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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
January 1, 2017  
Sunday after Christmas

Scripture Lessons: James 4:13-17; Matthew 2:13-23

Hymns: 120; 98; 96; 97:1,4 (124:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 63:7-9

I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD  
And the praises of the LORD,  
According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us,  
And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,  
Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies,  
According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.  
8 For He said, "Surely they are My people,  
Children who will not lie."  
So He became their Savior.  
9 In all their affliction He was afflicted,  
And the Angel of His Presence saved them;  
In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;  
And He bore them and carried them  
All the days of old. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, Dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: New Year's worship

It is important for the child of God to focus on the Lord as we enter into a new year. As we celebrate the coming of a new year in our society, indeed the whole of mankind has the tendency to approach this observance by both looking back over the past year, as well as looking forward to the expectations of the coming year. We have a natural tendency to also look at it in a very personal way, with personal accomplishments, as well as personal disappointments coming to mind as we look back, (We don't really like to look back with a remembrance of any of our failings being sinful though.) Then we look forward with a list of resolutions or goals that we will endeavor to take on in our meager attempts to make of the coming year something more than the last year. Even if we think of 2016 as being a pretty good year, one must always be ready to grow and improve on past performance.

This is all well and good except for one thing, by nature we also have the tendency to exclude the Lord from all this. The Lord needs to be included in the review of the past, being mindful of the Lord's blessings and grace in our past. Making plans for the future, there is a need for us to seek both God's direction found in His Word, and blessing upon the endeavors going forward. It is kind of ironic that with New Year's Day being only one short week after Christmas, that Jesus' place in our lives is pretty much lost to most people with regard to any New Year's observance.

Our text, words of the Prophet Isaiah recorded by inspiration several centuries before Jesus' birth, serve as a wonderful reminder of the Lord's place in our New Year's observance on this the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. On this New Year's Day let us focus on --

### **THEME: Remembering the Lovingkindnesses of our God.**

When we look back at 2016, and for that matter all history, there is a track record that one can easily observe. There is a track record for man, and another for the Lord. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit led Isaiah to recall. As Isaiah looked forward to the future of Judah, Isaiah first looked back at the history of the nation. His response was:

**Isaiah 63:7** I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD  
And the praises of the LORD,

According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us,  
And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,  
Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies,  
According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.

Isaiah was insistent about --

### **I. Remembering God's Faithfulness.**

In the first 39 chapters of Isaiah's prophecy he presented a great deal of warning concerning judgments to come. These judgments were down the road; almost a century would pass before the fall of Jerusalem. Throughout that portion of Isaiah's prophecy there was a clear accounting of the UNfaithfulness of the people of Israel, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and in the southern kingdom of Judah. In spite of all the warnings of the prophets the people and often the kings of both nations persisted in serving false gods and all sorts of evil: immorality, greed, cruelty, oppression, and in their idolatry even the practice of human sacrifice, abounded. Isaiah warned of God's judgment because of their sin.

But then a new time would come, and in that era there was hope for deliverance. To find that hope Isaiah said, "**I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord.**" Isaiah praised the Lord for all that the Lord had done for the people of Israel. The Biblical history of Israel records how the Lord had delivered them from the oppressive slavery of Egypt. He had sustained them in the wilderness. He had delivered them from the hand of their enemies. He had blessed them with an abundance of good things. He had stood by them in all their times of trial. God was faithful; year after year God had always been faithful. In spite of the record of unfaithfulness of the people of Israel, God had been faithful in all His ways, in all His words. So the people of Israel had good reason to look beyond the hard times of judgment. The small remnant of the faithful had good reason to hope in the Lord in spite of the difficulties that lay in life's path. **God is faithful.**

Isaiah also made a point of mentioning the Lord's mercies. He reminded the people that the Lord is compassionate. This is not an empty word. The Lord feels very deeply concerning the sufferings of people. And we are reminded also by Jeremiah that **the Lord's compassions do not fail. They are new every morning**

(Lamentations 2:22-23). The Lord suffers with His people. He cares for them in their distress. He cares about them even when they bring trouble and hardship upon themselves. He cares for them in their sicknesses. In His compassion the Lord shares in our sufferings. This is the Lord Isaiah knew and praised as his Lord and God.

So then, on this New Year's Day, and this Sunday after Christmas, we join Isaiah in looking back and making mention of the lovingkindnesses of our God. Even as we look back and see our own failings and sins, what do we see in the Lord? We see a consistent, loving care for us in all our ways. He provides for all our daily needs. He provides us with a wonderful country for our homeland, and daily bread, and warm houses, and loving families, and all our needs. He protects us from every evil.

And when we face the trials of this life, sickness and distress and trouble of any and all kinds, even when we have brought it upon ourselves in our foolishness, the Lord has compassion on us. And cares for us.

So going forward we have reason to hope in the Lord. He has blessed us with every blessings, both material and spiritual all the days of our lives, and His compassions do not fail. So we submit our lives to His good and gracious will with confidence. The Lord will stand by our side. The Lord will bless the labors of our hands. The Lord will watch out for us in all our ways.

On New Year's Day we hold this confidence fresh in our minds and hearts because we are still celebrating Christmas, actively –

## **II. Appreciating the Wonder of Our Savior.**

**Isaiah 63:8-9** For He said, “Surely they are My people,  
Children who will not lie.”

So He became their Savior.

9 In all their affliction He was afflicted,

And the Angel of His Presence saved them;

In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;

And He bore them and carried them

All the days of old.

Reading these words one might think that the Lord must be a pretty poor judge of character. This is certainly not true! He knows the heart of man. When God looked down on the people of Israel He was fully cognizant of all their sins, all their failings, all their lies, all their unfaithfulness. They had sworn their faithfulness to the Lord at Sinai, and betrayed that oath within 40 days. And yet when the Lord looked down upon the children of Israel in love and mercy He still owned them as His people. He looked upon them as His children. He trusted them **not** to lie. They had betrayed the Lord time and time again, and **yet** the Lord became their Savior! He bore them and carried them all the days of old!

That is the kind of God we have. This is the Lord **our** God, our **Savior**. He tells us that the Angel of His Presence saved the people. When we look down in the manger in that stable in Bethlehem what do we see but the Angel of His presence, the messenger of His grace, Jesus our Redeemer!

Just as it was in the days of old, the Lord is there in His love to redeem us. In His grace He does not destroy, but He delivers. He redeemed us with the precious blood of His Son. This did not happen because someone demonstrated how good we are, and that we can change, and that we deserve a second chance. We don't deserve a second chance any more than the Jews and the Israelites of old. We are unworthy of His grace and mercy, and yet He looks down upon us and declares **us** to be **His people, children who will not lie!** He trusts us in spite of our sin.

He redeemed us according to His grace, and when we tell the Lord that we sincerely and earnestly repent of our sins and will amend our sinful lives He says of us, "They will not lie."

He has had such compassion on us, He has had demonstrated such grace toward us that we cannot but be moved to dedicate ourselves to the Lord. Even as we so dedicate ourselves to Him, He bears us up in His hand. It is His strength that carries us through the challenges and trials and temptations of life. Even as the Lord has lifted us up as on eagles wings in the past, so He will continue to do as we proceed into the new year. What He desires of us is that we acknowledge Him in all our ways. We trust Him as our Savior.

We seek to live according to His gracious and good will for us, so that in all we do we glorify His name before the world.

Our New Year's observance simply cannot be separated from our Christmas observance. The Savior's birth is the power of God that empowers and directs our lives and gives us true hope for 2017, and all the years to come.

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)