

Church of the Holy Cross
January 1, 2012
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Happy New Day

Happy New Year! That phrase sounds awfully familiar, doesn't it? Didn't we just say that to one another a few weeks ago, back at the start of Advent—the church's new year—in late November? And here we are again. And in about three weeks, it will be the Asian lunar new year. And I'm sure there are some people in the congregation who think the new year really begins on Opening Day. For many of us, with or without children, the true new year comes as summer winds down in August or September, with the start of the academic year. And right after that will be Rosh Hoshanah, the Jewish new year, on a different lunar calendar. And each of us has a birthday, the start of a personal new year.

So, what do most of us do on all these occasions? There's usually some kind of ritual or celebration—a birthday cake with candles, a ceremonial first pitch, a toast with champagne. I'll bet some of you hosted or attended some good parties last night. But we also use them as occasions for reflection, self-evaluation, planning. We make resolutions.

We opine about what the team needs to do to have a better season. We vow to improve our grades in the new school term, or to be more active in PTA. We set goals to accomplish before our next birthday. On the eighth day after their son was born, Joseph and Mary had a ritual celebration, the circumcision of the baby and his receiving his name Jesus—the day we mark today as Holy Name Day. But I can imagine them also reflecting, evaluating, talking about their vision of what their son might become. I think of Mary pondering in her heart the words she had heard about her child and hoping for a bright future.

But as we do our own pondering, as we reflect on the past year and look to the one ahead, all too often we see more dark than light, more bad than good. We focus on our failures, our broken promises, our unachieved goals, our backsliding. We wonder how we can do things differently next year, better next year, and it may begin to loom ahead of us darkly rather than glow with the sunrise light of promise. Suddenly, we may not feel so much like celebrating.

Whether you find yourself there or not—but especially if you do—there are three things I urge you to remember. First, God loves you. God loves you just as you are, with all your flaws and despite your failings. God loves you so much that the Holy Spirit invites you look upon God as a parent—not just a distant Father in Heaven, but a warm and loving Abba.

Second, because God loves you so much, God will forgive you anything. Anything. If you are truly sorry, truly repentant, you have only to ask, and God will forgive you. If you truly want to change yourself or your life, you have only to ask, and God will help you find your way. If you are truly prepared to face your brokenness, you have only to ask, and God will heal you.

Third, you don't have to wait for New Year's Day or some other annual occasion to ask. You don't even have to wait for Sunday. God offers love and forgiveness and help and healing any day. In fact, God offers you these gifts every day, over and over as often as you need to return and ask.

Isn't that amazing? Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it awesome? God—God who created everything, God to whom we say, how exalted is your name in all the world—loves you. And you. And you. God offers love and forgiveness, help and healing—a new start—every day. Now that's cause for celebration.

So, Happy New Year. Happy New Day.