

## **Holy Christmas Day 8: New Year's Day, 2021 Covenant Renewal**

Blessings to all on this first day of a new year, 2021! May God bless each and every one of us with grace, mercy and peace. In this holy season of Christmas, may our hearts and souls continue to be centered on Christ. As St. Benedict says in his Rule, "Let them prefer nothing but the love of Christ".

Reflecting on the past and anticipating a future with hope, I thank God in the present moment for all God has done, is doing and that which is yet to come. During Lauds today (Morning Prayer) my thoughts went back to my youth and early college years as I remembered Miss Alta Ice, a Director of Christian Education & a Deaconess in my home church, First Methodist Church of Parkersburg, W.Va. Our youth group and the college-age group were strong in the late 60's and early 70's. I remember our special events and activities – especially our New Year's Eve party; the evening was fun, and always closed with Miss Ice gathering us together in a circle for "Watch Night service", ending with the John Wesley Covenant service (prayer).

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, encouraged renewal of covenant on New Year's Eve and created "watch-night" services. America's first-known "watch-night" service was held at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia on December 31, 1770. Since then throughout our Wesleyan tradition the use of a "Covenant Service" has been a part of the Church's celebration of the New Year.

The Invitation from the Covenant Service says, "Commit yourselves to Christ. . . Give yourselves to him. . . Christ has many services to be done. Some are more easy and honorable, others are more difficult and disgraceful. Some are more suitable to our inclinations and interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves. But then there are other works where we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. . ." (UM Book of Worship, page 291)

On this first day of 2021, I offer again this Covenant Prayer (in the Wesleyan Tradition), No. 607, The United Methodist Hymnal:

"I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering (patience).  
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things  
to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

As we each pray this, and make our personal covenant, we continue to pray for the needs around us – giving thanks for those who are working on the front-line with the COVID-19 pandemic. We pray for our nation and the world as we seek to be faithful followers of Christ.

William H. Wilson (Bill)+