

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Psalm 119:97-105 Luke 2:8-20

Back on Track: Daily Steps to Begin a New Year

Morning: Getting Started

Happy New Year 2021! May God bless you now and as we begin a new year filled with hopes, opportunities and challenges. Many people are glad to see 2020 end because of the pandemic which created and continues to create panic and havoc which has resulted in many losses along with grieving and mourning the deaths of many people around the world. Yet here we are opening up new calendars, date reminder apps and datebooks planning and looking ahead to those days which are empty and open before each of us. So what will you do to fill your days and bring hope to others?

We continue to welcome Jesus as the Baby born in a stable during this Christmas season and to acknowledge and praise God for this gift to us. For it is through Jesus that we have hope in this life and throughout eternity. Yet we also acknowledge this new year just begun and for many people searching today is not just to be vaccinated against covid19, but to begin this year with a hope that goes beyond the rejoicing of the shepherds and to begin the work of Christmas, that is to go tell it on the mountains, and in the valleys and everywhere- that Jesus is born, yes, but he is also the Christ, the Messiah the one in whom we should be placing our trust and all of our life.

So to begin 2021 we need to decide to get back on track or to refocus our lives about what it means to live our lives for Christ. The shepherds were in awe as they looked in the manger to see a baby and his parents watching in the stable. They had no idea that they would be witnesses to the birth of the Saviour who would be remembered for centuries to come. They did not know that they would receive a concert of angel voices to tell them to go into town in the middle of the night and see a baby. But just after a few words of conversation- they left the sheep their main source of employment on their own and went to 'see these things which had happened.' When they found the place where the family was, they worshiped and rejoiced with his parents. They made known what they had experienced and all who heard it were amazed. They returned to their duties but were forever changed. They went back to the fields and as they walked back to the fields, they glorified and praised God for all that they had heard and seen. Their life was different because they had listened to the angels and saw the Christ.

What have you been doing since you heard the story of Jesus' birth? Have you virtually celebrated with family and friends talking not just about the gifts that were exchanged, but about what Jesus' birth means? Or did we skip that part to plan for another virtual celebration of 2021?

What is it that we are called to do as we begin this year? Many of us are in lockdown for at least another week or 3. What will you do with this precious time that God gives to us? I am suggesting that we pick up the words of the prophet Jeremiah (15:19) and follow them. "IF you return to me, I will restore you." How many of us need to be restored? Not just physically, or mentally, or even emotionally, but what about spiritually? We need to be restored, renewed and refreshed to prepare for whatever comes our way. Yes, we are grateful for the situations of the past where people were diagnosed with serious illnesses and later it was gone. We are aware of situations where people were in need of cancer treatments or surgeries for physical healing to take place and yet prayer brought healing and no need for anything else. We also need to be restored because there are many people who are exhausted from their work- as essential workers dealing with very sick and dying individuals; people who are working from home instead of 6-8 hours and really working 16 -18 hours, or people doing it all- connecting children to virtual classrooms, working from home and trying to keep life in motion. Yes there are many people in need of being restored and to be renewed each day that God gives us. This is not only on the individual basis, but as families we also seek God's blessing.

One way of seeking God's blessing on you and your family is an old tradition which takes place on Epiphany, January 6 each year. Using chalk, the doorpost is marked with the year and the letters C M B which have a dual meaning. Christus Mansionem Benedicat "May Christ bless this dwelling place" or the traditional names of the Magi: Caspar, Melchoir and Balthasar, the Wise Men who brought gifts to Jesus in his home. When the chalk is applied a prayer is offered "Loving God, the doors of our hearts and the doors of our home are open to you and to all who need warmth and welcome. We give you thanks for our home, for the gift of family and for the blessing of friends. Keep us safe as we come in and as we go out each and every day. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen." Often the song "We Three Kings" is sung recognizing that the Magi came from different areas of the world to worship the Christ. This chalking asks God to bless the home for the year to come. But what is it that you hope to do as individuals in order to get back on track for growing in faith?

On an individual basis let's START by beginning each morning to focus on God so that our days will be made clear by walking in the path he has set out for each of us. It is Christ's light

that will guide us but we must walk on our own to face the work, the chores the challenges and most of all the people with whom we will be able to share our faith story.

S-start your morning the night before. If you work do you prepare for the next day in your mind knowing that there will be certain tasks to complete, people to connect with, jobs to do? Isaiah 26:9 tells us that ‘our souls yearn for God in the night for we earnestly seek God from within.’ If we believe in God and that God will guide us we need to pray for the day to come and have God guide us to prepare well.

T When we rise, we should do as Jesus did. Mark 1:35 tells us that “in the morning while it was still dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed.” We don’t need to leave our houses but we need to pray quietly believing that God’s word will light our way for the day.

A When do we rise and begin our morning prayer time, we can then ASK God about how we might improve our mornings. WE can ask God to teach us, and to know his path for us. What are we to read in the Bible and what do we pray? Often reading the Psalms helps us to realize that others have lived in this world before us and experienced many of the same things. Psalm 25 calls us to trust God to lead us to learn and grow.

R How many of you think about and reflect upon God during your day? Do you think about Jesus’ teachings on love as you make decisions for your work, or home? Do your faith values resemble your work values? Do you ever sing in your heart “This is the day that God has made let us rejoice and be glad” just because it is a good day in spite of the weather- whatever it may be? (Psalm 118:24. Are you ok with your work and you have peace within as you do your set tasks?

T Trust in God. Do you really trust God with your life each day? Do you pray regularly when all is well or do you only pray when you are in need? Psalm 143:8, 10 states: “Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Teach me to do your will for you are my God. Let your spirit lead me on a level path.”

As we begin each day we need to be reminded that God is walking with us, working, playing, learning all of it—with us. Because God is with those whom he calls his faithful children. By believing in him we are to put our faith in to action and START each day knowing that we are not alone.

When we reflect on 2020 many people are wanting to forget it entirely but there have also been some good things which have occurred—babies were born, people saw mountains and northern lights for the first time because there was less pollution in the sky, zoom meetings and gatherings of coworkers and families soared as stay at home orders were implemented and this made technology and its use made the world speed up 5 years, people appreciated the efforts of tireless ‘essential workers’ and giving to help those less fortunate were seen in many cities with skids of food stored in arenas until distribution was possible.

However, with the development of the vaccine against covid19 now being distributed around the world, there will be more changes and challenges continuing. The number of cases continues to rise as do the number of deaths. But we need to have faith in God because he will restore us if we return to him and live the way of love. We are also reminded that God does not want us to dwell in the past; we are to look to see the new things God is doing. Things to enable us to return to him, to prosper and to grow in faith. We will live more abundantly than before because our relationship with God will be stronger with prayer as our foundation. God’s word will lead us as Jesus’ teachings show us how to become stronger in our faith as each day passes.

Let us rejoice in this as we pray remember that each morning is a gift to offer God our praise and thanks!

Holy God of grace and love, we thank you that we can START our days in your presence through prayer, praise and in reading your word which guides our life. Bless us O God as we seek to get “Back on Track” and to grow in our relationship with you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.