

A New Beginning

Luke 2, Matthew 1, John 1
December 24, 2011

Stephan K. Turnbull
First Lutheran Church, White Bear Lake, MN

1. Welcome
2. Introduction

Can anyone remember when you first started seeing signs of the Christmas season? I know it was before thanksgiving for sure, right. And I'm not much of a decorator, in fact I don't know if I've ever decorated anything in my life..., but people tell me that you can buy Christmas decorations and Halloween decorations at the same time nowadays.

With Christmas having been in front of us for so long, would you forgive me if I glimpsed ahead at New Year's for a just a minute. Here at the end of December it's almost time to turn the calendar again, and we get a whole new start on the year. Are you working on your New Year's resolutions yet? No? I bet if you could buy them, WalMart would have start selling them at Labor Day.

I think Jay Leno's got the right idea on New Year's Resolutions. He said that studies now show that in America there are now more of us overweight people than average weight people. That means that to be overweight is to be average weight. That's great news! If your New Year's resolution was to get back down to a normal weight for your height, you're already there. You have reached your goal. I hope you're encouraged by that when you sit down to dinner tomorrow

(Tension) – New Year's resolutions are pretty easy to make fun of. We know most of them are not kept. But the idea of them makes sense to a lot of us. Most of us have some area of our lives that we'd like a second chance at, that we'd like to start over.

A lot of us would like to start over financially. Have you ever gotten into a financial situation where you wished you could just press the reset button and get to start over? It happens all the time. Things pile up on a credit card, and now you're looking at years of repayment for things that didn't last nearly that long. Cars that look great on the lot cost a lot of money on the back end and you wish you hadn't bought it in the first place. Your dream house was a great idea before the market crashed and you didn't get the new joy you were planning on. Sometimes it would really nice if we could just go back and take a do over.

It can happen in relationships too. I remember an old friend of mine that I still keep up with from time to time. When I first knew her she was this confident, happy person. She was a great friend and fun to be around. Then she started

dating this guy. He was smart and talented and it seemed like such a good thing. But he also turned out to be demanding and demeaning and controlling. And she just shriveled up. And I think she probably would have married the guy, because it didn't seem like she could see it, even though it was obvious she needed to get out of that relationship. And then one day he moved away and left her. And then she started to turn around, and some time later she met a wonderful guy, whom she did marry, and her confident, happy self came back out again. She just needed to start over.

Do you need to start over in some area of your life? Are you heading down a road that needs some redirection? Maybe you don't really want to go back and do all that part over again, but now would be a place for a clean slate and a new beginning?

(Text) I really think one of the most overlooked parts of the Bible's story of Christmas is that it is the story of a new start. I want to show you this in the Bible today and show you how this Christmas could be the opportunity for a new start in your life and in your relationship with God. Let me give you a few examples of how the Bible shows that Jesus is a new beginning for God's people.

The first one comes from some of the most famous verses in the Christmas story, but I think we've often missed the point of this little verse.

Near the beginning of the Christmas story it says... **So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. Luke 2:4.**

Then the angels said... **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:11.**

The Bible says that Jesus as a new David, the son of David that God had promised to send so long ago, a new king for his people. That's what made King Herod so mad that he sent the wise men to find Jesus so that he could try to kill him. He was afraid God was sending a new king for His people and he liked being King himself. And you may not know this, but the Christmas story in the Gospel of Matthew actually starts with a genealogy of Jesus. We don't usually read that part. So-and-so began so-and-so, and... We usually skip right over that. It's a kind of obscure genealogy of Jesus that's broken into three different parts with 14 generations in each part. And scholars have sometimes wondered, why did Matthew start where did and order it the way he did. You might wonder, why break Jesus' genealogy into groups of 14. It's kind of a random number. I'm not going to get to technical with you, but in the ancient world letters and numbers were used interchangeably and the letters that spell the name of King David also

add up to the number 14. The Christmas story says that Jesus is a new David and new King, a new start for God's rule world.

Most of us know we need a new ruler. Whether we're talking about our own lives or the world as a whole. We've gotten ourselves into some messes by making our own rules and serving our own agendas and generally believing that we are in charge. Did you ever see that billboard that was out a few years ago. I don't remember who put them up, but one of them said, "If you're living like there's no God, you'd better be right." Living like we are our own ruler can get us in a real mess.

The Bible says that God has not left us alone in our mess. He sent Jesus into the world to call us to a new way of life. And one of the distinct impressions you get when you read the stories of Jesus' life is you think, "Man, would we be better off if we lived this way." If we treated one another with mercy, if we were faithful in our relationships, if we generous with our time and resources...if we stopped trying to be Lord and Ruler of our own domain and said, let's do it His way.

Is today the day for a new start for you under the Lordship of Jesus? A day to say, I've been trying it my own way for long enough, and this isn't the life I know God has for me, and I want more than this. I'm ready to follow Jesus instead. Christmas is all about new starts. Maybe today is that kind of a new start for you.

