

In the ancient calendar used by the Romans, from which our calendar was created, the name of each month had a meaning. For example the month of February was so named because that was the time of the year for a feast called Februa. One month in particular in the ancient Roman calendar that had an especially descriptive name was January. The Latin word *janua* means a door or window from which a person may look both ways, in other words, in and out--forward and back. Historians say that January is also derived from the name Janus, a common household god among the Romans who was often depicted facing in two directions. Basically, he was looking forward and back. In fact, he is usually pictured having two faces, facing in opposite directions – two-faced.

As we stand at the doorway to the month of January and the New Year we too naturally look back over the way we have come. But we also naturally look ahead to the New Year, anticipating where we are going.

But this concept certainly isn't new; in fact it wasn't even new to the Romans. Centuries before them, the Prophet Isaiah was inspired to encourage the same practice among the Israelites – looking in two directions: forward and back. And even as they did then, Isaiah's words encourage us here tonight to, in a manner of speaking, have a two-faced New Year.

First, the Word of the Lord through the Prophet Isaiah: *I will tell about the LORD's mercies, about the praises of the LORD, about all that the LORD has done for us, about his great goodness to the house of Israel, which he did for them according to his abundant compassion, and according to his great mercy.* ⁸*He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not deal falsely," so he became their Savior.* ⁹*In all their anguish he had anguish, and the Angel of his Presence saved them. In his love and in his pity he himself redeemed them, and he took them up and carried them all the days of old.*

Secondly, understand that being two-faced isn't always a bad thing. Take a look at the half sheet insert in your service folder. You'll see at the top of the page a picture of the two-faced

Roman god Janus. Making all things *captive...to Christ* (2 Co. 10:5) and along with Isaiah tonight, I would like to encourage you to be two-faced on this eve of the New Year. And the first direction I would like to look tonight is back – back to, as Isaiah puts it, *the mercies of the Lord.*

We don't have to look very far back in the year to find them. In fact we really only have to look back one week. A week ago tonight was Christmas Eve. We were reminded that Christ was born to live the holy life we have not lived and to die under the just punishment for our sins. That is the clearest and most complete reminder of God's kindness and love for us - Jesus Christ.

But obviously our spiritual blessings for 2018 weren't confined to Christmas. For the last 52 Sundays our God has fed us with his Word when we gathered for worship. We followed Jesus to the cross. We shouted, "He is risen indeed!" We listened to the words and works of our Savior God. In Bible class, and Sunday school, and through our personal time in God's Word we have found healing and hope. We have felt God's presence and been reassured of his love when we sinned. We have "often" received the pledge that we are forgiven children of God as we received the very body and blood of Christ "in with and under" the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper. Truly these are *the LORD's mercies, about the praises of the LORD, about all that the LORD has done for us, about his great goodness ...which he did ... according to his abundant compassion, and according to his great mercy.*

But I would also like to invite you tonight to take a minute or so to come up with some specific blessings with which God has blessed you this past year. Then, write them down in the blanks provided on the half-sheet. If you need more room (and honestly, who of us can't come up with at least 6 blessings) go ahead and use the back side. ✍️📄

It's tough to stop, isn't it...naming all the amazing things God accomplished in our lives during this year. I mean, who of us can't tell of *the LORD's mercies* in our lives? Who of us can't tell *about all that the LORD has done for us*? Our Lord has given us shelter, food, and clothing. We have enjoyed the blessings of family and friends. We have enjoyed God's

creation for another year. The Lord has provided us with blessings beyond belief, more than we can use, more even *than we can ask or imagine*. (Eph 3:20)

Oh, I suppose that someone might say that not everything in 2018 was all that great. There was war, famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, death. Someone might say, "I had unbelievable problems this year. In fact this year was one of the worst I have ever had. I don't really see all that much that God has done for me."


The truth is, we face the temptation to feel that way and sometimes even entertain those kinds of thoughts. But if we look at the year from God's perspective we hear Isaiah say *In all their anguish he had anguish* Through all the trials and troubles we faced in 2018 God was there with us us. When we felt pain, God knew it. When we were crying, God felt it. When we were despairing, angry, frustrated, clueless, *anguish[ed]; he [too] had anguish*.

But he didn't just sympathize with us and do nothing. *No the Angel of his Presence saved [us]*. This side of heaven, we may never know the full impact of that statement. We may never know all the close calls we had last year. We may never know how many disasters the Lord protected us from. We may have walked through the valley of the shadow of death and not even realized it. But we do know this: the Lord has been present and *In his love and in his pity he himself redeemed [us], and he took [us] up and carried [us]*. That was 2018.

But remember now, the idea tonight is to be two-faced. So yeah, just as we looked back on 2018 with *appreciation*, let's also look ahead with *anticipation* as we maybe make resolutions, as we make plans, as we look forward to another year of God's grace.

But you know, that's what gives us such a great advantage over many others who will celebrate the New Year tonight. Oh sure, we'll all ask many of the same questions: What will the new year hold? Will the economy be good or bad? Will companies lay people off or will many be hiring? Will taxes go up or down? Will our investments go up or down? What about Russia and China? What will happen in Syria and Afghanistan? Will the political world increasingly polarize or will we find some common ground? Yes, we will ask many of the

same questions as the rest of the world. The difference is that *we go forward with God's grace*.

Oh, we know that we will fail many times. We know that we will fall short of God's perfect and holy will. We know that things will seldom go according to *our* plans. But we also know that our *LORD's mercies are new every morning* (Lam 3:23). We know *all that the LORD has done for us*. We know the he will *save* us. Yes, we *anticipate*, we look ahead to 2019, with confidence in God's grace and blessing. And so I would invite you to take another minute or two to write down a few occasions or plans for which you will seek God's blessings in this New Year. And then use this as a basis for your prayers tonight as you anticipate the New Year. Go ahead... use the back if you need it. 

Does that list make you a little nervous about what is to come? Perhaps. But that's why Isaiah encouraged us to be a little two-faced tonight – to look back on 2018 with *appreciation* and to look ahead to 2019 with *anticipation*. Because whatever may come your way in this New Year, know that you will have the blessing of God's Word for another 52 Sundays. Once again you will find hope and comfort in that Word. For another year you will be built up in your faith and find guidance for our life. In 2019 you will see souls enter the kingdom of God through the sacrament of Baptism. You will see souls enter the eternal kingdom of God through the sleep of death. You will grow in love for one another as we stand together before this altar and receive God's forgiveness of sin through the body and blood of our Savior. You will be victorious in the things that matter as you fight the good fight of faith, equipped by the Holy Spirit himself. You will God's Kingdom come "to us and many others" and not even the gates of hell will overcome it. Yes, 2019, will be a good year for all of us, because no matter what may come, we enter this New Year knowing that by God's grace, he *will* carry us and lift us up even as *he himself [has] redeemed [us], [taken us] up and carried [us] all the days of old*. God's richest blessing to you in this New Year of grace. Amen.