

31 December 2020
New Year's Eve

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“New Year’s ~~Resolution~~ Repenting”

Text: Isaiah 30:15-17; Romans 8:31b-39; Luke 12:35-40

Old Testament Israel was constantly tempted to trust in all sorts of things to protect them besides God. As we heard tonight from Isaiah, they trusted in *the strength and swiftness of horses* to win battles for them. But not only that. They trusted in their chosen status, no matter how they acted or what false gods they began to worship. They trusted in the walls of Jerusalem. They trusted in political alliances with the other nations. And none of it worked. Oh, maybe, for a little while it did. But in the end, whatever they trusted in let them down. As it will always be. For everything and everyone in this world will, sooner or later, let us down. For everything and everyone in this world is infected with sin.

And so God tells His people this through Isaiah, that not only will these things not protect you, but they’re so bad that ***a thousand shall flee at the threat of one***. Which is ridiculous, right? So Israel didn’t believe it. And yet it was true. This is how weak the things of this world are that we trust in to save us, to protect us, to give us life.

So what has it been for you this year? What have you and many relied on for protection and life? Science. Masks. Face shields. Social distancing. Isolation. I’m not saying all those things are bad or even useless. But I know of people who did all those things, who did everything according to the letter of all the recommendations of the experts, and *still* got Covid. Do those things, but do not *trust* in them.

But that’s only one example. What else have you trusted in this year for life, for happiness, for deliverance from trouble, for success, for security, for guidance? The answers are too many to list here. But we would be wise to listen to God, to listen to His prophet Isaiah. Do not put your trust, your faith, in any those things. Trust in the Lord your God, and Him only. For as Isaiah said, ***In returning [to the Lord] and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.***

Isn’t that a remarkable statement? *Our strength is in quietness and trust*. Not in busyness, not in worry, not in hectic and harried preparations and panic. But when we trust and rest in the Lord. The one who created you, who became flesh for you, who redeemed you. He will protect you. And He will save you. From what you can see and what you cannot see. From your past, present, and future. From the one trying to take you down, the evil one. Only He can.

So we heard from Saint Luke tonight to ***Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps***

burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast. And we do that on New Year's - and everyday, actually - *by repenting.* New Year's Eve is a time when many look *forward* and make resolutions for the New Year. But maybe better would be to look *back* and repent for the past year. For our wrong trust. And then wait for the Lord and see what He brings us this New Year.

Whatever it is - and surely there will be things none of us expect, just as this year now past! - whether it is *tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*, it will not *separate us from the love of Christ.* Jesus has conquered all the forces of evil and all sin, and in Him, we are conquerors too. In life and in death. With plenty or in want. Whether in this New Year we are exalted or brought low. *None of that* is greater than the water and Word that joined you to Christ and made you His. *None of that* is greater than the bread and wine that feeds you Christ and His life and salvation. *None of that* is greater than His Word that forgives your sin. You may be tempted to trust in other things, but how foolish that would be when you have Christ.

So in just a few hours now a New Year will start, as it has so many other times. How many more there will be only our Lord knows. But know He does. The day of His return is set. The day when there will be no more resolutions and no more repenting, but only peace and joy in Him. In the life He always meant for us to have. May that day come before the next New Year! Or even before this one. But if not, strengthen us, O Lord, in You. Keep us firm in the faith and well fed by You. Enlarge Your Church, and keep us always ready and waiting for Your return.

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