



**THE PLATFORM
INTERNATIONAL**

TPI... Together we can change the world

NEW ERA

JANUARY 2024

A NEW ROAD FOR A NEW YEAR

Isaiah 60:1-6 | Ephesians 3:1-12 | Matthew 2:1-12



**DR. VICTORY
GODSPOWER**
Senior Servant

Thank you all for an incredible year. 2023 has not only marked what has been accomplished by so many in a year but also what has been established over eight years. We count it a privilege to build with the amazing ministers God has placed around us all.

Phil 3.16 says; Only lets us live up to what we have already attained. We have attained much together. Something of significance is rarely achieved on our own.

What we have accomplished outruns the best intentions and favorable conditions.... And there is so much more in store.

We know we confidently walk into a new year because God has promised in Psalm one that when we live His way, we will prosper!

To our family, thank you. We value you beyond belief. To our friends, our church family, thank you. Love and appreciate you all so very much. Much love to you all for this New Year as we work together to expand the Kingdom.

Your In His Vineyard!

Dr. Victory Godspower
Senior Servant

A new year always brings a sense of hope, doesn't it?

The previous year with all its tragedies, problems, disappointments, failures, and sadness is now behind us, and a clean slate lies ahead. This is symbolized on New Year's Eve by the old man with the sickle and the newborn baby.

The old has passed away; the new has come. With whistles and horns and parties, and probably more to eat and drink than we should have, we ushered in the new year. Yet, beneath the gaiety and laughter, there's a gnawing feeling – it's all still the same; nothing's really changed. If anything, passing from the season of lights and glitter and carols to the season of dark, cold, bleak midwinter, only makes the emptiness worse, the depression deeper.

For sure there has been plenty in the news to make anyone depressed. As one commentator recently wrote in a local newspaper: "Reality seems to crush [hope] at every turn: the Ebola epidemic, the ruthless terror of the Islamic State, crushing economic disparities in this country, the pernicious scourge of racism, [the increase of] global warming, homelessness in our own 'backyard' on Cape Cod,"

[i] and also the plague of illicit drugs, rampant gun violence, etc., etc.

Also, many of us are feeling personal pains or anxieties this new year. Some of us are wrestling with important decisions regarding a primary relationship or a task to be done; some know firsthand the powerful effects of disabling disease or worry about health issues in the upcoming months; some have had to deal recently with a major loss; some wonder if we can make it in the coming year without the presence of one who meant so much; some of us are feeling very lonely, in spite of people all around us; some of us fear growing older, or fear what the future may hold; some wonder if dreams will ever be realized, or whether the new year will be even more frustrating and filled with feelings of futility than the last.

Many of us are feeling pain or anxiety this new year. What is this pain or anxiety like for you? When we feel this way, the temptation is to stay with the familiar and the comfortable, to crawl back into bed and pull up the covers, or to sneak into the manger with Jesus, where it's warm, safe, and secure.

The temptation is to stay where we are – in the dark crevices of depression or defeat, of fear or foreboding, in the deep ruts of sameness, boredom, or lethargy. But Epiphany with its emphasis on a light shining in the darkness, reminds us that life continues on, that revelation and growth and new beginnings loom on the horizon, that new roads appear up ahead, new roads that will take us, if we choose to let them, into new adventures, new challenges, new opportunities to be the persons God wants us to be. Epiphany reminds us that life continues on, even as one year ends and another begins, "one season following another," as they sing in "Fiddler on the Roof." The Magi, also called the Wise Men or the Three Kings, who bring their gifts to the Christ Child, illustrate this movement. But first, a brief word about who these Magi were.

They probably were astrologers from the East, perhaps from Persia or Babylon, present day Iran and Iraq. They believed that human destiny was written in the stars, and though they were learned men of their day, we would consider many of their notions superstitious today.

Yet, I'll bet if I asked right now (which I won't) how many of you know your own astrological sign, over 90% of you would raise your hand. Nonetheless, the wise men agreed upon one thing (as many of us do also) – they believed that human events were influenced by a power beyond this world.

