

**Have a Blessed New Year in Christ!**  
**Ephesians 1:3-14**

**Jan. 4, 2026 (Chr. 2-A)**

**St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14 NIV)*

Dear friends and fellow disciples in Jesus Christ our Savior:

For four days now we've been greeting each other with "Happy New Year!" But will it really be happy? What if the economy breaks down and we get into a recession and jobs get lost? What if a natural disaster like a flood or tornado strikes our area and creates catastrophic damage? What if our health suffers, or death comes to a loved one? How can we be assured that 2026 will be a happy year?

The apostle Paul's opening message to Christians in Ephesus assures us that will be. He praises God, the Father of Christ, because he "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." And those last two words are the key. In our text, Paul repeats the phrase "in Christ," or "in him" or "in the One [God] loves" ten times. Today, let's look at key spiritual blessings in our text that will lead us to say, **"Have a Blessed New Year in Christ!"**

At the start of the New Year, many of us make resolutions. We're going to become better people this year, overcome our personal weaknesses, manage our lives better. But when we look back at the past, we get pessimistic about keeping our resolutions. So often, our resolutions are similar to the ones we made last year, and the year before that, and we didn't follow through. All too often, we fall short of our goals, we miss the mark.

But God assures us, "I've got you covered." Paul writes, "For [God] chose us *in [Christ].*" God's not like the captain of a team who chooses his players based on how strong, athletic and fast they are. He chose us way before we were born—"before the creation of the world," he chose us. God chose us "to be holy and blameless in his sight," even though he knows that we are sinners who keep falling short of our goals and missing the mark. How? He chose us "*in him, in Christ*," who alone is holy, blameless. In Christ we have been "predestined," a word that means God had a plan for us ahead of time, and his plan is that we get adopted to "sonship," meaning God not only brings us into his family, but he also makes us sons, heirs of his kingdom, heirs of eternal life in heaven.

How can this be? Again, it's "through Jesus Christ." God chose and predestined us, not because of anything he saw in us, but because of what he saw in his Son. For what purpose? "To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves"—again, "*in Christ.*" So when we look back, and we're reminded of our sins, let's look even further back and remember: God has chosen me. He adopted me into his family. Let me all this year praise him for his glorious grace, his undeserved love that made me, a sinner, now a son and a saint thanks to Jesus, God's holy Son!

But as we look at our present reality, we might still wonder if we really have these blessings. We've already started off this year with missteps and sins that we know rebel against God's holy will. We wonder, "Will God's patience with me run out? Might I get kicked out of his family?"

Paul teaches us to look again at our status *in Christ*. "*In him* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Redemption is "buying us back to set us free." Picture hostages being held captive, or slaves without hope—until someone comes to pay the price to give them freedom. That's what Jesus did! We were without hope, captive to the devil and slaves to sin, when Jesus came to be born and live among us without any sin, and then paid the ultimate price with his lifeblood shed on the cross. "It is finished!" Jesus cried right before he died; the price is paid in full! With that redemption we have the "forgiveness of sins." The picture of forgiveness here is sending away, like the passage from Psalm 103(:12): "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." All our missteps, all our acts of rebellion—all gone!

Paul adds, "in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us." God is not like Scrooge, giving a meager amount of forgiveness and then telling us, "Now earn what I gave you!" No, God is *rich* in grace, he *lavishes* this on us. God is so rich in grace because Christ's payment is priceless and boundless.

God is so gracious, he has "made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure." God doesn't go, "I'm taking away your sin, but I'm going to keep it a secret from you." In God's Word, in the message of Christ, we find out about God's good and gracious will, his good pleasure "which he purposed *in Christ*," and has now been put into effect. So 2026 will also be a blessed New Year, because we'll again hear about God's grace on us sinners, Christ's redemption, and the forgiveness of all our sins when we're *in Christ*.

This spiritual blessing leads to yet another spiritual blessing, a blessing that assures us of our future. At the beginning of this sermon I mentioned some of those concerns we might have about the future and what might come this year. Add to that, "What if we lose God?" Paul again teaches us to look not to ourselves, but to Christ. "*In him* we were also chosen" and predestined, and "you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation." When you and I heard the good news (the gospel) that we are saved by Christ, we believed it. How did we come to faith? Not by our choosing—God chose us, we didn't choose him—but by the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a "seal": "When you believed, you were marked *in him* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." Picture it this way: Adoptive parents make the payment to adopt a child and make her their own. The down payment is a guarantee of future payments from the parents, and a future inheritance for the child. The Holy Spirit is the seal, the "down payment" that God makes for us to belong to him. The Spirit comes in baptism as well as in the preaching and reading of the Word. When you witness a baptism, when you believe the good news, you are seeing that down payment being made by God—the Holy Spirit is there.

In this way, we are assured of our future. We've got the seal, the down payment of the Holy Spirit, and this guarantees "our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." The full redemption—being set free from the vestiges of sin and the prowling of the devil—will be realized when Christ comes on Judgment Day. We will receive our inheritance of eternal life, bliss and happiness forever with the Lord in heaven!

We don't know if 2026 will be the year the Lord Jesus returns—only God knows. But we do know that 2026 will be a most blessed year. It will be another year of God's grace, another year of receiving the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Holy Communion, another year of being *in Christ*. So let this be a year to praise his glory by being faithful to his Word, obedient, and loving toward him and all he has made. In Christ, in Christ alone, we will have a very blessed New Year! Amen.