

31 December 2006
Eve of the Name and Circumcision of Jesus

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“”The Tabernacle Blessing, Now Ours in Christ
Text: Numbers 6:22-27; Luke 2:21; Galatians 3:23-29

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was the final instruction God gave to Moses about the building and service of the Tabernacle: *put my name on them*. Put my name on them, that they never forget whose they are. Put my name on them, that the last word they hear ringing in their ears and sending them on their way is a word of blessing and peace. Put my name on them, for they are mine; my treasured possession.

And so it is still today. The words of the Old Testament reading, called the Aaronic benediction, are the last words *you also* hear here every week, as you leave this place and go back out into the world:

***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.***

And with those words God's name is placed upon *you*. That you remember whose *you* are, and leave this place with His name and blessing and peace ringing in your ears. For you are His treasured possession.

Yet how many times has this happened for you? How many times have you heard those words spoken upon you? A hundred? A thousand? More? Yet have you ever considered them? What do they mean? These are wonderful words, and words that are not just a *wish* – for God's Word is always powerful and effective and does what it says. Yet perhaps we take them, and God's Name, for granted. . . . So as we come to the end of another year and stand on the doorstep to a New Year, the end seems a good place to start! To appreciate the beginning. To remember what God has done for us this past year, and what He promises for the next.

So we begin with the first part of this Trinitarian blessing: ***The Lord bless you and keep you***. These are **First Article** words, that speak of your loving Heavenly Father, who

gives to you and **blesses** you with everything you need in this life. This New Year will bring with it many changes and challenges, sorrows and joys – but you will have all that you need to get through. For you have your Father’s name and promise. Your Father who gives you life and health; who gives you *clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, land, animals, and all that you have*; who gives you your spouse and family, friends, and the people around you who help you. We often want (and try!) to take the credit for ourselves, for working so hard to earn and provide all that we need for ourselves and our families – but not so. It is our Father in Heaven who provides us with those things.

And yet with these words we do not only receive our Father’s blessing, we also receive the promise of His **keeping** – His promise that He will also *defend you against all danger and guard and protect you from all evil*. Which means He will not allow the devil to have his way with you. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to handle. He will send His angels to guide and protect your steps. His keeping means that He will always be there for you, watching over you and giving you His protection, for without that, the devil would long ago have destroyed you. And think over this past year, how this has all been true for you. And in more ways than you even know. Your Father blessing and keeping, *all out of His Fatherly divine, goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you*.

Now that blessing and promise alone is enough for some people, and is all that they’re looking for! But its not enough for your Father, who extends His blessing and keeping beyond the things of this life; and so the blessing continues: ***the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.***

Those are **Second Article** words, for it is the Son of God who came into our world to show us the **face** and **grace** of God and demonstrate His love for us. His loving work of redemption, begun (as we remember today) with His *circumcision*. With this, He begins His fulfilling of the Law for us. Keeping every requirement, every jot and tittle, perfectly for us. To be our perfect substitute. And so the eighth day after His birth, Jesus takes His place with every male baby under the Law, and for the first time sheds His blood for us. A reminder to us that crib leads to cross. That this is a King born to die.

And so in Him, the **face** of God shines upon us with **grace**. Because of Jesus, because of His blood and forgiveness, God will never turn His back to us. And think how great a thing that is, for think about those times in your life when people have turned their back to you. When a person turns their back to you it sometimes means that they are angry –

and they are walking away from you. *God will never do that to you.* When a person turns their back to you it sometimes is so they do not have to look at you – they want to have you out of their sight and out of their mind. *God will never do that to you.* When a person turns their back to you it is sometimes an indication that they did not want to speak to you and they do not want to listen to you. *God will never do that to you.*

For in Jesus, God's face is always toward us. God's face of mercy. And think about what *that* means – when a person is *facing* you. When you can see a person's face you can tell a lot about that person. You can see them smile. They can speak to you. They can see you and know what you are doing and if you need help. They can show compassion for you. They can listen to you. Because of Jesus, God's face is always toward you, shining upon you with his grace and forgiveness. Because of your sin, that is something that you do not deserve – but because of Jesus, His cross and blood and atonement, that is something that has been given to you as a gift. *That you may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom.* And as this has been a year of grace for you, you can be sure that the next will be as well.

And then finally we hear: ***the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*** And these are the **Third Article** words, for it is the blessing of **peace** that we receive from the Holy Spirit. Even in the midst of war, increasing crime and disregard for life, the strife and difficulties that continue in our world and lives – still there is peace. Not the elusive peace the world is searching and striving for, but the peace which the world cannot understand; the peace which passes understanding; the peace placed into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Peace with God. Peace in the forgiveness of sins. The peace of knowing that the changes and chances of this world do not determine our destiny, but that we are in better hands – nail-pierced hands. Hands whose care does not end with this life, but continues forever. For those hands, risen from the dead, will raise us as well, with Him, to life eternal.

And this blessing and keeping, this face and grace, this peace, is for all: ***Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.*** And it is **for you.** For the eighth day after Christmas is not just the first day of a New Year, but the first day of a new life:

a new life in Christ – the *new* Tabernacle of God among us! . . .

in His blood, first shed for us this day . . .

and in His Name –

first placed upon you in Holy Baptism, and now continually placed upon you here through His blessing. A new life strengthened by His Absolution, and fed His body and blood. A new life given to you by the Father, by grace through faith in His Son, by the

power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord blessing and keeping you;

The Lord making His face shine upon you and being gracious to you;

The Lord lifting up His countenance upon you, and giving you peace.

It is the Tabernacle Blessing, now yours in Christ – the *new* dwelling of God with men!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.