My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

At the beginning of a new year, many people set resolutions to do something different or to be a different person. These resolutions may include long held goals or new aspirations and dreams. There’s energy and excitement with looking at one’s life and believing that something better is possible for you and in you. Naming a new resolution expresses a commitment in doing the work to make it possible.

Or maybe we don’t set resolutions. Lots of folks will deliberately avoid doing so, for any number of reasons. Most post-post-modernists believe this is something that should be relegated to the dust bin of traditions past. Know anyone like that? Others look around and see how many others have broken their resolutions year after year, so what’s the point of making promises that are impossible to keep. Know people like that? Still other folks are not afraid to make a promise, but they sure don’t want others to know about it so that they can maybe tweak it slightly or mightily to justify to their own egos that they kept a promise, and only then will they spout it to the world at large. I don’t know about you, but I’ve known my share of folks who seem to thrive on their social status and one-upping one another.

Common wisdom says don’t promise something you can’t follow through on. Or on which you cannot follow through. A safe resolution for me might be to quit my maddening use of dangling participles.

But even if there’s a new goal that presses us forward to action, we don’t intentionally do not call it a resolution. Personally, I have not set a new year’s resolution in years. I’m not opposed to them, but they don’t have the resonance of a different way of reflecting and setting new intentions that promises to another person might carry. So what is in a New Year’s promise, to whom, and for what?

Our scripture today is a microcosm and gentle reminder of both the limitations, but also the power, of a New Year’s resolution. We heard about the first part on Christmas Eve, didn’t we? We heard something about the very nature of God’s being, that it is eternal and represents all that was, is, and shall be. And we know from Genesis that God’s Spirit flowed over the deep when there was nothing of or on the earth. And that the Word and Wisdom were with God from not just the time of the creation of all that we know, but also of all that there is, the known and unknown, the universe which is vastly older than any telescope can tell us.

So isn’t it amazing that the most awesome power and Spirit imaginable came to us in the first place. We can’t imagine that, can we, that God could come and be one of us, with us, and want to know us? Yet somehow it’s entirely conceivable that the world wouldn’t know what to do with that miraculous presence. Like almost anything we don’t understand, we want distance from those who are different until we can frame it from OUR experience, in OUR heads, look at it through OUR cultural or national or ethnic lens. And if God can’t take our side, with our opinion, and us triumphant, then it must be blasphemy, and not God at all. Isn’t that what we say about the world’s other religions and cultures that are not ours? We’re the best, so you’re with us or against us.

I’ll tell you, putting Jesus in our lives and our culture makes us feel downright omnipotent. And I think for all of us, the more competent we are in our workplaces, the more confident we are in our social circles, the more we get over-involved in our families’ lives, relying on our intelligence, charm or ingenuity, the easier it becomes for us individually to adopt that feeling of invincibility and power.

We should pity God some days for trying to wrestle some humility out of us. But God is wiser than we know, right? God knows that we cannot stay on top forever, and reminds us constantly about the dangers of darkness in our hearts, souls, and Spirits. God seeks always to bring light to us in subtle ways that require us to have eyes that see, ears that hear, and neighbors that care. God gives us these things in life to be able to get beyond ourselves somehow to see all the signs of joy, life, and love beyond what we confuse as those same things with our control of things, status, prestige, and money.

None of those last four words can give us what God gives and wants most: relationship with us, creation.

And God is wiser than we know, right? God decided that the way through our armored defense of nation, ego, and control was to put up the vulnerability of a newborn child into our midst, to disrupt us in our usual defenses of denial, lies, derision, and dismissal. Who can bring those to bear against a helpless infant? The incarnation was a brilliant move, because it forced us to know that God’s ultimate power was in coming to us with no power at all.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

What infant holds any delusion about its own power and omnipotence? It’s an absurd question. But I believe that question’s absurdity is what God puts to us in our scripture today, with riddles of light and dark, of presence and eternal. We’ve been trying to figure out the gift of vulnerability ever since, and as we built churches that gave Christ ever more power and glory as we understood it, I wonder what Christ would have thought of our understandings.

So the new year, for me, is a way of reminding myself of what can be, what I’m striving toward, and letting myself dream of a different world and a better me in it. I don’t have a specific thing in mind. But I do rely on figuring out that if somehow I make myself more vulnerable each and every day in the world, maybe the gift of Christmas might become more real in my days ahead in 2022. I don’t know. But isn’t that the magic of Christmas, after all? What a new year this will be indeed.

Thanks be to God, Amen.