[ii] Tradition says there were three of them; the Bible doesn't say how many. In the Middle Ages they were given names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar; they are nameless in the Bible. The Magi became identified as kings, probably reflecting our Isaiah passage for today. The story in Matthew is about kings and wise men, but these are people in addition to the Magi.

The kings are: Herod, a ruthless tyrant who stops at nothing to achieve his goals; and Jesus, a vulnerable and helpless baby, who becomes known as the King of Kings, a baby who grows up to be a ruler whose power is hidden in humility.

[iii] The wise men are the chief priests and scribes, well-versed in the scriptures, who are called in by Herod to tell him where this so-called king of the Jews was to be born.

The Magi from the East are inquisitive, adventurous, obedient to their calling, and seek no honor for themselves. They humble themselves before the Christ Child and offer sacrificial gifts of great value. In short, they fit the image of servants more than royalty or those with superior wisdom, and thus, are exemplary role models for us. But it's what they do at the end of the story that is of particular interest this month.

Matthew says they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. In the Bible, dreams are an important conduit for God to communicate with people. Could be for us too, for as we in the TPI say, “God is still speaking.”

The Magi, after they have offered their gifts, realize the danger in returning to Herod, and leave “for their own country by another road.” They don't hang around to bask in the beauty of the babe. They don't stay where it's comfortable and secure. They set out from there by another road, a new road, a different road than the one they'd been traveling upon.

They move on in their journey of life, and so must we. For us, the manger is only one stopping place on our journey of faith. And while the tranquillity of the manger may move us deeply, it should never transfix us. The rest of Christ's journey, and our journey, remains to be traveled.

[iv] As we embark on this new year, embodied so well in the spirit of Epiphany and the reality of life moving on, a fair question for us to ask is, “how can we move on?” The answer may be found in the refrain from an old church camp song I'll bet many of you remember: “Rise and Shine.” Isaiah tells the people of Israel to “Arise, shine; for your light has come...” They no longer have to live in darkness – nor do we.

Rise and shine, get up, begin again – there is more to come! There are new roads to travel upon in this new year. But there are also powerful forces working against this directive. Apathy, lack of confidence, our physical or mental state, extreme caution or timidity – all these tend to hold us back. Worse than any of these is fear

–disabling, crippling, immobilizing fear.

Sometime in the early part of the nineteenth century, one dark winter night, a weary traveler came to the banks of the mighty Mississippi for the first time. There was no bridge in sight and ice covered the water as far as one could see.

Could he dare cross over? Would the ice bear his weight? It was urgent he reach the other side, so finally, after much hesitation, and with fear and trembling, he began cautiously creeping on his hands and knees across the surface of the ice.

By distributing his weight in this way, he hoped to prevent the ice from cracking beneath him. About half way across he heard a noise behind him, and he turned and looked to see a man driving a horse-drawn sleigh filled with coal, starting to cross the river.

And here was the traveler on his hands and knees. The man, his horse, and his sleigh-full of coal dashed past him and out of sight, across the same river of ice

on which he was creeping! You and I are sometimes like that traveler, aren't we? Fear, by whatever name we call it, can prevent us from doing so much. Cautiously, timidly, tremblingly, we venture forth upon God's promises, as though the lightness of our step might make the promises more secure, yet at the same time, we doubt that they are true. God has promised to be with us – believe this promise!

God has promised to uphold us no matter what – believe this promise! God has promised to grant us victory over all our spiritual enemies – believe this promise! God has promised to grant us full and free forgiveness of our sins through and because of Jesus Christ, our newborn Savior – believe this promise!

Don't creep upon these promises as though they were too fragile to hold you up. Stand upon them, confident that God is as good as God's word, and that our living, loving Lord will deliver them as promised.

[v] Maybe you've heard the expression: “even if

you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there!” It's true! So, in this new year, let's get up and get going. Let us rise and shine, knowing that it is God's light that empowers the light within us.

