

“God’s little flock counts down...watching for the Master!”

(Luke 12:32)

LSB 735

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1. In joyful possession of the kingdom of Grace
2. Bravely focused on serving Him in His kingdom - with waists girded for service to reach the lost and with lamps shining brightly through His Word and Sacraments
3. Served by the Master when He returns to begin His kingdom of glory eternally

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Master who will return! Amen.

The Gospel reading appointed for this New Year’s Eve from Luke 12 is the basis for our meditation this evening “God’s little flock counts down...watching for the Master’s return!”

**(Lk. 12:32 NKJ) 32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**

Many people from around the world, each in its own time zone, will observe the ritual countdown to the new year. Will you be watching the seconds tick off and welcome the new year with a toast of champagne or a hug and a kiss to a loved one? Set off firecrackers? Yell and scream tonight? Say a prayer of thanksgiving to God? Ask for His blessings upon the new year?

Most people count down to the new year hoping that it will be better than the previous year. Some people respond sarcastically, well, it couldn’t be worse. Is that your outlook?

One blog writer, Dave Barry, for the Miami Herald wrote, “The nation, spent all of 2017 obsessing over 2016: the election, the Russians, the emails, the Mueller probe, the Russians, the Russians, the Russians.... That was all we heard about, day after soul-crushing day, for the entire year.

So when 2018 finally dawned, we were desperately hoping for change. It was a new year, a chance for the nation to break out of the endless, pointless barrage of charges and countercharges, to move past the vicious, hate-filled hyperpartisan spew of name-calling and petty point-scoring, to end the 24/7 cycle of media hysteria...”

Unfortunately, 2018 had a lot of the same, but rather than depress his readers further, Barry gives some tongue and cheek humor to ameliorate the negativity of 2018. It's his way of taking a big Ibuprofen for 2018.

So, we began 2018 faced with the growing nuclear threat in Korea and who had the bigger nuclear button.

Barry writes, intelligence satellite photographs reveal that 16 construction projects in North Korea — which the North Korean government claims are going to be Chipotle restaurants — in fact are missile bases. North Korea insists that these will be used “only for delivery orders.”

Russian hacking caught our attention once again in 2018. Barry writes: Responding to alleged Russian infiltration of Facebook and massive breaches of user data, the Senate Committee held a hearing intended to answer such probing questions as:

- What IS Facebook, anyway?
- Where does it go when you turn off the computer?
- Is there a print version?
- Is Facebook the one with the video of a cat riding on a dog?
- How do you get a cat to do that, anyway?

Well, I guess it's good to know our leaders aren't frittering away too much of their work time on Facebook.

Animals weren't exempt from mishaps in 2018. In March, we heard stories about pet animal troubles on United Airlines.

Barry writes:

“A German shepherd named Irgo, which United was supposed to fly to Kansas City, instead gets flown to... Japan! Meanwhile a Great Dane that United was supposed to fly to Japan winds up in Kansas City. It is probably a good thing that both of these breeds are too large for the overhead bin.

Then, a United Flight from Newark to St. Louis is diverted when United realizes that a dog that was loaded onto the plane was supposed to go to Akron.

Responding to public outrage over these incidents, United Airlines issues an apology, but sends it to the wrong email address.

Barry continues: In financial news, Facebook stock drops more than \$100 billion in a single day — the greatest loss in stock-market history — after the company releases a quarterly report revealing that many people have trouble distinguishing between the “wow” emoji and the “sad” emoji. Despite this setback, Facebook is still worth way more than General Motors and most other American companies that make actual things.

One bit of good news, Barry writes: NASA’s \$850 million InSight space-probe lander, after a six-month interplanetary journey covering 301 million miles, touches down on the surface of Mars. It was supposed to go to Venus, but NASA used navigational data provided by United Airlines.

Just a few of the headline stories in 2018, just a quick humorous glimpse...  
Humor can distract us from the problems of the kingdoms of this world, but that’s about all it does.

Thanks be to God, He has given the world real solutions for all its problems, if the world would just listen to His Word. We gather this evening to hear why there was joy in 2018 in the midst of natural disasters, flash floods here in our own city, sickness, death, sin and fighting. And why we can enter 2019 with much joy and expectation of great blessings from our God. Our Gospel reading begins with these strong words.

