

Hymns of the Church – *Old Year Hath Now Passed Away* - 2 January 2018, Anno Domini
(In the Year of our Lord)



BLESS the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; 4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; 5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1-5)

How very often do our prayers include a plea for the Lord's blessing on us, first of all; and then on others! We petition for a blessing of good health, prosperity, safety, travel, etc. Do we really trust in the Lord's will to bless us. Suppose it is not the Lord's will that He grant us excellent health in His omniscient predilection – then what? Of course, we should know better since we, with passing regularity, pray in the Lord's Prayer, Thy Will be done! Too often, we expect only that OUR will be done; and only His will be done when it happens to coincide with our own. Whatever the Lord's will be – either health or sickness, wealth or humble holdings – it will always be the best result for His elect children.

Today's hymn selection is of a hymn of the Reformation age acknowledging God as the Holder of the Keys of Time and Eternity. It was composed by Johann Steurlein of Erfurt, Germany, in 1588 – the same year the Spanish 'Invincible' Armada was launched, with great futility, against Protestant England by Philipp II. The tune is the anonymous work of a German composer entitled, Herr Jesu Christ (appearing in Dresden in 1628 at first observation). This is an excellent hymn selection for the Coming New Year.

Old Year Now Hath Passed Away

*The old year now hath passed away;
We thank Thee, O our God, today
That Thou hast kept us through the year
When danger and distress were near.*

*We pray Thee, O eternal Son,
Who with the Father reign'st as One,
To guard and rule Thy Christendom
Through all the ages yet to come.*

*Take not Thy saving Word away,
Our souls' true comfort, staff, and stay.
Abide with us and keep us free
From errors, following only Thee.*

*Oh, help us to forsake all sin,
A new and holier course begin!
Mark not what once was done amiss;
A happier, better year be this,*

*Wherein as Christians we may live
Or die in peace that Thou canst give,
To rise again when Thou shalt come
And enter Thine eternal home.*

*There shall we thank Thee and adore
With all the angels evermore.
Lord Jesus Christ, increase our faith
To praise Thy Name through life and death*

The old year now hath passed away; We thank Thee, O our God, today That Thou hast kept us through the year When danger and distress were near. Danger and distress is always a razor's edge away from us. It is the Lord's sustaining power that keeps those dangers and distresses at bay. The old gospel hymn, I Need Thee Every Hour sums up well that sustaining need of Christ in our daily lives. The old year passes on the scale of time, but its realities remain fixed in eternity. Our records of conduct and memories of events may fade, but they are forever recorded in God's Book of Life.

We pray Thee, O eternal Son, Who with the Father reign'st as One, To guard and rule Thy Christendom Through all the ages yet to come. There are ages ahead that are registered in time, but there is also an eternity to come. It is this eternity with which our concerns should be most focused. Every soul is eternal, and will spend eternity at some destination – but which? We struggle in the Kingdom of Heaven on this sphere – the Church; and this struggle will continue throughout the ages to come. However, there lies before us a moment when those struggles shall cease, and time will be no more; and this present age will cease. We shall then be safely ensconced in the Ark of our Salvation (Jesus Christ), or desperately and hopelessly bemoaning our predicament in the darkness without the Ark.

Take not Thy saving Word away, Our souls' true comfort, staff, and stay. Abide with us and keep us free From errors, following only Thee. God has pronounced to His chosen ones that same pronouncement He gave to Noah, *Come thou and all thy house into the ark*; Gen 7:1 (KJV) Please note that God did not say to Noah, *Go thou into the Ark* but rather *Come thou into the ark*. There is an important distinction in those two terms. God said *Come into the Ark* because that was the security of God. He says the same to us today. He is not outside the Ark of Safety, but HE IS the ARK of SAFETY!

Oh, help us to forsake all sin, A new and holier course begin! Mark not what once was done amiss; A happier, better year be this, How does God help us to *forsake all sin*? He does not do so by touching our heads with a magic scepter! He gives us His Word to study and to thoroughly digest through meditation and faith. We fill our hearts and souls with His Word in believing faith, and our lives are changed thereby. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* (Psalm 119:11) God does not forget our sins, but He refuses (a conscious act) to remember them if we have repented thereof. You may have undertaken the futility of making up a list of New Year's resolutions. How long did these remain unviolated in the past? We cannot

remain faithful to our own laws, much less those of God. But those two Commandments that God gave as a summary of the larger Ten are kept in love – and only by the means of our echoed love of Christ.

Wherein as Christians we may live Or die in peace that Thou canst give, To rise again when Thou shalt come And enter Thine eternal home. The peace of God is not conditional on our present or future environment – it is an internal peace of the soul. His grant of peace is a product of His munificent Grace. It is not native to our hearts, but an imputed benefit of having our Lord as our Savior and Redeemer. Furthermore, if we have been obedient to His command in the Gospel of St. Luke 9:23, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* He will have followed the Lord, not only on the placid shores of Galilee, but also down the Via Dolorosa to Calvary. We will have died a thousand deaths to self, and risen a multitude of times in Christ. We will have followed in self-denial, and in a habitual charity toward our fellow man. We do not simply follow Christ when the way seems beautiful and convenient, but in the hard a dreary moments through that valley of the ‘shadow of death’ knowing that death is not a reality to the elect of the Lord, but merely a shadow only, and a transient state.

Perhaps this year, or the next, or even ten years hence – we shall close our eyes in the sleep of the saints only to open them immediately beyond the Gates of Splendor and behold the Face of Christ whose Light will brighten and extinguish any lingering memory of loss.

HAPPY NEW YEAR, now, and FOREVER!