This sounds like a great New Year's resolution, doesn't it? But it won't be complete until we finish the old camp song's refrain, and “give God the glory.” We do this by living thankful lives, thanking God for the blessings we've received, and by sharing the Good News with others.

We do this individually and together as the church. The mission of the church, as Paul implies to the Ephesians, is to reflect the light of Christ, to point to Christ's work in the world, to declare Christ's redemption, to reveal the mystery, to make known God's wisdom, but perhaps most important, to mirror and imitate Christ's love and deeds of mercy.

And this is our individual mission as well. As we sang in our first hymn, we need to “go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, that Jesus Christ is born” – and that we have been born into and

embraced by the light of Christ ourselves.

Rose Crawford was blind the first fifty years of her life, until one day she found out that there was an operation that could restore her sight. And so she had the operation. You can imagine her awe and joy at seeing light and colors, images of people, and the beauties of nature, none of which she had ever seen before.

Sadly, Rose could have had the surgery twenty years earlier. She was unnecessarily blind for twenty years, because she didn't know about the operation and assumed she was doomed to live in darkness. Nobody told her about the sight-restoring surgery. Nobody told her she no longer had to continue living in darkness. Millions of people today live in spiritual darkness because nobody has told them they no longer have to live there anymore.

[vi] Part of giving God the glory is sharing the light of Christ's glory with others. Shortly before Christmas, I was at a Shop, picking up a few groceries. I had noticed a bell ringer outside the

store when I entered, and decided I'd make a little contribution on the way out. I did so, and the young woman who was ringing the bell nodded her head and smiled a "thank you." I'm guessing she may have been unable to speak, because she then showed me a computer tablet upon which were written some words.

Now, we all know that church people tend to be more evangelical than many of us "frozen chosen" mainline Protestants – right? Well, true to form, this ringer was out there spreading the gospel. On the tablet were these words, "Do you know how much Jesus loves you?" I smiled and replied, "Yes, I do! Thank you, and Merry Christmas!" As I walked back to my car, I thought, "Wow!

That was neat!" Talk about sharing the light of Christ's glory with others. She was doing it very effectively. Each of us has a new road ahead of us in the new year. It's another road, a different road than any we've traveled on before.

As we step off down that road, not knowing what we may find, not knowing exactly where we're going, we can be comforted in knowing that for sure, the light goes with us, leading us, guiding us, showing us the way.

God will be with us on our journeys down that new road ahead. Even now God is calling to each of us, whoever we are, whatever our circumstance, calling us to get up off our hands and knees, to stop creeping, and rise and shine, and continue on the journey, giving God our praise, and sharing the Good News with others along the way.

Some of us may be thinking, "Well that's fine for the younger folks, but I'm too old to be thinking about starting off on any new roads. There is grace here not just for the young, but for the old, or older, as well. It's not hard, is it, to see the possibility of new life and new beginnings, when we are young or in the lives of the young? It may be more difficult to imagine such grace and newness when we are well beyond that time of life, when the future is no longer so open or full of promise as it once seemed.

All the more reason then to receive the gift of this part of the story, the promise of grace and new life, not only for the young, but for no-longer-young [as well]. Grace happens, surprise and new life can come, no matter what our age. Look today for the surprise of God's grace in your life, no matter what age you are.

[vii] A New Year's Eve poem I came across

concludes with these words: "With courage we face the future, with warm memory we sing the old year out. With hope in our hearts and voices we face the sunrise of God's new dawn."

[viii] So, let's sing the new year in by singing together the refrain of that old song: [Marcia and the choir will help us] "Rise, and shine, and give God the glory,

glory, Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory, Rise and shine and [clap] give God the glory, glory, Children of the Lord."

[ix] May hope dwell in our hearts and voices, and may that sunrise, the light of Christ, shine brightly on each of us as we journey on the new road we'll be traveling upon in this new year. Amen.





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