

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come... (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Happy New Year! January 1 always seems to bring much hope and optimism to so many people. The beginning of the new year is an opportunity for a new start – to leave behind the failures or difficulties of the previous year and move forward with positive thoughts, intentions, and expectations. It might mean making resolutions, changing jobs, or rededicating yourself to something you’ve been striving for already. “This year’s going to be better than the last!”

It usually doesn’t take too long for that optimism and drive to fade away for most people, though, right? Most resolutions don’t make it out of January. Circumstances in life – whether sickness, strain, or heartache – haven’t magically gone away. In some way, at least, we realize that this year won’t be all that much different from last year.

That might sound depressing, but as Christians we can actually take solace in the truth that the flip of the calendar doesn’t magically change everything. On the one hand, it means we can be honest about the struggles we face. Even more importantly, we actually have something – someone – to look to in this new year, someone who never changes. He never changes, and he is faithful.

This is why we’ve chosen Hebrews 13:8 as our theme verse for our year-long celebration in 2024 – *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*. 2024 marks the 150th anniversary of Immanuel as a congregation (as well as 100 years for our current church building!). To be sure, much has changed over 150 years. Technology has advanced well beyond the imaginations of any of the people who began worshipping together in 1874. Clothing, cultural mores, language – we could spend hours and hours talking through how different life is today than it was 150 years ago. Yet, they all faced the same temptations, the same difficulties, the same hardships that we face (sometimes worse!). Sin, death, and the devil still attacked them as they do us. But, their faith and hope is our faith and hope. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Each month during our celebration, our congregation will focus on one aspect of God’s faithfulness in the life of the Church. We thought of no better way than to start our celebration by focusing on Baptism. Not only is the Baptism of Our Lord celebrated this month (Sunday, January 7), but the connection between the first month of the year and the new life we find in Baptism was impossible to ignore. Jesus says that we are *born again by water and the Spirit* (John 3:5). Paul says that we are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection for a new life which begins already now (Romans 6). He calls it a washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Peter reminds us that *Baptism now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 3:21). As we remember our Baptisms, then, we remember God’s faithfulness in the past by bringing us into the Body of Christ. But we *also* remember that God is faithful today and tomorrow, continually helping us to “drown the Old Adam with all sins and evil desires by daily contrition and repentance, so that a new man will emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC). Just as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, so too is his faithfulness to us. You are baptized! You are a new creation!

-Pastor Squire

“All who believe and are baptized shall see the Lord’s salvation: baptized into the death of Christ, they are a new creation. Through Christ’s redemption they shall stand among the glorious, heavenly band of every tribe and nation.”

(“All Who Believe and Are Baptized,” *LSB 601*, v. 1)