

## **Church New Year**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Each year on September 1<sup>st</sup> the Church celebrates the beginning of another liturgical year. This has been the case since the year 325AD when the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council established this date as the beginning of the ecclesiastical year.

Yet, as we may know, September 1<sup>st</sup> was not a date chosen at random for in the Old Testament times the month of September marked the beginning of the civil year for the Jewish people. On this day the Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets – a feast which marked not only the civil new year but also the beginning of another agricultural cycle since September was the time for harvesting the fruits of the earth and for making the ground ready for new planting.

And so on September 1<sup>st</sup> the Jews offered to God both thanksgiving and supplication – they thanked the Lord for the fruits of their harvest and they asked His blessing for the new civil and agricultural year.

Therefore, when the Fathers met in Council and established the Church New Year on September 1<sup>st</sup>, they were following a long established practice dating back to the time of Moses. Yet, the Fathers were not simply adhering to Jewish custom because they knew that in Christ everything had become new – the people of God, the New Israel, were no longer under the law but under grace. With the Lord Jesus's entrance into the world, everything had changed, for Christ had fulfilled the Law, established a New Covenant in His Blood, and had given His Spirit as a pledge of the Kingdom to come.

When we look at the life of the Lord, it is very easy to see how the Jewish feasts of the Old Testament found their fulfillment in Christ. Take the events of Holy Week for example:

On Holy Friday, while the Jews were sacrificing the lambs for the Passover, the Lord Jesus Christ hung upon the Cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then on Holy Saturday, while the Jews rested keeping the Sabbath, the Lord Himself rested bodily in the grave. And then on Pascha, as the Jews were celebrating their deliverance from bondage to Pharaoh through Moses, Christ was delivering all of mankind from the bondage to death and the devil.

Likewise, on Pentecost when the Jews were celebrating how Moses received the Law of God inscribed on stone tablets, the Christians were also receiving the Law of God but this time inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the fleshly tablets of the heart as had been prophesied.

Now on this day, the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, the Lord also fulfilled the Jewish Law by elevating it to something higher, by transforming and fulfilling it. What did the Lord do?

Well on this day, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, the Lord began His public ministry. St. Luke records how Christ entered the Synagogue and was handed the book of Isaiah, and then read the following passage:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

You see, on this day, when the Jews were celebrating the beginning of the new civil year, and nature itself was about to unfold anew, the Lord Himself saw it fit to begin revealing the newness of life which He had come to grant – He saw it fit to renew creation by the power of His Gospel teaching and His life bestowing ministry.

And so, for us Christians, September 1<sup>st</sup> marks something much more important than the beginning of a civil or agricultural year – September 1<sup>st</sup> marks the beginning of our spiritual year, our liturgical year, a year that is truly acceptable to the Lord because it begins with the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is sanctified throughout by the events of the Lord's life.

We know that the Lord in becoming man and dwelling among us, has sanctified all of creation. He has made all things new. He has dramatically altered the way in which we live, how we think, what we do or say, and most importantly what we live for. No longer are we people whose minds and hearts cannot rise above the things of the world for we have become people whose focus is on the eternal Kingdom of God.

Yet, as we know, this new life, this more abundant life, is not forced upon us – it is simply offered, and it is up to us to decide whether or not we want to receive this great gift.

In today's Gospel reading we just heard the parable of the Lord's wedding feast. And we heard how though many were called few chose to accept the invitation. Instead they chose to make light of the invite, going their own ways – one to his business and another to his farm. And in their stead, the Master of the House welcomed others so that the wedding hall might be filled with guests.

This parable, like last week's parable of the vineyard and the unjust stewards, reveals the unwillingness of the Old Testament Jewish people to accept their Messiah. Yet this parable is also instructional for us, for we are now the ones who have been invited to the eternal marriage feast, we are the ones called to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. But in order for this to happen we need to accept the invitation, we need to receive the gift.

Brothers and sisters, as we set out on this new church year, let us resolve to do just two simple things, let us make two simple resolutions. Let us, like the Old Testament Israelite people, offer to the Lord two things: thanksgiving and supplication.

Let us thank the Lord for all He has given us – for the blessings of the material world, for the food we eat, the air we breath, and for the beauty of nature. Let us thank the Lord for the people in our lives, our families and friends, for our parish community, for those who love us and even those who hate us.

And let us ask the Lord for all things necessary in this New Church Year – for whatever it is He knows we need in the months to come both individually and as a community. And most importantly let us ask the Lord to continually fill us with newness of life, with His Holy Spirit. To do this, to receive this Spirit, we will have to make some changes, we will have to become more spiritual people, we will have to open our eyes more widely to the eternal realities before us.

But if we can do these things, if we can pass this New Year with gratitude and thanksgiving, and with the desire for newness of life, then not only will this year be acceptable to the Lord, but it will also be acceptable to us for our lives will be transformed and transfigured by the presence of Jesus Christ, the One who alone can give us not only life but life more abundantly, both now and in the Age to come.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!