

Blessed Babies!

Numbers 6^{22-end}; Psalm 8; Galatians 4⁴⁻⁷; Luke 2¹⁵⁻²¹

When the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son (Galatians 4⁴)

Happy New Year!

No sermon about New Year Resolutions - I don't make them because I would never keep them! (If I were it would be to try to stop saying in sermons, 'Have you got it?' - I got told off by she-who-must-be for doing that too often!)

Instead we stick with the readings as the Church celebrates Jesus' birth noting that, as Jew, he was named and circumcised on the 8th day.

One form of words that was almost certainly used was the blessing that we had as our first reading from Numbers:

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.**

We could take note of just a couple of things from this blessing as we start a New Year:

- ✦ For those who make resolutions it would not be unusual for some to resolve to take their bible reading and praying more seriously. Most fail in this because it takes time to learn to be silent in God's presence (a very valid form of prayer) and they haven't got there yet, but neither do they know what to say. Here is some practical help for you because many have referred to this blessing as the Lord's Prayer of the Old Testament. Here repetition of a set prayer is encouraged, indeed, commanded by God. That's what we do in Morning Prayer in Church - we stand on the shoulders of giants as we reach up to God using words that have been hallowed by careful thought and devout use. As far as God is concerned attempting to pray is prayer! If each morning and each evening you simply used one of the prayers from the Book of Common Prayer (1662) you would have made a start:

For the Morning:

O Lord, our heavenly Father,
Almighty and everlasting God,
who hast brought us safely to the beginning of this day;

defend us in the same by thy mighty power;
and grant that this day we fall into no sin,
neither run into any kind of danger,
but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance,
to do always that is righteous in thy sight;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For the evening:

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed;
give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give;
that both, our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments,
and also that, by thee,
we being defended from the fear of our enemies
may pass our time in rest and quietness,
through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

It doesn't have to be these - find what works with you - but pray and develop your praying using whatever helps in words or silence! If you spend time with God you cannot help but become closer to him.

- ✦ Moses is told to tell Aaron to bless the people (a plural) and then the blessing (you) is given in the singular. The point is simple - God blesses us as individuals and then we become a blessing to the community (both the community of faith and the community around us). How does God bless us and how do we know we are blessed?
- ✦ Moses had spent time with God on mount Sinai and his face shone because he had been in God's presence (so much so that people wanted him to put a bag on his head). This blessing asks that you and I will have this same experience: **The Lord make his face to shine upon you**. People will know we have been with God and that will be a blessing - we pass it on.
- ✦ The blessing asks that God will give us **peace** - *shalom* which is wholeness: being at peace with God; with ourselves; with those around us; and with the world. If we live in this *shalom* it is infectious - we pass it on.
- ✦ I was tempted to change one of the hymns this morning to 'Count your blessings' so that we could reflect on how God has blessed us and then how we pass it on.

God commands his priests to bless his people - whether they like it or not! We choose whether to pass that blessing on and the more time we spend with God - especially in prayer - the easier that is.