.

"Swear," urged the Proconsul, "reproach Christ, and I will set you free." Polycarp answered, "86 years have I have served him and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

Polycarp like the Apostle Paul Praise God for His incredible spiritual blessings and it was a finale of fireworks the likes we have never seen. From the very fire that took his earthly life Polycarp was heard to pray:

"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise you for all these things, I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you, with him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen."

Paul and Polycarp both confronted death, and there was not a fizzle of faith, but a fireworks display of Praise to God that still lighting the skies to this day.

What's your New Year look like? If you're hoping for blessings only in the physical and material realm, you'll be missing something far greater that God has prepared, even given to you even now. The Spiritual Blessings of knowing God has chosen you for eternity. The Spiritual blessing of Redemption thru the Blood of Christ. And the Spiritual Blessing of the Sealing of the Promised Holy Spirit who will bring us into His everlasting kingdom, to the Praise of HIS glory!!

CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE NICENE CREED

Please stand

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man;

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried.

And the third day rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,

I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,

and I look for the resurrection of the dead

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

+ SACRAMENT +

PREFACE

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

P: Blessed are You, almighty Lord, for calling us as Your people and displaying Your abiding care for us as we respond to Your call as Your followers and Your friends. Gathered as Your family at Your gracious invitation, grant that we be strengthened in faith toward You and in genuine love for one another as we walk each day in the wisdom You graciously supply and confidently await Your coming in glory. Send Your Holy Spirit upon us to sanctify and renew us in body and soul for the sake of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we offer our thanksgiving and prayer.

C: Amen.

SELF-REFLECTION (In preparation of receiving the Sacrament, let us be reminded of makes us truly worthy to receive the gift of God's grace.)

1. Are you baptized in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
2. Do you know you are a sinner in need of God's grace?
3. Do you believe Jesus died to atone for your sins?
4. Do I believe that God offers His forgiveness through the "real" presence of Jesus, in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine?
5. Do you seek to amend your sinful life?

If you have answered "Yes" to all of these questions you are encouraged to come. Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

P: Let us now approach the table of the Lord with sincere hearts, joyfully receiving His promised presence.

P: Merciful Lord,

C: we do not presume to come to this Your table, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Your manifold and great mercies.

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Your table.

But You are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy.

Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink His blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed, through His most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER *(Matthew 6:9-13)*

P: Remember us in Your kingdom, Lord, and teach us to pray:

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE PEACE OF THE LORD

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: And also with you.

WORDS OF OUR LORD

P: With the very words of Christ we consecrate and partake of this sacred meal.

P: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My + body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

(Let us eat together the body of Christ.)

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My + blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

(Let us drink together from the cup of salvation, the blood of Christ shed for our sins.)

POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE "Nunc Dimittis" (Now let Your Servant Depart)

**Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word,
For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before
The face of all people.**

**A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen.**

THANKSGIVING

P: O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.

C: And His mercy endures forever.

P: Let us pray:

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

P: Bless we the Lord

C: Thanks be to God!

BLESSING OF THE LORD *Numbers 6:24–26*

P: The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

HYMN No. 506 "Glory Be to God the Father"

**Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit:
Great Jehovah, Three in One!
Glory, glory
While eternal ages run!**

**Glory be to Him who loved us,
Washed us from each spot and stain;
Glory be to Him who bought us,
Made us kings with Him to reign!
Glory, glory
To the Lamb that once was slain!**

**Glory to the King of angels,
Glory to the Church's King,
Glory to the King of nations;
Heav'n and earth, your praises bring!
Glory, glory
To the King of glory sing!**

**Glory, blessing, praise eternal!
Thus the choir of angels sings:
Honor, riches, pow'r, dominion!
Thus its praise creation brings.
Glory, glory,
Glory to the King of kings!**

SENDING

P: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

LEAVING MUSIC:

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee, Royal Albert Hall Mass Choir