

## From Darkness to Light: The Joy of Our New Life in Christ

My friends, we are entering at last into one of my favorite times of the year: the beginning of spring. Sure, we can give winter its due. The first snowfall of the year is always beautiful and inspiring. The old traditions of Christmas are romantic and endearing. And there's something alluring about the thought of cozying up before a roaring fire while the cold wind howls outside.

But by the time we get into late January and February, for most of us winter has worn out its welcome. We're tired of the cold. We're weary of the gloom. We're itching to get out of the house (which has, of course, been getting messier by the day) without having to bundle up. We're sick of shoveling snow. And, come to mention it, we're probably just sick in general.

But then—God be praised!—comes spring. The weather begins to warm. The sun begins to shine. The birds begin to sing. Delicate green buds appear on the many fingers of once barren trees. Early blooming flowers—crocuses and tulips and daffodils—burst up out of nowhere from the ground. People everywhere emerge from their cramped and cluttered houses, forsaking their heavy winter coats, to work and play freely in the mild springtime air. Everything is once again green and the world, which seemed so dead, is alive. Spring. It's a time of joy and renewal, a time of freshness and life—and, to speak personally, it's one of my favorite times of the year.

But aside from giving us an earthly sense of joy, spring can also serve a higher purpose, for it also gives us a beautiful illustration of the gift of God in Christ, namely, the *new life* that God freely offers to us through faith in Him.

Yeah, by nature we were all born under the power of sin and the captivity of the devil. We were “dead in [our] trespasses,” as Paul says (Ephesians 2:1). And what did that mean? It meant an existence of hopelessness and despair. An existence of sadness and gloom. An existence of futility and of anxiety and of the deepest, most profound fear. The power of sin reigned darkly over us. The devil, in all of his cruelty and malice, held us captive. Death was our lot. We were idolaters, adulterers, blasphemers, murderers, and thieves—and in our sin we stood under the just condemnation of God. All around us today we see a world living under the power of sin and dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death. And at one time we were all right there with them. Our life was once a winter life, a life of barrenness, hostility, and gloom.

But then came Jesus. Long ago, out of His love for us, He left His glorious throne in heaven and stepped down into our world of darkness. He bore the sin of all. He suffered the punishment we deserved. He shed His own innocent blood on the cross. He died in our place. And then in the dawning light of Easter He rose again in glory from the dead. In this way, Jesus paid the price for the sins of the world and graciously accomplished our eternal salvation.

And now Jesus comes to us, offering this salvation as a free gift through faith in Him. Not only does He assure us of forgiveness and a gracious reception by the Father, but He promises us a new life, a life of joy and holiness empowered by His Spirit. This is a blessing of baptism, and something truly to be cherished. As Paul says, “We were buried therefore with [Jesus] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

A new life. It is ours through the resurrection of Christ, even now. It is a springtime life, a life of peace and joy, a life of warmth and light, a life of righteousness and of freedom and of love. It is the life of God's Spirit, in which we bear good fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). This is the gift of Christ, which we believers have in our baptisms at this very moment. Yeah, for the time being this new life is still hindered by our old, sinful flesh, so that we “do not do what [we] want” (Romans 7:15). And yet it is nevertheless at work in us and will be made complete in us when Christ returns and we are perfected. Indeed, it is the golden life of heaven, given to us now.

So as we watch springtime burst forth around us, I would have you remember two things. First, remember that the gift of Christ includes a new life, which we live even now by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther says in our Small Catechism, “[Jesus] has redeemed me...purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil...that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (SC II, 3). The goal of Jesus’ salvation is, in fact, a new life.

But, secondly, remember the true joy of this new life. Don’t be deceived when the world tells you that the life of sin will make you happy. No, that is a life of hopelessness and fear. Instead, the new life that we have in Jesus is truly the good life, for it is a life lived in the freedom and comfort of the Gospel, a life that affirms our nature as God’s creatures, a life in which we rest under His care, a life shaped as He has intended. In short, this new life works in us all that we were meant to be. And, even though we will still face hardships in this world, our new life is still a life of the highest joy.

So open your eyes to the gift of Christ, cherish the new life He gives, and set yourself to live according to it every day. For Jesus has risen. And, in your baptisms, so have you.

Pastor Vergin