



Most people collectively said this past New Year's Eve, **"Good riddance to 2021. Welcome the new year 2022."** And yet, the new year has already begun with the Colorado forest fire causing death and many losing all their worldly possessions in the snap of a finger. A major winter storm dropped a massive snowfall across a large swath of the Midwest and East Coast while causing another round of tornadoes in the South. Doctors are proclaiming that the Omicron variant will reach its peak sometime in January 2022. And yesterday, our nation

mourned the one-year anniversary of the deadly violence and insurrection on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021. Yes, on Epiphany. Satan has smeared the celebration of "the Gentile Christmas" with his black mark of hatred and division. It was another difficult year to say the least. But as I looked back on my yearly letters to friends and family, the story of looking forward to dismissing the past and embracing a fresh start in the new year continually repeats itself. As King Solomon said, *"There is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9). If only there was something or someone who could put an end to this vicious cycle of our sin-full lives.

Great news! There is! **It's all about Jesus!** The celebration of Epiphany, as we begin the New Year of our Lord 2022, once again makes manifest the truth of God's 24/7 unfailing gracious activity in our world and His bestowal of eternal gifts to those who believe in Jesus Christ who lived, died and rose for the redemption of all who believe in Him. As with every year in the past and all those in the future, 2022 belongs to the Lord. You've probably heard the line, "Wise men still seek Him." I must confess that I, too, have worn shirts and pins that depicted this message. But the truth of all of Scripture is that God has come, continually comes and will come again to seek us. *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10). Therefore, like the Wise Men, we fall down and worship our Lord and Savior. And the confession that we worship Jesus, only Jesus, bears a powerful witness to the world around us desperately in need of a Savior - the only One who breaks the cycle of sin and death. **Read the full article** which will encourage you with the truth that 2022 belongs to the Lord whom we worship and the One in whom we live and move and have our very being. (Acts 17:28)

Wise people worship the One who FIRST came to seek us.

The wisdom of Scripture reveals (makes manifest) the truth that wise people worship Jesus who came for them and their salvation. God seeks us out. Every single person is by nature dead in sin, an enemy of Christ and a child of the devil. Thus, no one can or will seek out God. All mankind is conceived in sin and falls short of the glory of God in thought, word and deed, by what is done and what is left undone. The only way believers are able to follow Jesus is because He sought them out first in love and with His redeeming mercy and grace. Jesus is Wisdom. Wisdom follows Jesus and falls down to worship Him alone. This wisdom defines the believer in Christ.

Wisdom knows and confesses the truth: it was God who came to Adam and Eve after they hid from Him and from each other after they sinned. It was God who sent His prophets to call His people to repentance and life. It is God who loved the world and sent His one and only Son so that the world would not perish but have eternal life. It was God who sent the star to lead the wise men to Jesus. And it's God who comes to you - in Word and Sacrament which makes manifest His saving Gospel, in His Holy Spirit, in His relentless love, and in the promise of His forgiveness.

Epiphany is so much more than men bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The visit of the wise men to the home of the infant Jesus is a cherished part of Christmas. Epiphany is often called the "Christmas of the Gentiles." It has been included in many of the well-known and best-loved hymns and carols. Our manger scenes would seem empty without the well-dressed men and their camels. And the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh can be named by many, even if people don't really know the truth of Christ's birth or what those gifts actually signify.

Wisdom leads us to worship Jesus bearing our sinful nature and our sins of thought, word and deed, sins of commission and omission. What kind of gifts are those in comparison to what the wise men brought? Actually, they are great gifts. Our worship, repentance, and confession are exactly what our Savior wants from each and every person - it's what He wants from you. *"God wants all people to be saved and to come to know the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4)*. Jesus has come to bear the sins of the world, for you, for me, and to take them away for good. He wants all people to cling to Him and receive from Him His forgiveness, life, and salvation. Any worldly gift we offer God is His anyway. Believers give weekly offerings, not because God needs them, but because they need to give them. Believers in Christ let go of the things of this world which are perishing and fall down and worship the One who gives all good gifts.

Wise Christians worship and bear witness of Christ who came for the world.

