

**The Gospel According to Calvin**  
**Luke 2:15-21**  
**Name of Jesus Sunday (New Years Day)**  
**January 1, 2023**  
**Pastor John Klawiter, Preaching**

Grace and peace to you my siblings in Christ,

On this first day of 2023, I find myself seeking wisdom for the new year.

I've studied other theologians and reflected on what meaning they have discerned. I know this might sound odd coming from a Lutheran pastor, but I took a lot this week from Calvin. (**picture of John Calvin**).

No, not John Calvin!

**This Calvin** (snow). The young cartoon character who goes on adventures with his stuffed tiger, Hobbes.

Calvin often had thoughtful perspectives on life through his opinionated and animated conversations with Hobbes. He's also... how shall I put this, really really naughty!

New Year's Resolutions were a frequent button that provoked his scorn.

**Hobbes asks (question)** him if he's made any new year's resolutions.

**(Calvin) Resolutions? Me? Just what are you implying? That I need to change? Well buddy, as far as I'm concerned, I'm perfect the way I am!**

Calvin doesn't want to make any changes—why should he?!

In another conversation, Calvin and Hobbes are walking in a winter wonderland when Calvin gets deeply philosophical with his friend.

**Calvin says** "I asked dad if he wanted to see some New Year's Resolutions I wrote. He said he'd be glad to and he was pleased to see I was taking an interest in self-improvement.

**I told him the resolutions weren't for ME, they were for HIM!**

I can imagine how I'd react if MY KIDS said this to me. Not surprisingly, Calvin's dad wasn't impressed.

**Calvin tells Hobbes** “that’s why we’re outside.” And it all comes **together for Hobbes**. “I wondered what the rush was!”

It's easy to point the finger and lament how awful Calvin is, but at the same time, his outlook might not be too far from reality. It's our tendency to point out other people's flaws. It's not that we don't see our own flaws—I mean, we are our worst critics—but it's hard to change, so why even try?

During Jesus day—in fact, going back to the days of Moses—some of his peers would take on a real change. They would make a significant resolution. Sometimes, it was because they wanted to do it... but other times, they had to do this because their family made them.

It was called a **Nazirite Vow**.

The process to take this vow is spelled out in the book of Numbers while the Israelites are on Mt Sinai before they reach the promised land.

This is not something that everyone did. You could do it for a set time period—a vow lasted 30 days, OR you could be a Nazirite forever—like Samson—you know, the judge with the long hair, who lost his strength when Delilah cuts it. Because it breaks the Nazirite vow!

This vow could be taken as an act of holiness—to be set apart.

But it could also be a response to sin—done as penance.

Finally, the vow might be taken to avoid defilement of the entire camp. The Nazirite vow kept unclean persons away others. This is something we're familiar with: Quarantine.

Taking the vow was serious business and the rules around it were clearly spelled out in Numbers 6. (**click on circles**):

1. Abstain from grape products—no wine or strong drinks.
2. After taking the vow, no razor can touch their head
3. Finally, they can't go near the dead—even if a parent or sibling dies, they can't defile themselves.

All their days as Nazirites are considered holy to the LORD. They are blessed.

After the detailed explanation of what it means to be a Nazirite and how to provide offerings for the vow, it might be a surprise to find out what scripture passage comes next.

It's probably the most familiar passage that you know because we say at the end of every worship. **It's called the Aaronic blessing.**

The LORD tells Moses... to tell Aaron... to tell the Israelites.

That they are blessed.

**So they shall put MY NAME—the LORD—on the Israelites and I will bless them.**

Think about it—whether being made holy for life, or taking the vow to step back from society for a month, this vow is powerful.

We aren't making a Nazirite vow at the end of church, but this important element of our liturgy is a reminder of two things:

**1. We are the LORD's—we have the name of God on our hearts!**

**AND**

**2. We are blessed!**

When taking a Nazirite vow, a person is choosing to live differently.

We have two names. Our God-given name and God's name. When we wear God's name, **WE** are choosing to live differently.

But we also have our given name. As we remember today as the 8<sup>th</sup> day, this is when Jesus is officially named. He will be called Jesus—as declared by the angel.

Jesus means “the Lord is salvation.” His name had been foretold since before his birth. What a cool story, isn't it???

How about you? We were given a name. It's important. It identifies us.

In your bulletin, you have a sheet that asks for your name (or names—feel free to add family members, too).

**What's the meaning of your name? What's the story about how you received it?**

I bet there's some good stories. I encourage you to share the story behind your name. My name means "God is gracious." My baptismal sponsors were my Grandpa John and my Uncle John.

I wear this name—it's how I'm identified, it's who I am.

But as a Christian, I also wear the 2<sup>nd</sup> name. I wear God's name through my baptism. I wear the name of the LORD in whose I belong to.

Because I belong to God, shouldn't that be apparent in how I, John, am viewed by the world? Shouldn't my neighbor be able to see what's on my heart when they see me?

I hope so.

Calvin has one more interesting question about the subject of what's on our hearts.

**He asks Hobbes**, "Do you think our morality is defined by our actions, or by what's in our hearts?"

**Hobbes thoughtfully suggests**, "I think our actions **SHOW** what's in our hearts."

Great answer, right???

**Calvin is floored.** Hobbes nails it.

But then he thinks even harder and realizes HIS actions aren't very good... Hobbes, by answering correctly, has made Calvin self-aware of his actions. He doesn't like getting called out for this.

**He yells back**, "I resent that!"

**Hobbes is right.** Our actions CAN show what's in our hearts.

This is what we aspire to, each and every day. How can our actions show our neighbor what's on our hearts? We can comfort the grieving, we can befriend the lonely, we can cheer up the depressed, but we can also be like Hobbes and call out the self-absorbed, we can point out destructive behaviors for a friend in denial, we can even advocate for the powerless by using our power to make change.

We don't have to be perfect. Our actions—and sometimes inactions—won't always match the best of what's in our hearts. But there's good news.

Being a child of God and a recipient of God's grace is like **being Calvin on Christmas morning**... despite being sinful and flawed, we are exonerated—acquitted of all charges. **Jesus Christ (arrow!)** loves us anyway and gives us the gift of eternal life through him. Even though we don't deserve it.

So... what do we do with this gift?

Like a Nazirite vow, like a humble family being told of a Messiah born to them, like wise magi from afar bearing gifts... we wear this gift on our heart.

Our actions show what's in our hearts.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Child of God. You carry the name of the LORD wherever you go. May we resolve to have our actions demonstrate God's grace at work in our hearts and lives. What a blessing that is. Amen.