**How f**

Earlier this week, an estimate of more than one million people gathered at Times Square to welcome in the New Year, while millions more gathered around their television sets as they watched the annual tradition either at home or at someone else’s New Year’s Eve party. But whether you were physically at Times Square or not, chances are we were being surrounded by plenty of screaming and cheering noises just as the ball drops to ring in the new year.

Personally, I’ve never spent New Year’s Eve at Times Square, nor do I have any desire whatsoever to do so in the foreseeable future. But have you ever thought about welcoming the New Year in an alternative way…in a complete solitude and peaceful serenity out in the wilderness? I have!

About 20 years ago, I had this unique opportunity to spend New Year’s Eve over at the Grand Canyon National Park out in Arizona. How many of you have been there? People asked me, why didn’t you spend New Year’s Eve in Las Vegas instead? You should’ve done that, it’s much more exciting and festive…but that’s exactly what I didn’t want to do. I wanted to get away from the crowd and welcome the new year in a unique way. That’s why I chose to stay in one of the cabins within the Grand Canyon National Park.

I remember the cabin that I stayed in had no television, no telephone, no WiFi or Internet of course (remember, this was more than 20 years ago!) There was electricity and a fireplace to keep warm and I believe an AM/FM clock radio in that room. But that’s about it. Yup! What a way to spend my New Year’s Eve, right?

But the next morning, I got to wake up bright and early, in order to catch the first sunrise of the new year. And I must tell you, it was the most magnificent experience and the most awesome sight there is. I would totally do it again if I can. Watching the sun rise over the Grand Canyon on New Year’s morning. What a way to welcome in the new year! Everything just stood still and frozen in time surrounded by the majestic beauty of God’s creations.

This was the most memorable New Year’s Eve I have ever spent in complete solitude and in the midst of peaceful and quiet presence of God.

Our passages this morning on this first Sunday of the New Year also offer us a glimpse of the powerful and majestic nature of our God and God’s creation. The familiar passage of Genesis 1, literally took us to the beginning of ALL creation, where there was an empty void in a space of nothingness. **Before there was anything in this universe, before there was any sign of life whatsoever, there was GOD!!!** Then suddenly a light was introduced into this world in the midst of darkness, kind of like the 1st sunrise of the New Year out in the wilderness, full of excitement, expectation and new hope upon the horizon. **When God spoke, there was!!! Out of nothing, God created!** What an awesome imagery that was? **As** **God orchestrated ALL things into proper order in the midst of chaos. God prescribed ALL creations of life in accordance to God’s purpose.** **God demonstrated God’s presence in nature in the midst of darkness of our lives.**

As the Psalmist declared in Psalm 29,*3*

***The voice of the LORD is over the waters;***

***the God of glory thunders,***

***the LORD, over mighty waters.***

***The voice of the LORD is powerful;   
          the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.***

The references of the mighty forces of nature in *Psalm* and in *Genesis* this morning remind us of who we are and whose we are in light of God’s wondrous creation. What a perfect reminder for us on this very first Sunday of the new year, as we come to pay tribute to our God who filled us with new hope and optimism of God’s promises.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, today we have also launched into this new season of Epiphany on our liturgical calendar. The word “Epiphany” is derived from a Greek term “*Epiphaneia*”, which means “revealing” or “shining forth”.

As we remember the arrival of the three Magi on *Three Kings Day* yesterday, which signified the shining forth of the light of Christ to ALL of humanity, we proclaim that indeed, a Savior has been born for those who have come from the East and West, and from the North and South. We have come to pay this Messiah child homage bearing our various gifts of ourselves, regardless of what we have to offer. But more importantly we have come to bring God’s greatest gift of HOPE, PEACE and LOVE back to where we came from, for the benefits of God’s people. That was the mission of the Wise Men (and of us today)…not so much of what we can afford to bring with us, but the gift of the Good News that we may bring back to OUR communities to our people. **This is what Epiphany all about! Go, and shine forth this light of Christ amongst God’s people!**

As we heard from Rev. Mark Koenig last week, that the “Work of Christmas” does not end when we put away the Christmas trees and decorations, the nativity scene or the Advent candles. In fact, the Work of Christmas has just begun. The true meaning of Christmas lives on as we continue to shine forth the light of Christ that is burning in our lives.