The wisdom of the Christian, like faith, is a gift from God. We know that *"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10)*. Fear of the Lord is to hate evil and all those things that have to do with sin, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. The world measures wisdom quite differently. The world's wisdom is measured through the fields of science, math, history, art, music, etc. (all gifts from God, by the way) and how these disciplines affect the world. **But even the best worldly wisdom cannot save.** Worldly wisdom is blind (veiled) to the truth of Christ and His salvation. The world tends to bow down and worship these things as if they were the end all and the goal of one's life.

What made the wise men so wise? It wasn't their knowledge nor what the world teaches that drove what they did - but rather that they listened to the Word of God, even though it may not have made a lot of earthly, worldly sense. They fell down and worshiped Jesus. Only Him. The Christian acknowledges the gifts of knowledge, learns them and appreciates them in their daily lives. Such wisdom and knowledge from the Lord guides, directs, and shapes actions and decisions in this life. When Jesus comes again in glory all will be revealed - who were the wise and who were the foolish ones. And on that Day, Daniel says, *"those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3)*. The Christian worshiping Jesus and bearing witness to the wisdom of the Lord shine bright and the Holy Spirit uses this witness to turn many to His righteousness.

True wisdom acknowledges that this and every year is the “Year of the Lord.”

In 2022, which calendar will you observe? New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day have become a national event here in the United States, but it’s not a part of our Church calendar. In Scripture, you will notice about four different calendars. The Jews followed two calendars themselves - the civil calendar with its new year in September, and the religious calendar with its new year in March.

The Chinese New Year will be on February 1, 2022 - the year of the Tiger. If you follow the year of the tiger you are predicted to be brave, competitive, unpredictable and confident. Or we could pick one of the several calendars with which we ourselves operate, such as the tax year ending on April 15, or perhaps the fiscal year beginning on July 1 of each year. There’s the sports calendar which goes from the opening day of one season to another. And there’s always the Hallmark calendar which requires that someone be sent a card almost every week of the year! So what calendar will you observe in 2022?

The Church marks her time and gears her life according to Christ and what He has done and continues to do, not by what we happen to be doing. The Church celebrates each and every day by returning to Jesus, worshiping Him and witnessing of Him. We live victoriously and confident in His grace and truth. Regardless of what will happen or what we may face in 2022, since we have been crucified and raised to new life with Christ, each and every day will be an occasion for victorious joy! That is a promise from the very One who bears the name Jesus to those who bear the same name - that’s you, that’s me, and that’s every believer in Christ. Therefore, we have the wisdom to understand the urgency of witnessing of Jesus 24/7.

Have you ever considered observing one of those “one day at a time” calendars and marking each one with a cross? One of our prayers as the Church is certainly to cling to the Cross and return to the Cross constantly in repentance to be strengthened with victorious resolve. There at the cross we look up and see the One named Jesus “the Lord saves”. Never has the world seen such compassion, such forgiveness, such glory!

The wisdom of God makes manifest the love of God for the world - for you.

One New Year’s resolution that we can make together as children of God that will not be broken is that 2022 belongs to the Lord. God’s Word and wisdom is a revelation of what God has in store for us this year. **God is for us. We are loved.** Since God sacrificed His only begotten Son for us, He will surely give us all other things as well. (See Romans 8) God gave His best so that we might have the best in Christ. What a witness to share with the world: you are loved - God gives you all you need now and for eternity. There’s no sweeter Gospel truth than God’s saving love, grace, and mercy. But unfortunately, children of God are reluctant to witness due to feelings of inadequacy, lack of knowledge of God’s Word or feeling that evangelism is someone else’s job. How tragic for the world in which we live and move and have our very being. The world around us doesn’t know we operate every single day under the truth of God’s relentless love and grace.

A boy went into a pet shop, looking for a puppy. He looked at each one, examined it closely, and put it back in the cage. After several minutes, he walked back to the store owner and said,

"I picked one out. How much will it cost?" The man gave him the price and the boy promised to be back in a few days to pick up his chosen puppy. "Don't wait too long," said the owner, "puppies like these sell quickly." The boy worked hard to earn the money needed to purchase his beloved puppy and returned to the store in a few days just like he promised. He paid the money and went to pick up his precious new companion. The boy reached into the cage and pulled out a skinny dog with a limp leg and started to leave. The owner stopped him. "Don't take THAT puppy. He's crippled. He can't play. He'll never run with you. He can't fetch. Choose one of the better puppies." The boy said, "No thank you, sir. This is exactly the puppy I've been looking for." As the boy turned to leave, the store owner noticed that extending from the bottom of the boy's pant leg was a brace - a brace for his crippled leg.

