



*In the beginning, God created  
the heavens and the earth.  
Genesis 1:1*

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Well, Christmas is almost over for most people. The church year still gives us a few more days of the Christmas season, but for the most part, people are beginning to at least think about putting away decorations, gifts, and all the trimmings of the season. Christmas gives way to the New Year. The cycle continues. For every beginning, there must be an ending. The sun must set in order for the moon to rise, darkness gives way to the light of a new dawn. Graduation becomes Commencement. Winter ends as spring gets underway. The New Year cannot begin until we ring out the old year.

This New Year's Eve will be especially poignant to me. My dear friend Joan entered Eternal Life as the summer came to a close. Her brave battle with cancer was finished; and even in her last days, her thoughts were of her loved ones as she helped them prepare for her memorial service. She requested, and got, a covered dish luncheon before the Celebration and Commemoration of her life, followed by a champagne toast and dessert, held on a Saturday, so friends and family would not have to take a day off from their regular work week. Joan and I were spirit sisters from the moment we met more than 20 years ago. Her New Year's Eve birthday was always celebrated by me, even though we were half a continent apart. Quite by chance, I learned today that the grand daughter of another friend will celebrate her first earthly birthday on New Year's Eve as Joan celebrates her first birthday of eternity. So the circle of life continues – one life ends as another begins.

Each year people begin the new year with “resolutions” – goals and promises to do things differently, to be better persons, to be kinder, more generous, gentler; to give up bad habits and live improved lives. Most resolutions are broken after the first week. We sink back to our old routines and sinful ways. But God is merciful and forgiving. Every time we confess our sins and receive the body and blood of Christ, we are given a new chance to amend our lives, a new possibility to be a better person, a new opportunity to show that we are the hands of God on earth and proclaim our love for others by doing his will and work.

What resolutions will you make (and fervently try to keep) this year in relation to God and your spiritual life? Will you resolve to begin and end each day with prayer? To read your Bible daily? To truly love you neighbor by helping with deed and actions, and not merely by contributing to charities? To put God's priorities like worship, above worldly priorities?

In this next year we need to remember that we have been given a gift from God. He has given us life and a beautiful world in which to live that life. Sure there is evil in the world . . . but it's not all evil. We can become preoccupied with the distractions of the world or we can notice how wonderful things are. . . and live gratefully. Think about how spectacular life is,

- the beauty of a sunrise and sunset
- the majesty of the clouds
- the breathtaking nature of a flower
- the simple joy of child
- the pleasure that comes from people who become friends
- the peaceful sense after a newly fallen snow
- the first songs of a bird in the spring

As we begin the new year, let us remember: "In the beginning . . . God". For if we make God the beginning of our year and our lives, we will find that He is also the end that we have been looking for.

*Thank you, dear heavenly father, for new beginnings.  
Let us be truly grateful for all that you have given us.  
Amen*