- a. And the Bible says more about how Jesus is a new start. Jesus is not only a King or Ruler, he's also a new teacher who can teach us how to live. The greatest teacher in the Old Testament was Moses. Moses was famous for leading God's people out of Egypt and he was famous for teaching God's law, like the 10 commandments, to Israel from Mt. Sinai. And the Bible says that another part of Jesus is that He is a new start in God's teaching, like a new and better Moses. Let me give you a couple examples:
 - i. When Jesus had been born and Herod heard about it, he set out to kill all the baby boy's born around Bethlehem, so he could stop this would-be king, but Joseph and Mary escaped from Israel to Egypt to hide there until it was safe to come home. In Matthew 2:14-15 says, **"So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Matthew 2:14-15.** It's like a replay of God calling Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.
 - ii. When Jesus grew up and gave his greatest sermon, he went up on a mountainside, like Moses did for the 10 commandments, and gave his

own commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. And he says things like, “You have heard it said “Do not murder, but I tell you...” In fact the Gospel’s are full of examples of ways that Jesus is like a New Moses, teaching people God’s ways.

iii. We could all use someone to teach us how to live the way God intends. Now there are all kinds of places you can look if you want to learn how to invest in the stock market, fix a car, or train for a marathon. But if you want to be wise in the things that matter most, Jesus is the teacher to turn to. If you want to learn and practice forgiveness in your relationships, about love and sacrifice, priorities, how to pray, how to understand what God is really like, Jesus is your Rabbi.

iv. Are you ready to learn from Jesus? Ready to read His Word? Ready for a new start and a new understanding in the things that matter most? Might this Christmas be a chance to make a fresh start?

b. Jesus is a new David, a new ruler for us and our world; He’s a new Moses, a teacher for the things we really need, but there’s an even more important new start than that. The Bible says that Jesus is like a New Adam, a new start for the human race.

i. Most of our Christmas story details come from the stories in Matthew and Luke. They tell us about the shepherds and the angels and Mary and Joseph. But the Gospel of John handles the start of the story differently. He’s got more of a poet’s heart. And when he starts his story of Jesus he says this in John 1, **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1.** There’s one other verse in the Bible that starts that way, “In the Beginning...” It’s the story of creation, and now this is a story of God doing creation over again, for our sake, by his grace and power.

ii. The Bible makes the same point again when it tell us about Jesus temptation. It’s like a retelling of the temptation story from the beginning of Genesis. Jesus is out in the wilderness with the tempter, but this time he doesn’t eat the apple like Adam and Eve did, he doesn’t turn the stones into bread. Jesus is faithful where every other human has failed.

iii. This is what makes the whole thing matter. We need Jesus to be the ruler of our lives and our world; we need Jesus to be our teacher for all the things tha matter most, but if all this new start business was

just a matter of saying, “Ok, now you know what to do, now go do it!” we’d still be stuck where we started, wouldn’t we? Do you think that would actually change your life? I remember this time when I was in elementary school and we were in gym class. (Seems like everybody has an old gym class story, doesn’t it?) Our gym teacher was timing us in a 40 yard dash and we all got two tries. I don’t remember my times anymore, I’m just lucky she was using a stopwatch and not a calendar for me. I don’t remember my times, but this is what I remember. I ran as hard as I could on my first try. I pushed all the way to the end and got some kind of time. Then I ran it again, and I wanted to go faster. And I gritted my teeth and my arms were pumping and I was focused on the finish line I tried as hard as I could. And I remember as clearly as it was yesterday, I was 0.1 seconds slower the second time. And I was mad. And my teacher tried to tell me that 0.1 seconds is nothing, it probably had more to do with the speed of her finger than the speed of my running. That’s probably true, but I wanted to go faster. Do you know what the problem was? It wasn’t that I didn’t want it. It wasn’t that I didn’t try hard enough. It wasn’t even that I needed someone to teach me where the start and finish lines were. Maybe somebody could have taught me about running form and I could have gotten a little faster, but do you know the real problem. I was still using the same legs. That’s just all the speed they had. And I could have run that 40 yard dash a hundred times, and I would not have crossed the finish line significantly faster. It’s just not going to happen.

- iv. When the Bible says that Jesus is a new start for you, maybe your heart knows that you’ve tried that before. You don’t want to go back and do it all over again and wind up in the same place. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, and you’ve played that game before. That’s why so many of us have given up on New Year’s resolutions. We’ve already run the 40 yard dash on these legs and we know how it ends.
- v. But a new beginning on New Year’s is different than a new beginning on Christmas. Because Jesus doesn’t just give you a new start with the same old, slower than Molasses in January, scrawny little 4th grade legs. Jesus doesn’t give you a new vision but the same old heart; a new goal, but the same mind, the same imagination, the same weakness. Jesus has the power to change both you and your direction.

4. (Take home)

- a. I'm going to pray for us in just a minutes, and as I pray let me ask you to think about the direction of your own life right now, whether you're ready to give Jesus greater Lordship of your life, whether you really want to learn from Him how to live life his way, whether you're ready for new legs to run. I want to invite you to make this Christmas a new start for your life.

PRAY