Jesus knows how you feel. You've been scarred by the COVID virus and every challenge that has arisen since the beginning of the pandemic. Jesus came to heal and give life in the face of death and disease. You're under the gun at work. You've got more to do than is humanly possible. So did Christ. You've got children and grandchildren who make a piranha hour out of dinner. Jesus knows what that is like. People take more from you than they give. Jesus understands. Your teenagers won't listen. Your students won't try. Your employees give you a blank look when you assign them tasks to complete. Jesus knows exactly how you feel.

You are precious to Him. So precious that He became like you, except without sin, so that nothing could separate you from Him. When you struggle, He listens. When you yearn, He responds. When you question, He hears. Like the boy, He paid the price to claim us as His own. You and I would be crippled in sin, hatred, disenchantment, doubt, and fear without His love. You are loved - God alone has justified you. God's statement of "NOT GUILTY" is made in His Son's own blood. He has cleared you of any accusation that others can bring against you. Only in Christ can you enter a new year with a clean slate. (Although there is now a movement afoot that suggests that merely the changing of the calendar gives you a clean slate.) God does not condemn you any longer as you wear the garments of His salvation. The case is closed! Jesus lived, died, rose, ascended, and is seated at God's right hand. All because of His love. This is the year of the Lord. As children given the wisdom of the Lord, we have a life-changing and life-altering witness of Jesus to share.

What will it take to face another year with confidence?

It's all about Jesus. How can you conquer the adversaries that will, as certain as sin, come your way in 2022? How can anyone break free of the vicious cycle of sin and death in this world? When someone asks you (and they will) for the hope that you have, what do you have to share? (1 Peter 3:15) What is your witness when people constantly bring up the challenges, struggles and upheaval of our sinful world? Tell them that this is the year of the Lord.

Every time you date a check, sign an important document, place 2022 on a letter head, you are bearing witness of Jesus and proclaiming your New Year's resolution. You are stating with confidence that whatever comes our way in 2022, you can count on God's love to help you get through it as more than a conqueror. When you share that January 6th every year is Epiphany, point them - not to finely dressed men visiting the house of Jesus with gold, frankincense and myrrh in tow - but to the gifts of sin forgiven, life restored, eternity given, and blessing upon blessing which flow from God to them. **God came and God comes seeking them to make them His own. God alone gives all good gifts. God's grace is greater than our despair**

and anything we could possibly face this or any year. That's the wisdom God has given to you to live in one victorious day after another - now and for eternity. And this wisdom leads you to fall before the throne of God and worship Him.

In this New Year of our Lord 2022, ask God for the wisdom to worship Him and witness of Jesus. Ask God to prepare you and equip you to join His mission - to seek and save the lost. We praise God for the resources He has granted the Church to bear witness that wise people follow the Savior who first came seeking them. Consider the upcoming hybrid conference, "Making Disciples for Life: The Rock in Shifting Sands" which will be held in person or online from January 10-12, 2022. You can register at the LCMS website: www.lcms.org. This conference will share God's wisdom through His servants and further prepare you in the new year to bear His witness. You will be able to view all the sessions for 60 days following the conference so you can take it all in on your schedule. You will be blessed tremendously through this experience.

God has made manifest GREAT NEWS. Someone has broken the seemingly endless cycle of being eager to say good riddance to the past year only to be disappointed in the new year. The Great News is all about Jesus and the wisdom that will find you worshipping Him and witnessing of His saving truth. Have a great 2022. If you need encouragement to witness or are looking to be equipped for this joyous privilege, email your English District Evangelization Team at: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org May God bless the year of our Lord with the faith of the wisemen who fell down and worshiped Jesus trusting always in God's Word. Have a great 2022 in the name of Jesus, the Savior.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20