

Some of us would have seen on TV news how people all over the world celebrate New Year. Every big city celebrates it with a spectacular fireworks display. What it stuck me, as I watched over the years, more and more fireworks were performed either at the highest or advanced technological buildings or structures. The Dubai firework display this year was performed in the world's tallest building. It was indeed quite spectacular. The whole building was lit with fireworks and laser light. But sadly, I'm afraid to say, it is a form of late modern idolatry. Late modern folks delight in their own achievements. Late modern folks believe they can make the world look much better through their technological advancements. Put it in the biblical perspective, it is the Tower of Babel in late modern manifestation. So as we have just entered into the third decade of the third millennium, and have seen how people celebrate New Year, we as Christians must learn to regain the concept of delight and celebration. What are we to delight in so much that we must do something to celebrate in earnest?

The Bible never tells us to celebrate New Year; it does, however, tell us to celebrate the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper, and even our salvation in Jesus Christ and so on. So whether to celebrate New Year or not is something adiaphorous. But today's reading as the first Sunday of year 2021, there is something to remind us we must incessantly celebrate. From a literary analysis, Proverb 8 is poem and Ephesians 1.3-14 in Greek is a long sentence of constant praise. Poem and praise are the tools in literary form of delight and celebration. John's Gospel 1.12 says, 'He gave them the right to become children of God.' In Proverbs 8.22, as early Christianity recognizes, wisdom is personified and identified as the second person of the triune God. The wisdom declares, '*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.*' Yet in 8:1, it says, 'Does not wisdom call?'

Wisdom calls us to recognize it as the work of a Creator, the foundational work which was 'in the beginning' of the Creator's way, which 'was by him as a master workman' and 'was his daily delight', as He marked out the foundations of the earth, and whose 'delight was with the sons of man'. So we notice the mutual satisfaction of the wisdom of God in mankind, and of mankind in the wisdom of God as the ground of celebration. What wisdom demands of us is a response to the goodness of God's world, which is to say, to know it and to love it, to realize ourselves in engagement with it. Our human nature displays immense capacity for knowing and loving things, but these are also capacities for ignorance and

deception, as revealed in New Year's firework displays. St Paul in Ephesians 1.5 says, 'He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.' Isn't it wonderfully great to be reminded at the beginning of a New Year that we are God's children, having the wisdom of God calling us, to be living in God's created world, and therefore rightly so to celebrate with uttermost thanks and praise. We need not create New Year celebrations with spectacular firework display. No doubt we must have achieved a great deal to make the world as it is in terms of prosperity and a better place to live, but our celebration is chiefly to delight in our status of God's children living in God's created world.

So let us spend some time, this morning, to think through what it means for us to celebrate or delight in our status of being children of God.

The reality of sonship in our late modern world is a complex issue. Nowadays, a son may have a biological father who is just a sperm donor as well as a non-biological father married to the woman who conceives the son with the sperm by the donor. And sadly many folks do not even know the existence of their biological fathers.

The promise of our sonship of God has been guaranteed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who indwells our hearts who keeps reminding us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us and that this privileged status of sonship must be celebrated in delight. Our celebration is not artificial. It is real knowledge of God. St Paul in Romans and Galatians tell us it is the Spirit who helps us to pray to God, 'ABBA, Father.' The world perhaps needs firework to provide an optimistic view that the New Year may bring prosperity and peace. New Year celebrations, by the way, can become idol worship. For us it is God's Spirit that reminds us God's love and grace have been lavishly as well as incessantly given us.

St John the Evangelist reminds us our status of children of God is not an artifact we can purchase at will, like New Year fireworks. He puts it this way: being children of God is 'not from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of man, but from God.' Our celebration of Christmas is not just about the birth of the Messiah but also about us becoming children of God.

Christian celebration is about inheritance as well. It is also delight in inheritance. We are to inherit the world. That is to say, the goodness of creation will be re-established. In creation it is not just God's delight in what He has created. Human being should also delight in living in this good world.

We mustn't misunderstand St Paul when he said, the blessings are called 'spiritual', and we already have them in heavenly places; hence, when he said, 'In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance', he meant that heaven is what we shall inherit. We are now in heavenly places simply means that the goodness of creation is a present reality. St Paul tells us everything in heaven and earth is being summed up in the Messiah (v.10). And in vs. 20-23, Jesus is the real human to whom, as in creation's original intention, i.e. Creation goodness, all is now subject. What St Paul wants us to celebrate is that we are now living in the reality of the creation goodness. But once again, this goodness of creation which is more than simply heaven, is given to us as a gift of grace in Christ. It cannot be accomplished by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by God.

We celebrate Christmas because God has given us grace and truth in His incarnate Son. The secular world may celebrate New Year with optimism, with firework and predictions that tomorrow will be better than today. But whether New Year or not, we celebrate, if we have to do it, with the understanding that we celebrate it in Christ. That is to say, New Year has meaning because Christ has graced it with the delights of creation, with the truthful knowledge that the glory of heaven and earth become one and ultimate reality. It is not optimistic wishful thinking.

Dear brothers and sisters, whether at the beginning or at the end of a year, ultimately we must celebrate the Messiah, the wisdom right at the beginning of creation, because our present and future is now all revealed in Him. There is no uncertainty in Him. In Christ, everything, including our present and future, is always 'Yes.' Furthermore, we celebrate the Messiah, because in Him God's eternal purpose, as manifested in the goodness of the creation will soon be fully known. That is the meaning of the phrase 'grace upon grace' when St John the Evangelist says, 'From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.' Now we celebrate the goodness of the creation, but we anticipate we shall celebrate the eternal purpose of God which will be gloriously revealed to us. We celebrate the future, even in the midst of its unknown factor because grace will never depart

from us. The Messiah has already promised us, 'Lo, from now on till the end of the age, I shall always be with you.' Only the people who know they are truly children of God can celebrate at all time and not just at the beginning of a New Year.