

Minor Festivals: New Year's Eve, December 31

Marking Time



The twelve-foot ball drops over Times Square. The count-down begins: “Ten, nine, eight...one!” People shout, “Happy New Year!” Horns and noisemakers blare. Husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends kiss. People sing (or fake like they’re singing), “Should auld acquaintance be forgot And never brought to mind? Should auld acquaintance be forgot And days of auld lang syne? For auld lang syne, my dear For auld lang syne We’ll take the cup o’ kindness yet For auld lang syne For auld lang syne, my dear For auld lang syne We’ll take the cup o’ kindness yet For auld lang syne.” Such is the annual ritual of “delivering” the New Year’s baby.

Welcoming the New Year is nothing new. According to the Old Testament Jewish calendar, God’s people observed two different types of New Years—the religious New Year and the civil (non-religious) New Year. The religious New Year and the religious calendar reminded the people that although they were in the world, they were not part of the world. They were different from the unbelieving world around them. They were citizens of heaven, and their hearts were to be set, not on earthly things, but on heavenly things.

The civil New Year began on the first day of the seventh month. It was called the Feast of Trumpets. Just as we welcome the New Year with horns and noisemakers, the Jews welcomed the New Year with ram’s horns blaring from morning till evening at the Temple in Jerusalem. They would thank the Lord for his past graces and ask the Lord for future blessings. They were also reminded of the fact that time keeps slipping by and that there will be a time when Judgment Day will come and the world will end. And so, the Feast of Trumpets was also a time to reflect on one’s sin and one’s need for a Deliverer—the promised Savior.

Like the Old Testament Jews, we have a religious calendar. It begins on November 29, the first Sunday of Advent. Having our own church calendar reminds us that we, too, are strangers and aliens on this earth—pilgrims passing through this life until we reach our real home of heaven. But it is also appropriate for us to celebrate the civil New Year—to mark the passage of time, to review the blessings of the past year, to long for the Lord’s benediction on the year to come, to repent of past sins and look to Jesus’ death and resurrection for assurance that we can go into the New Year with a clean slate, compelled by Christ’s love to serve him better in all that we do in the days to come.

The noise makers and horns are symbols of joy and excitement as we welcome the New Year and anxiously anticipate what the future holds. They also remind us that there is a time when the present age will cease: “In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” The trumpet call of God will announce the coming of Jesus. He will sit on his throne in majestic glory to judge the living and the dead. There is no fear of that day, because we are wrapped in his robes of righteousness and will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Until then, let’s make wise use of the time that God gives. Let’s live our lives in repentant faith, longing for his appearing. Let’s live our lives in a manner which shows those around us that we know that our times are in our Savior’s hands and that his hands are stretched out to give them also a rich welcome into his eternal kingdom.

Pastor Zuberbier

After sharing this devotion with your family, take the time to read Psalm 90.