

## Minor Festivals: The Conversion of St. Paul – January 25th

The Apostle Paul had two names in the Bible. He was by Jewish birth named Saul, meaning “*asked of God*.” During his early years, as the great persecutor of Christians, everybody knew him as Saul. Saul had made quite a name for himself, and it wasn’t a pleasant name among Christians, as Ananias commented to the Lord, “*I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem*” (Acts:9:13). It wasn’t until after Saul’s conversion to Christianity, when on the island of Cyprus, that Saul also began to be called Paul (Acts 13:9). Paul was his Roman or Gentile name. Paul means “*small or humble*,” and how true that meaning would be for Paul in Christian ministry.

We take time to celebrate the Minor Church Festival: “The Conversion of St. Paul” every year on January 25<sup>th</sup>, because it reminds us of the miracle of faith. As Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, the Lord intervened. The Lord came upon Saul in a light from heaven, made himself known, and caused Saul to become blind. Then by the direction of the Lord, Saul entered Damascus to await the Lord’s chosen servant, Ananias. Ananias would then place his hands upon Saul, whereby his vision returned and immediately Saul was baptized into the name of the Triune God.

Only by the Lord’s power. Only by the Lord’s grace. Would the once great persecutor of Christians, now become the Lord’s chosen instrument, “*to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel*” (Acts 9:15). Only the Lord could turn Saul’s unbelieving heart to a heart of faith, so the once destroyer of God’s church would now be the one who would seek to extend and build it.

The same miracle of faith that was worked in Saul is the same miracle of faith that has been worked in us. It took a miracle to turn us to Christ, for by nature we were spiritually blind, dead in our sins, and hostile to God. “*The sinful mind is hostile to God, it cannot submit to God’s law, nor can it do so*” (Romans 8:7).” But only by the power and grace of God, “*He made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins – it is by grace you have been saved*” (Ephesians 2:5). At our baptisms the Holy Spirit planted a saving faith in our hearts. Through the hearing of God’s Word, the Holy Spirit continues to strengthen our faith. A faith – in Christ – knowing his suffering, death, and resurrection won my salvation and everlasting life.

If it had not been for Christ, Saul would have stayed on that road to Damascus and would have stayed in his unbelief on the road to hell. If it had not been for Christ, we too would have remained in our unbelief on the way to our eternal damnation. But thank the Lord for his great love and mercy, in coming to us through Word and sacrament to work in us the miracle of faith. Like Saul (Paul), we are now in faith, able to live every day in freedom before our God, the God who called us out of our unbelief to his amazing grace.

Read Saul’s Conversion...**Acts 9:1-19** as today’s Scripture Lesson.

Blessings to you and your families,  
Pastor Matthew Guse