

New Year's Eve • December 31, 2009

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Revelation 21:1-8

"Reboot"

Blessed Christmastide to you! How many of you exchanged gifts with friends and family this year? And how many of you gave or received a gift that requires electricity? And how many of you were then responsible for setting up those gifts and trying to figure out why they weren't working quite like you'd expected? It seems like the fancier the electronics, the greater the possibility for a glitch. If you have been one of those many people in our nation who have filled the role of your family's (or your office's) go-to tech-support person, you might know this, but if not, let me clue you in to a little secret: the reboot. The reboot, in layman's terms, is the advanced technique for clearing up many a problem with computers or other electronics – you turn the thing off, wait a second, and then turn it back on. Reboot. More often than not, the reboot clears up whatever problem you'd been having. Unfortunately, though, it doesn't usually address the underlying issue; so the problem might just pop back up later on. But if that problem does come back? Reboot again!

Maybe you feel like you need a reboot this New Year's Eve. Maybe this year has not been the best one ever – maybe it's just been full of pain for you or your loved ones, and you can't wait for it to be done. If you're feeling stuck in bad habits or are looking to improve your diet or fitness, *now* is the time to make a change. Isn't that what people do at the end of the year, making their resolutions? There's something about that ticking-over of the last digit (or two) on the calendar that inspires starting over. In the new year, you can make different choices, *be a better you*. The new year ahead is a blank slate, a reboot. This past year wasn't perfect? Just shut it down and start it back up! But, unfortunately, the new year is a kind of reboot in another way: starting over might be OK for a while, but if it doesn't address the underlying issue, the problems can pop right back up.

Our reading for this New Year's Eve comes from the book of Revelation, in which St. John records the vision he was given of Jesus' ultimate victory over the forces of sin, death, and the devil. And in our reading from chapter 21, John sees the ultimate reboot: a new heaven and a new earth come into being and the heavenly Jerusalem descends. We hear the Father's voice, speaking the great message, "Behold, I am making all things new." The old is gone, because the old could not hope to contain the perfection that God brings. This isn't just a ticking-over from the old, repeating what has come before – the new is truly *new*. Through John's ears, we hear the promise of Christmas fulfilled: God will be with His people, those who have triumphed in Christ, forever. But is that promise *ours*?

Hearing that last verse of our reading, you might wonder if you have anything to look forward to when the Last Day comes. Have we worshiped other gods? Have we been sexually immoral? Have we been cowards? Have we been liars? Have we shown a lack of faith in our lives? Our faults and failings from the past year – even the past week – would seem to take us out of the running for that triumph in Christ that John describes. If we've broken one of the Commandments, we've broken them all. *We are* in need of a clean slate, a reboot, if there's to be any hope.

On the church calendar, tomorrow, January 1, remembers the Circumcision of Our Lord, eight days after his birth. According to the Old Covenant, circumcision was a sign that numbered someone among God's people. It was a new beginning. But circumcision doesn't save; it doesn't guarantee a place among the saints. Baptism does. It's more than a sign of washing: in the waters of Baptism, the Holy Spirit *does* clean our slate and give us a new beginning. He makes us members of God's family and heirs of the victory that Jesus won for us in his birth, life, death, and resurrection. Because of Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, and Easter, every day for the Christian is a new day in Baptism.

New Year's resolutions have this tendency to disappoint. Things might go OK at first, maybe for a week or even two. But when the breakdown comes, it's "game over." What's your experience? You've probably felt weak, guilty, and even ashamed at your lack of willpower. The effects of the New Year's reboot don't seem to last.

Baptism is different. In the baptismal reboot of the soul, we don't just start with a clean slate and good intentions. God puts faith into those whom He washes. We're not quite the same people that we were before. Faith makes it possible to do amazing things. Through the faith that God gives, we can conquer the struggles that we face from day to day, overcoming the temptation to break down and go back to the way that things were. You and I know, though, that Christians can and do break down. We fall short. We give ourselves over to temptation. But here's the wonderful thing about Baptism: you don't need to be re-baptized. Baptism isn't our own work; it's something that God does to and for us. It lasts, and for the baptized, every day is a reboot. Every morning, the baptized can turn from the sin of the past and seek God's forgiveness – drowning the Old Adam, as Martin Luther put it – and arise to live as forgiven people who have a clean slate. The people that John heard condemned in his vision of the new creation are those people who are unrepentant, who refuse to turn from their ways. Even though we still struggle with sin, even though that underlying issue is still in us, as the baptized we can have confidence in our daily reboot, living as repentant people until that Last Day comes and the ultimate reboot takes place.

What are the good things in your life that you know need a reboot in the year ahead? Beyond making New Year's resolutions, prayerfully lay these things at our Lord's feet. As John sees in the new creation, God will renew his people. When you are faced with the temptations and habits of the past, go to our loving Father in prayer. He is the One who sits on the throne of heaven, and through the faith that He gives, you *will* conquer.

May you know true peace in the coming twelve months, in the Name and power of Him who makes all things new. Happy New Year!

Amen.