

**December 31, 2023,
1st SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS/Epiphany Sunday
Pastor Tom Olson
Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

PRELUDE: Jan Ellingson (Fuglebergs)

CALL TO WORSHIP: The First Noel vss. 2-4 read

HYMN #33 (vss 1&5) “The First Noel”

CONFESSION OF SIN: Psalm 51:1-7 Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

HYMN #54 “O How Beautiful the Sky”

Children’s Message?

Reader: Bob Hawksford

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Genesis 1:1-5 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 2:1-12 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the*

east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

READER: Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

HYMN # 53 “As with Gladness Men of Old”

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

PRAISE AND WORSHIP SONGS: Chosen by Jan

SERMON TITLE: “STARTING OVER”

Romans 6:1-11; Pastor Tom Olson; December 31, 2023

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

FAVORITE: My New Year's sermon is a favorite of the year for me because I love to start over. In the Spring we start over with our garden and make adjustments. This spring it is more potatoes because we ran out this winter. I like to take some time these cold wintery days to set some broad goals for the year.

QUOTES: New Year is also a time of year that I like to ponder good quotes. These two are new to me and worth consideration: "Don't let other people make their problems become your problems." Another is from Candice Owens to college students: "Life is tough, get a helmet." A growing number of college students are interested in the topic of personal responsibility. They are recognizing the futility of blaming other people for their own poor choices. They are discovering the value of making sacrifices for the sake of the long-run.

THEME: Romans 6, our epistle lesson, is a great text for the new year theme of STARTING OVER. It is a demonstration of the power of God to make wise choices motivated by grace. First of all, STARTING OVER...

I. WITH OUR SINS ARE NAILED TO THE CROSS

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

CLEAN: We can begin this new year with a clean slate. We can repent of our sins and bring them to the cross and be fully assured that they are forgiven by God. Can you imagine how many people could benefit from the assurance that their sins were all forgiven? Forgiveness is what God specializes in. I like the way a contemporary song "JESUS, THANK YOU" puts it:

*Your blood has washed away my sin
Jesus, thank You
The Father's wrath completely satisfied
Jesus, thank You
Once Your enemy, now seated at Your table
Jesus, thank You*

THANKFUL: We can enter 2024 with a renewed heart because our sins are forgiven. That is motivation to live a new life. Motivation is key. Once we are motivated, we can take action. Gratitude for the grace of God is powerful motivation. We START OVER WITH OUR SINS NAILED TO THE CROSS. Secondly, STARTING OVER...

II. WITH POWER OVER SIN

Romans 6:5-8 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

LATIN: Two famous Latin titles describe the work of Christ. One is **CHRISTUS REDEMPTOR** and the other is **CHRISTUS VICTOR**. There are many churches named Redeemer or Christ the Redeemer...Christus Redemptor. But there are not too many churches named Christus Victor. There happens to be one in Apple Valley on the corner of Cedar and 127th St. The Free Lutheran Church used to have one in Maplewood called "Victory in Christ," which is basically the same thing. In our first point we emphasized the redeeming power of Christ's blood. But in this point, we want to emphasize the VICTORY and POWER we have in Christ over sin.

THEOLOGY: Before 1,000 AD Victory in Christ was a major theme of the Christian church. There was a much stronger emphasis on the Resurrection and Power of Jesus. This needs to be revived. Billy Graham went to Russia and the people oppressed by communism begged him to preach about the Victorious Resurrected Christ.

POWER: Once you are assured that your sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ, you can lay hold of the power of Christ to have victory over sin. This will allow you to live in victory over sin rather than struggling under the power of sin.

RAISED: That is why the baptized believers here are reminded by Paul that we have been both BURIED with Christ and RAISED with Christ to walk in newness of life. We do not have to be *“slaves of sin.”* JESUS IS MORE POWERFUL THAN OUR SINS.

DEAD: The Bible makes it clear in 1 Timothy 4:4&5 that everything God created is good and that all things, including foods, are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. That includes us. We also are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.

FEEDING: As we feed our souls the Word of God and prayer, there is the power to overcome temptation. That is why devotions, and church attendance, Bible study meetings and prayer meetings are so important. That is why conversational prayer during the day is so important. This is where we get the spiritual energy to overcome sin. As I study Gary Kalstad’s mom’s Bible I am finding notes about how certain Bible verses help her cope with the challenges of life.

EATING: When I work really hard doing manual labor, I need to almost double my calorie intake in order to keep up the effort. Christ the Redeemer also wants to be Christ the Victor in our lives. He wants to make us champions over sin as we FEAST on His Word, COMMUNE with Him in prayer, and REST in His

promises. We can START OVER in 2024 with FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND POWER OVER SIN! And finally, STARTING OVER...

III. WITH ETERNAL LIFE

Romans 6:9-11 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

ETERNAL: The long-term blessing that we have as believers in Christ is the gift of eternal life. Vivian Kalstad and Gloria Conrad started over this week with eternal life.

JESUS: Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the “first-fruits” of those who have died. Jesus arose, never to die again. And he will raise up all those who have died believing in Him. We will live with our Savior in heaven forever. And no mind can conceive how wonderful that will be.

INCORRUPTIBLE: Notice in verse 9 that the one who rises from the dead *“cannot die again.”* When we are raised from the dead by Jesus we cannot die again. We can be certain because our salvation is in Christ and not in anything we have done. All other religions have no assurance of salvation because they are trying to earn their place in heaven. We have assurance because we know that Jesus is our Savior and his merit is imputed to us and gives us right standing with God. What a joyful thing it is to have this blessed assurance. What a joyful thing it is for me to remind a dying soul that there is a fresh start awaiting them in heaven.

INVITATION: The power of the Christian life is in Christ. Jesus is where we find everlasting life with the Savior in glory. Jesus is in heaven preparing a perfect place for us. That is why STARTING

OVER is possible for us on this last day of 2023 with
FORGIVENESS, POWER AND ETERNAL LIFE. Amen

*Now may the peace of God that surpasses all human
comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in
Christ Jesus. Amen*

PRAYER: Gracious Father in heaven, so many of us need a fresh
start. We have failed in many ways this past year. We receive
your full forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus. We ask
that you would fill us afresh with the Holy Spirit and power to
have victory over sin. We also thank you that at the end of our
brief lives that you are preparing a home for us in heaven. Help us
to share this good news of Jesus and His love with our hurting
world. In Jesus' Name. Amen

HYMN #546 “Now I Belong to Jesus”

LORD'S PRAYER

BENEDICTION

Hymn # 545 (Chorus only 2x) “Because He Lives”

POSTLUDE: Jan Ellingson