

## *The Epiphany of our Lord*

January 5, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Romans 10:11-17

*As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (NIV)*

Did you make any New Year resolutions this last week? People still do that, right? People see a new year as a fresh start, a new beginning, an opportunity to start over and make some improvements. I have here a list of ten of the most popular New Year Resolutions for 2014. Many are the same as you hear every year. 1) Lose weight 2) Quit smoking 3) Save money 4) Get fit 5) Manage stress 6) Make a trip 7) Drink less alcohol 8) Manage debt 9) Volunteer more 10) Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

While some of these resolutions may make us laugh, may be repeated year after year, or may or may not be taken seriously, it is not wrong to want to do things better, to improve things for yourself or those around you. Since it is the time of year for resolutions I want to add one to the list. In fact, I want us to put this one at the very top of our list. This resolution focuses more on the spiritual than the physical. That is a good thing. For Jesus reminds us God takes care of our physical needs too as we: ***"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"*** (Matthew 6). So my prayer is that the Lord works in each of your hearts so that you: **Make it your New Year Resolution to celebrate Epiphany!**

If we are going to make celebrating Epiphany our number one resolution for this new year we need to understand what this Epiphany thing is all about. These words of our text here from Romans get at the heart of Epiphany: ***"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*** This is the wonderful truth Epiphany makes known. Jesus is revealed as the Savior for all people of all nations. This is why Magi, Gentiles from the east, come searching for Jesus. This is why when they find Him as a little child in a home in Bethlehem they worship Jesus as their Savior and King. This is why these non-Jewish travelers take their expensive gifts and they present to Jesus their treasures of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Isn't this why we do the same? Jesus has been made known to us as our Savior too. He is the Savior we needed because Jews and Gentiles, we are all alike under sin. Was that sin evident last year in our worship life? Did joining the Magi in saying "we have come to worship Him" become less than our top priority? When we did gather for worship was it with the same exceedingly great joy the Magi had when they saw again the star that led them to the Savior? Or was our coming to this house of worship at times just routine or ho-hum for us? And what about our gifts to our Savior last year, did we give Jesus our best treasures with our first-fruits or did

He get our leftovers? How about with our time and talents? What about our worship life in our homes – how often did we set aside time for Jesus and his Word there? Wouldn't you agree that there is room for improvement for the New Year? Are you ready with me to ask the Lord to help us make it our resolution to spend this New Year celebrating Epiphany?

It starts again where it began for us and where it always begins. We come to see Jesus. That's why we are here to see Jesus once again in His Word. We come to see Jesus who not only gives us an example of what true worship and commitment looks like, but He it lives for us. We come to see why there is no difference between Jew and Gentile as we hear about Jesus being nailed to the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We come to see the only Son of Man without sin, the only human strong enough to hold off the devil's temptations, and the Son of God whom not even death could hold. In short, we come to see our Savior. We come to see the light of the world and the only one who provides for all people life, forgiveness, and salvation. This is why we come to worship Him. This is why we gather to sing, pray, praise, and give thanks. This is why we lay our gifts at His feet. This is why we call on the name of the Lord, the one and only saving name. This is why we celebrate Epiphany, the fact that Jesus is revealed as the Savior of the world every week!

Here is another great reason to come to worship and celebrate Epiphany every week. ***“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** It is no secret where saving faith comes from – God tells us it comes from hearing the Word. This is what the Holy Spirit uses to change hearts and open eyes. This is the only way our faith grows – the only way we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This will be the only way our family here at Amazing Grace, under God, will grow. It will only be because others hear the message because faith comes through hearing the word of Christ. So Epiphany makes our goal very clear for us - tell others what Jesus has done. Paul puts it this way: ***“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”***

Think about what the Epiphany message does for our evangelism efforts. Jesus is the Savior of the Jews. Jesus is the Savior of the Gentiles. Jesus is the Savior of rich and poor, black and white, young and old, for He is the Savior of all. Therefore, the word of Christ is for everyone. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus! So how many people did you tell the good news to last year? How beautiful were our feet? Is there room for improvement? Is there reason for us to make a New Year resolution to celebrate Epiphany?

Perhaps you have read or heard about the story of the man walking on the beach. As he walked along the ocean he noticed thousands of starfish the tide had thrown onto the beach. Unable to return to the ocean during low tide, the starfish were dying. There this man came across a young boy picking up the starfish one by one and throwing them back into the ocean. After watching this seemingly futile effort, the man said, *“There must be thousands of starfish on this beach. It would be impossible for you to save them all. There are simply too many. You can't possible make a difference.”* The young boy smiled as he picked up another starfish and tossed it back into the ocean. *“It made a difference to that one,”* he replied.

***“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they***

*preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"* Dear friends, never doubt that the Lord is able to use us to make a difference. He uses our offerings. He uses our witness. The Lord uses us to preach the good news to all creation. Make it your New Year resolution to celebrate Epiphany. Make this New Year one where you target those who are dying Jesus. Like it was for Paul there will be those today who will reject the message. But it still remains true faith comes from hearing the message. Even if the Lord uses each of us to save one person – what a difference!

The truths of Epiphany are something to celebrate and live, if God grants us the time, all year long. All year long we are able to listen to His Word where more and more is revealed to us about this Savior of all. All year long we have opportunities to worship Him. ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come!”*** All year long we have a chance to celebrate Epiphany by revealing to others the Savior who has been born for them – He is Christ the Lord. ***“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm...the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come...And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.”*** (Isaiah 60)

We may look back like many people do every New Year and be put to shame by some of the resolutions we made the previous year. There is a good reason we laugh and repeat some of those same resolutions. But for this resolution we have God’s promise: ***“Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*** So my family and friends here at Amazing Grace it is a New Year – I pray we get busy and stay busy all year long celebrating Epiphany! Amen.