



NEW YEAR'S EVE  
2020  
NORTHMINSTER BAPTIST CHURCH

Welcome to this New Year's Eve time of reflection, confession, commitment and communion. The secular world starts over on January 1. We who call ourselves Christians begin with Advent. Regardless of when we begin, we all need to know that we can "begin again." If we were perfect, we would just keep going. But, after a year of who we are and what we do, we need a new beginning. This service provides the opportunity to make that new beginning. Use it for your benefit, and receive it as a simple, sacred, quiet gift.

Northminster Baptist Church  
3955 Ridgewood Road  
Jackson, MS 39211  
601-982-4703  
601-982-4705 FAX  
[www.northminsterbaptist.org](http://www.northminsterbaptist.org)

If you are reading these words, you must be sitting in the sanctuary at Northminster on Thursday evening, December 31, 2020; New Year's Eve. It's the last service of the year at Northminster; this quiet hour at close of day at close of year, what T. S. Eliot might have called, "*A still point in the turning world.*"

This New Year's Eve is different from most, because it comes at the close of a year which is different from most; the year 2020, which all of us will always remember as the year of the pandemic; some of us infected by the virus, all of us affected by the virus.

The novel coronavirus, and the many changes it has brought to our lives, will, needless to say, last past midnight. It may however, feel like something of a relief when, later tonight, the clock strikes twelve, and we can, at least, turn the page and begin the new year; most of the worst of the pandemic, hopefully, behind us; more "normal" days ahead.

Although, even that we must say with only the greatest of care. After all, life never actually goes "back to normal," because life never truly goes back to anything. "Back" is not the way life moves, only forward. As C.S. Lewis once said, "*The one prayer God will not answer is the prayer for an encore. God's creativity is much too vast for that. God will not give us back the good old days, but God will give us good new days.*"

Beyond the necessary precautions the pandemic has brought to our lives; after sanitizing and distancing, Zoom meetings and masks, life will be more as it once was, but life will have changed, because we will have changed. As the ancient saying wisely surmises, "We never step in the same stream twice." Time passes, life moves, things change.

Our great longing is not for what was, but for what will be; our great calling, to live deeply, fully and faithfully into whatever is coming next, and, with the help of the Spirit of God, and the people of God, to do the next right thing in the next new year.

God . . . who is with us,  
And, who goes before us.  
In the silence,  
in community,  
we linger together  
and with you, O God,  
around, yet another, of life's important thresholds,  
reflecting on what has been  
and straining to see what awaits us.

Memories,  
images,  
and feelings  
too deep for words,  
rise to mind and heart as we recall  
how life has been lived  
this past year. We remember:  
The beauty . . . and the darkness.  
The joys . . . and the sorrows.  
The rest . . . and the labors.  
The kindness . . . and the hurt.  
The giving . . . and the withholding.  
The community . . . and the loneliness.  
The dreams . . . and the failures.

Lord Jesus,  
redeem it all, and us,  
through your grace.  
Heal the wounds  
that we carry into this new year.  
Quiet our confusion and fear.  
Center our lives in You  
for we are prone to repeat the wrongs of the past.

And encourage  
our hearts and minds,  
O God,  
with Your life-giving Spirit  
so that, in the year that awaits us,  
our faith . . . will be stronger,  
our words . . . will be gracious,  
our service . . . fruitful,  
our plans . . . noble,  
our love . . . selfless,  
our homes . . . peaceful,  
our community . . . at one,  
our world . . . more like heaven.

Even now, O Lord, abide in us completely,  
and pray through us *Your prayer* for the New Year.

**Rev. Nancy Hollomon-Peede, (December 31, 2000)**

## Prayers of Confession

\*\*\*\*\*

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:  
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied: “Go out into the darkness and put your hand in the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night.  
And [God] led me toward the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone East.

-M. L. Haskins

\*\*\*\*\*

For all that has been, thanks.  
For all that will be, yes.

-Dag Hammarskjöld

\*\*\*\*\*

When Jesus says, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” I listen. Even during my doubting days in college I listened, and carefully, because Jesus knew not only more about God than I did — that was obvious; he also knew more about the world. He could talk convincingly to me about a father in heaven because he took seriously the earth’s homeless orphans. He could talk to me convincingly about living at peace in the hands of love because I knew that he himself knew darkness, sorrow, and death. That’s why, eventually, Jesus became for me too my Lord and Savior; and that’s why I think it right to say that the authority of the Lord’s Prayer stems from the reliability of the source.