As we carry this light of Christ into this world that is often filled with the deep darkness of our human sins, lacking in God’s compassion, peace, love, and justice, the voices of the people can once again be heard in the wilderness crying out and yearning for a Savior. This superficial void cannot be fulfilled with earthly pleasures and materialistic gains. None of what Santa Claus brought or any Christmas gifts that we might have received, can sustain us with the everlasting JOY and PEACE that only Christ our Savior can provide.

Last week I got to visit Kings Plaza after Christmas but before the New Year. I wasn’t looking for anything in particular…but just walking around. I came across the Santaland that they had set up on the 2nd floor, where Santa was posing for photos with children. As you would’ve guessed, Santaland has now been closed but they haven’t taken it down yet, so it looked deserted. Santa has returned home and we won’t be hearing his voice of “Ho, Ho, Ho” at least for the next 11 months.

As I was walking around, I also noticed that the people were already back to their usual self once again…the holidays are over, so now what? The reality is now sinking in. The people were back at screaming and yelling at each other, competing for an edge over the others. Many looked depressed with a post-holiday blue, with their credit cards fully maxed out and their payments will soon need to be made. **Sadly for many of these folks, the** **Christmas Joy was only short-lived and substance-based.**

But the true joy of Christ’s birth shall live in us, both inside and out. This is what the season of Epiphany all about. It is about us sharing this light of Christ to others who may still be living in the “formless void” and the “deep darkness”. It is about us bringing this new hope and new life of what Christ has offered us to those who are crying in loneliness or in silence out in the wilderness. This gift of Christ in God’s hope and promise is more valuable than any Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh that the Wise Men had brought.

About 10 years ago, I was serving as the youth pastor of a group of teenagers and college students out in New Jersey. That year, we decided that we wanted to put on a Praise Night/Coffee House outreach event during the kids’ Winter break from school. In the course of our planning, we were trying to brainstorm a catchy and snappy title for the event, in order to draw people’s attention, so that they would come. As we were putting on our thinking cap, suddenly a lightbulb came on in my head, quite literally…the image of the light of Christ flashed across my mind especially during the season of Epiphany. The theme focused on how we may SHINE the light of Christ before others…as a continuation or extension of Christmas. We chose the acronym SHINE – S-H-I-N-E, which stands for **Show How It Never Ends**.

In the same way, every time we come and gather in worship, whenever we break bread together, as we will later on, to celebrate the communion of Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals and shines forth to us Christ’s presence around this table of grace and forgiveness.

**Through Christ,** **God had made Godself known to us ALL not only at the scene of nativity, but also at this table of Thanksgiving and at the fount of Baptism.**

**Through the Holy Spirit, Christ has made himself known to us through the happenings of our lives, through our trials, obstacles, and challenges, and through our many miracles of joys and blessings in disguise.**

So later on, as we come before this table of grace, let us come with great confidence of what this New Year may bring, knowing that God’s promises will never fail us. God’s voice will continue to cry out in our lives… calling us to reach out to those who are still out in the wilderness. Even as we speak, we hear God’s voice is being echoed and resonated through the canyon. During this season of Epiphany, God has invited all of us to listen attentively to hear what God may have to say, through God’s still small voice in our heart. ***Be still and know that I am God!*[[1]](#footnote-1)**Be still and know that I am. Be still!

God is about to sing to us a new song, for as long as we declare our faith in Him through our calling of baptism and fellowship around this table of grace and forgiveness. **God will never let us go. God will never let us down.** As the psalmist declared to us this morning,

***The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;***

***The LORD sits enthroned as king forever.***

***May the LORD give strength to his people!***

***May the LORD bless his people with peace.[[2]](#footnote-2)***

Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Psalm 46:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Psalm 29:10-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)