**(Lk. 12:32 NKJ) 32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**

No fear, though God’s people may not be great in number, they are much beloved and protected by their Heavenly Father who bestows on them His good pleasure. He uses the diminutive toward us to tell us how great His love is! He chose the smallest of cities Bethlehem for the birth of His Son, Jesus. And from little Bethlehem, the angels proclaimed that there is peace on earth, on the whole earth and good will toward men. Wow, what a promise that we can expect God’s good pleasure, His good will toward us. And, it is manifested to us in the gift already in our possession of the kingdom.

Though we live in an earthly kingdom filled with strife, though we by our own sinning have added to the strife, God gives to each of us His kingdom through baptism where He reigns with His grace, mercy, forgiveness and love. In short we are given charge of His house, to use the spiritual gifts that He has given us in faith until the Master returns. Listen to Paul’s words in Galatians 4 connecting Jesus’ birth to our rebirth and rescue from the law!

**(Gal. 4:3-7 NKJ) 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.**

**4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,**

**5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

**6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"**

**7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

Does God not take care of His sons and daughters? Does He not provide for them? Indeed, our Gospel reading from Luke 12 Jesus spends a good deal of time talking to the multitudes about greed and covetousness and what life is really all about. Take the time this week to reread it.

Should 2019 bring great material blessings, we should be careful not to put our trust and confidence in them instead of God. So Jesus gives this illustration about a rich man whose crop was plentiful.

**(Lk. 12:17-21 NKJ) What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'**

**18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.**

**19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'**

**20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'**

**21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

May God not require our souls from us because we have traded His kingdom of grace for the kingdom of the world!

Instead we enter 2019 with the wisdom from Proverbs 30.

**(Prov. 30:8-9 NKJ) 8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches-- Feed me with the food allotted to me;**

**9 Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.**

And again from Hebrews we hear these words of promise from God.

**(Heb. 13:5-6 NKJ) 5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

**6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"**

So if we are assured that God will take care of our daily bread, where should a Christian focus his or her attention and efforts in 2019.

Again, our Gospel tells us.

**(Lk. 12:35 NKJ) 35 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;**

In ancient times, people used long flowing robes which could get in the way of when it was time to work. Basically girding your waist means putting a belt around your waist so that you can get to the work at hand. As servants in God's house our work is His work of keeping ourselves ready and watchful for the Master's return.

How? We bravely focus on His kingdom work of teaching, preaching, and proclaiming the Gospel to our own souls, and to our family, friends and neighbors. We keep the light burning brightly of His Gospel, the Light of revelation to the Gentiles as we heard Simeon say yesterday. We reflect the light of His love to the world in all that we say and do.

Jesus says 9 verses before our text begins :

**(Lk. 12:23 NKJ) 23 "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.**

Life for the Christian is girding the waist in service to the Lord and receiving from Him the brightly shining gifts of His word and sacraments to keep our lamps burning bright.

And maybe the Master will return in 2019? We don't know but all we need to focus on is being ready - to number our days as our Psalm for this evening, Psalm 90 tells us:

**(Ps. 90:4 NKJ) 4 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.**

**And again: (Ps. 90:10-12 NKJ) 10 The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**

**11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.  
12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

So, enter 2019 with thankful hearts for the mercy He has given to you His servant - your salvation in Jesus. And thank God that you are privileged to serve your Master in His house, His kingdom of Grace. Number your days in 2019 by girding your waist, being faithful to the care of His house and Jesus' mission of reaching the lost.

Treasure the Gospel, the Light of His salvation that keeps your lamps of faith burning bright - **“a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:33-34)**

And as God continues to serve us with all His rich blessings, we look forward to the day when the Master does arrive. He opens the door and what does He do? Verse 37 of our Gospel tells us.

**(Lk. 12:37 NKJ) 37 "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.**

Our Good and Gracious and Loving God continues to serve us in heaven!!!! Wow! We have much to look forward to in 2019. So, little flock of God, count the New Year down with much joy in your hearts - for the kingdom you possess, for the joy of serving God in His kingdom and for the final return of the Master when He will serve you with His kingdom of eternal glory!!!!

Happy and Blessed New Year in Jesus! Amen!