-William Sloane Coffin

\*\*\*\*\*

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

-Mary Oliver

\*\*\*\*\*

In the stillness of this room at this hour, what do you remember gladly about the year 2020? Is there some occasion in 2020 which was all the best in every way? Some moment so dear, good and beautiful you wish you could re-live it? A trip? A walk? A meal with friends? A book or movie? A conversation? A sunset? To remember gladly those best moments is to be like the one leper in Luke chapter seventeen; the grateful one who returned to give thanks for his healing. So, as this year comes to a close, pause. Stop. Recall. Remember. And be glad.

On the other hand, what memories from 2020 are the most painful, the most troubling, the most disappointing? Did life take a hard turn for you since last New Year’s Eve? Are you carrying a burden, now, you had not imagined would be yours, then? What moment or hour or day in 2020 was the hardest? Which struggle was, and perhaps still is, the most difficult as this all-but-spent year comes to a close?

“*And perhaps still is.*” That’s the problem, isn’t it? Whatever “was” our deepest struggle or disappointment in 2020 will not magically come to a halt in a few hours when midnight closes one calendar and opens another. If only we could lock last year’s struggles in last year’s vault, put the past behind us, and ring in 2021 with a clean slate. If only. But, unfortunately, our struggles don’t wear watches, keep calendars or mind midnight.

I once heard a friend at Laity Lodge tell about being in a huge South American city on New Year’s Eve. As he walked the streets of the city, he saw shredded paper falling from high-rise apartment windows on both sides of the street. He was appalled by this apparent display of blatant littering, until a local explained to him that this was a New Year’s Eve tradition; the shredded pages falling from the sky were the ripped remains of the previous year’s calendar; a symbolic gesture intended to signify that last year was over, and with the new year everyone could begin again with a clean slate.

Destroying last year’s calendar is a meaningful gesture, but, as we all know, our deepest struggles span the years. Our greatest sorrow or dilemma on December 31 will likely be with us on January 1. But, still, it helps to sit in the sanctuary on New Year’s Eve, look back on where we have been, and then look forward with new hope and new resolve to a new year of life and prayer, growth and discovery, service and friendship, laughter and tears, routine and surprise, joy and, yes, struggle.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

We all know how slippery “New Year’s Resolutions” are. (Easy to make, hard to keep.) And yet, there is great virtue in making new commitments. And when better to make them than at the dawning of a new year? What new practices would you like to adopt in 2021? What old practices do you need to continue to work on? If there was one thing you could change about yourself in 2021, what would that be? How might you do it? Who might be able to help?

\*\*\*\*\*

What did you get most right in 2020? What are you most proud of that you said or did or resisted in 2020? We usually confess to God our sin in church, as we should. Perhaps these quiet moments on New Year’s Eve are a good time to confess to God something we got right.

\*\*\*\*\*

Our church is engaged in many friendships beyond our walls. No one can be involved in everything, but everyone can be involved in something. What Northminster friendship is calling to you? How do you want to reach outside yourself in 2021?

\*\*\*\*\*

Many of us here tonight will receive the bread and cup of communion. Perhaps we could think of it as one last mouthful before we head out on a long journey; a last mouthful and a final swallow before we step across the threshold of 2021.

What this new year will hold of joy or sorrow we cannot know, manage or control. We can only take care of what we can take care of; our own truthfulness, integrity, kindness and compassion. We eat the bread, drink the cup and then walk out these Northminster doors to live into whatever the new year may bring; knowing that, in all times and places, the Lord our God is with us to strengthen, sustain, forgive, guide, comfort, lead and love us.

\*\*\*\*\*

New Year’s Eve finds us on that narrow strip of land which lies somewhere between memory and hope: On the last back step of 2020, we recall, revisit, rehearse and remember. On the first front step of 2021, we wonder, anticipate, imagine and hope.

Every time we approach the table of communion, we occupy a narrow strip of land which lies somewhere between memory and hope: We eat and drink in remembrance of our Lord Jesus, and when we do, we proclaim the story until our Lord comes again: *For I received from the Lord what I also handed unto you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

\*\*\*\*\*

The Church has her own days of new beginnings and starting over. The first Sunday of Advent is one; that is the Church’s “new year’s day” when the Christian year begins again. Then there is Ash Wednesday; a day for repentance, for turning toward God and embracing new practices for a new future. And deep in our Hebrew heritage and history is The Day of Atonement, when the sins of God’s people are carried far away.

All those days are places from which to start over. They all lack the power to erase the past, but they all hold the promise of another second chance for us to become more nearly the persons God is calling us and redeeming us to be. No one gets to start over from the beginning, but everyone gets to start over from here.

\*\*\*\*\*

Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

-Isaiah 43:18-19