

Our Beginning, Our Ending

**A sermon by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented at the New Year's Watchnight Service
on Thursday, December 31, 2009**

Sermon:

I wish each of you and your families a blessed New Year. My prayer is that as we have been sustained and nurtured by God in the past, so for 2010 we will know the holy presence of the one we worship and praise this evening. This night we stand on the threshold of an new year remembering the lives of those who have given so much to make us who we are today. We also praise God that we can count ourselves among the living and ask for Divine guidance and sustenance for the years yet to come.

The changing of the year has many different meanings for the many different people and cultures found in God's creation. For me, growing up here in New Brunswick, I remember images that captured my cultures understanding of the New Year. The image of grey-haired, long-bearded, old father time creeping along with the assistance of a cane was depicted as slowly and reluctantly passing on the torch of the New Year to a bright and lively infant wrapped in a diaper. The old was passing away and the new was being born. The New Year was a time to say farewell (and sometimes good riddance) to the year ending – especially if it had been a particularly difficult or even bad year; then looking ahead to the hope and promise of a new year with thoughts of better health, better family relations, and better economic times. What are some of the images that come to mind for you this evening as you gather with your church sisters and brothers? What are some of the ways that your culture and your family mark the changing of the year?

Many months ago, at the conclusion of a funeral service, I had a man come up to me as I stood beside the grave and say (pointing to the body laid to rest in the

ground), "That is the chief end of man!" I looked at my friend and shared with him that I did not agree with him. The chief end of human beings is to praise God, and to do so for eternity. While death visits each one of us at some point and time, it is not the end. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead means that we no more need to fear death because death is not the final word in life; the final word in life is life everlasting.

In our reading from the closing book to the Christian scriptures, The Revelation of John, we hear the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where death will be no more and mourning and crying a pain will be no more for the first things have passed away. This night serves to remind us that we begin with God and we end with God – that is the chief end for each of us – our beginning and our ending. This evening as we give thanks to God for the lives of those we have loved but see no more, we also offer our praise to God for his never-failing promises and for the future hope of being reunited with those who we continue to love and miss.

Thanks be to God.