

New Resolutions for Concordia
January 4, 2015

“Arise, shine; for your light has come and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”
Isaiah 60:1

Welcome to the New Year and may blessings upon blessings fill your days with joy and peace. How wonderful to be present at the beginning of a new year, a new day...a new beginning.

What have you done to greet the new year? To take advantage of a new beginning - the opportunity to start something new? What have you envisioned to embrace the future, the *not yet* - something completely different.

Actually, I tried something new at the end of last year, anticipating the yet unmade resolutions of the new year...I committed to singing in the choir for Advent and Christmas. I haven't sung in a choir for many years and the experience brought home some things I had forgotten and taught me some things I didn't know about myself. The experience of worship from the choir side is very different than the other side of the chancel or in the congregation. The exhilaration and challenge of singing in unison and harmony with other voices, blending your voice with your parts, hearing the other parts soar off in different directions - melodies - and be marvelously joined together in the last measures...I forgot how delightful the experience and how appreciative I am for the talents members share with us.

I also learned my voice does not have the range I thought it has and how difficult it can be for me to keep in tune and come in on time. I'm grateful for the patience Lana and fellow choir members showed me. I must confess, I entered into the whole experience with some trepidation and uncertainty- *can I really do this?* The new is a bit frightening, filled, as it is, with the unknown. Trying something new means change: changing what you do, changing how you see yourself and how others see you. Change, even for something new and wonderful, is a journey into the unknown-- testing, challenging your abilities. There is comfort, great comfort, in the familiar, the status quo.

That's the underlying thrust of the Christmas story- Part III- The visit of the Magi. Last week, Pastor Adam spoke about the “dangerous” baby of Jesus and how Simeon and Anna greeted the baby Jesus at the temple for circumcision on the 8th day, rejoicing in the Messiah and prophesying that this change would be “the rise and fall of many” in Jerusalem. God has brought about a new day, a new beginning, a change: wonderful gift, terrible gift, filled with promise. The news of the Magi frightened Herod and all Jerusalem with him. The response to change is like an automatic knee-jerk reaction-*not in my neighborhood-not for me and for mine*. Erect barriers to prevent change from happening, preserve the way things are, build barricades against the future. In this way, Herod is not that different than you and me. No one likes the unpredictable, the totally ‘new’ thing. We all feel an impulse to first turn away, deny, hide the truth, and try to preserve the momentum and inertia of the way things are.

The difference for you and me is seeing past the fear and uncertainty to see God's hand in all that is coming and to join ourselves to God's future. For God, our God, is not behind us. Our God meets us ahead, guides us as surely as the star guided the Magi-- to a new and promised future. Christ meets us on the road ahead and calls us to follow him. That dangerous baby is our Messiah, our Savior and Lord. "Arise, Shine: Your light has come."

Last week, I spoke with another pastor who told me "You've had quite an exciting year." "What do you mean?" I asked. "Well look at all the things that have happened this year--" and he ticked off a list:

- New Associate Pastor
- New full time Parish Administrator
- New leadership positions and staff at Concordia Place
- Expansion plans for a new worshipping community for Concordia Church
- Vision 2020 plans for Concordia Place

"It's been a banner year of change, you must be pleased."

"I guess when you put it that way; there have been a lot of activities and developments." I replied, "But I don't think of it as a year of change, not a year of new ministries. It's more like a year of preparation for change. Now we're ready to do new ministries, to expand and grow. I'm excited about what the new year will bring."

Our parish administrator, Jen, tells me quite a number of new commitments were made in our Stewardship program for this new year: commitments to new ministries and members making commitments for things they have not done before. That excites me, for if we will embrace the future of our church, we will need to do new things, take up new challenges, and meet the days ahead with openness and commitment.

If you are one of those who committed to something new at Concordia this year, as I hope you are - **thank you**. I know it can be daunting and a bit scary to commit your time and give of your ability in a totally new way not certain how it will all turn out. If you haven't stepped up for Concordia's future yet, well, there is still opportunity, need and welcome. Also, know if you haven't, you will no doubt be approached.

For change at Concordia has come. It's come for our outreach ministries at Concordia Place, for our church community at Concordia Church, for our neighborhoods and for our neighbors. Christ calls us to do more and be more than we have been. We have been blessed with talents, enriched with resources, and filled with vision. Of this moment in our life together, the prophet Isaiah has truly foretold, "Arise, Shine; your light has come and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you."