

## Happy New Year!

For many Christians, the new year starts with Advent. Advent is 4 weeks of contemplation and reflection before Christmas during which people prepare to more closely follow the path Jesus calls them to in the year ahead. It is a time of preparation for the coming of the Christ Child and the celebration of his birth. Christmas Day marks the start of that celebration which is 12 days long; ending on January 6<sup>th</sup> with the celebration of Epiphany (the commemoration of the coming of the wisemen to see Jesus). Since the wisemen brought Jesus gifts, gift giving waits till the 6<sup>th</sup> for many.

In much of the secular world, the new year does not come until January 1<sup>st</sup> (actually 5 weeks into the new Christian year, and the halfway point in the 12 days of Christmas). For many who follow the secular calendar, the Christmas decorations are put away by the 1<sup>st</sup>, and January comes in with parties and football. Part of this New Year's tradition for many is making new year's resolutions. The concept is a nod to the idea of contemplating living differently in the coming year. However, these resolutions often have more to do with self-improvement than with a closer walk with Jesus.

This year, in a world desperately in need of God's peace and redeeming grace, look at the new year as a time to take to heart Jesus' call to spread his teaching and be peacemakers. Resolve to do what you need to do to improve your health or lifestyle, but also carry Advent's reflection into the new year. Seek God's guidance through the Word, prayer, and study with brothers and sisters so that together we can stop the cycles of hate, mistrust, anger, and fear that are tearing our communities apart and bringing suffering of so many in this world.

### Remember in Prayer:

- **Those dealing with winter storms & cold weather** – especially those with no shelter. More than 60 people have died in the U.S. during the winter storm. Many are still stranded in life-threatening conditions; many are still in need of help.
- **Those recovering from other earthquakes** – especially the deadly one in Indonesia.
- **Iran** – where peaceful protests against the extreme Islamic government, & their violent repression continues.
- **China** – The government has dropped its COVID rules. Now, new COVID cases & deaths are skyrocketing & overwhelming their medical system. The government is responding by no longer reporting case or death numbers. The possibility of developing new variants with so many new cases is serious.
- **Ukraine where war continues** – attacks against Ukrainian civilians are cutting power, heat, & water in the midst of winter.
- **Somalia** – severe food insecurity continues. Drought & violence have displaced millions.
- **Victims of Gun Violence** – **There were at least 2 mass shootings** (4 or more people shot excluding the shooter) **every day in 2022**. 43,790 people have died in gun violence in 2022 (up 778 from last week), including 1,638 children (up 24 from last week). 38,053 people have been injured (up 431 from last week) including 4,415 children (up 50 from last week). 23,892 of the deaths are suicides (up 462 from last week). There have been 661 mass shootings in 2022 (25 were last week). (Gun Violence Archive statistics) **The 2022 numbers average out to 121 people a day dying in gun violence, 5 of them children. 66 people a day took their own life with a gun.**
- **The continuing COVID Pandemic & the 'Tripledemic'** (COVID combined with RSV virus and flu). Case numbers are spiking due to holiday gatherings. The number of cases of strep A infection among children is also growing. **A number of diseases** (measles, polio, etc.) which have been under control or nearly eliminated are back because children are not getting their regular vaccines.



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