

Numbers 6:22-27  
"Given Peace in God's Blessing"  
Circumcision and Name of Jesus

January 1, 2025  
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

*"The LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,*

*The LORD bless you and keep you;*

*the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

*the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.'"*

*(Numbers 6:22-26)*

We hear those words known as the Aaronic Benediction at the conclusion of each Divine Service. What do those words mean to you? We hear them Sunday after Sunday, Monday after Monday, year after year.

Like so many things, when we get used to it, we may forget its meaning. Yes, you may have the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed memorized, but do you know what you are saying? Or is it just rote memory?

So, what about the Aaronic Benediction? What does it teach? What do those three phrases mean? You may think: the service is over, so it's time to go home! Well, that is technically true, but those three phrases mean more than the service is over.

You see, those three phrases of God's blessing confront the reality of our sin. And to receive the Lord's blessing implies that we *need* His blessing. By nature, we do not want to admit our need for God and for His blessing. So many of us live by the motto: "*God helps those who help themselves.*" So often, we would rather follow the example of the Israelites in turning away from God's sure blessing and look instead to our own abilities for "blessing."

Afterall, who really does all the work as we gather around Word and Sacrament? Now, we all know Who does the work. But we don't always act as if He is doing all the work! Afterall, *we* come to the Divine Service. *He isn't literally dragging us in!* (Although our parents may have something to say about that!)

So, *we* come to the Divine Service. *We* pray. *We* sing. *We* listen. *We* stand. *We* sit. *We* stand. *We* sit. *We* give. That's what it often looks and feels like. And you may be tired after a Divine Service with all that sitting and standing and singing and praying. We are so often tempted to think that *our* participation in the Divine Service is the *only* good work going on!

In today's Old Testament lesson from Numbers 6, the Lord gave us the words of the Aaron Benediction so that we would not forget who is responsible for every blessing.

So, God gave Moses a special blessing for Aaron to pronounce upon God's people. In referring to Himself, God uses the special name He has chosen for Himself – Yahweh, which is why each letter of LORD is capitalized. Through His name, the Lord presents Himself to us as ***“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”*** (Exodus 34:6-7). As such a compassionate and gracious God, the Lord reaches out to us to bless us.

Also, we see in the Aaronic Blessing, three unique phrases where the LORD is repeated. What we have here is a reference to the Holy Trinity. As each of the Divine Persons carries out His work, the Triune God reaches out to bless all those who trust in the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, all three Persons are involved in our salvation. So, let's look at these three phrases to see what they mean for us!

First, ***“the LORD bless you and keep you”*** (Numbers 6:24). This first phrase focuses on the work of God the Father. This blessing from the Father includes all aspects of life. So, wherever you look, you can see how the Lord blesses us through physical and material possessions that He gives to us.

Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed summarizes these blessings from God the Father, noting that the Lord has *“given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses.”* ... He also *“gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have.”*

So, with this first phrase, ***“the LORD bless you and keep you,”*** we need only to look at where we live. Look at the food and furniture, the children and cars, the dishes and dresses, the suits and sofas, electricity, natural gas, and water. Count the many ways the Lord blesses you with these temporal gifts!

And beyond these temporal blessings, God the Father blesses us and keeps us as He answers our prayer requests! Just think about how often the Lord keeps us by preventing problems and dangers from overwhelming us! How zealously does He work to keep us from going to those places where we will be tempted to sin!

At the same time, how loving the Lord is when He allows tests to come upon us! For He promises that He will also make a way of escape and that all things will work together for the good of those who love Him!

Oh, how much He blesses us as He keeps us faithful to the Gospel to the end of our lives. For it is He who will deliver us from this present fallen world into the perfection of His glory in heaven.

Second, ***“the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you”*** (Numbers 6:25). This phrase focuses on the work of God the Son.

We are all sinful. We were all born into sin. It is our nature to rebel against God. So, the only hope for us is in the fact that God is gracious to us.

How clearly we see God’s love for us in the work of our Redeemer, who is called Jesus. Again, Luther does a good job in summarizing the blessings given to us in Jesus, *“who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”*

This is God’s grace! His undeserved kindness to us. For in Christ, God shows His love to us – a deep, profound love that loves us even when we don’t deserve it because of our sin. In such love, God makes His face shine upon us! So, just as the face of a glad new mother radiates love, so God looks at us, covering all our sins with the perfect redemption that Christ has purchased for us through His atoning death on the cross.

Third, ***“the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace”*** (Numbers 6:26). To no surprise, this phrase focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit.

The phrase, ***“the Lord lift up His countenance upon you”*** shows that the Lord gladly looks upon each of us as individuals.

How sad would it be if God would turn His back on you, ignore you, and leave you to what you truly deserve: eternal death apart from God. Thanks be to God that He does not do that! So, how wonderful it is that the work of the Holy Spirit is to turn us rebellious people into His children by leading us to faith in Jesus Christ!

The Holy Spirit gives the spiritually blind – sight by leading them to Christ, who is the Light of the world. As the Giver of life, the Holy Spirit gives life to the spiritually dead in their trespasses and sin. We – *you and I* – are miracles of the work of the Holy Spirit! As Luther says, for it is the Holy Spirit who has “*called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*”

In this miracle of conversion, the Holy Spirit gives us peace as we know that through Christ alone we are reconciled to God. In this miracle, the Holy Spirit gives us certainty of faith. Now, we have a peace that will stand up to the fiercest trials. With the Holy Spirit anchoring us in faith, we can say with St. Paul, “*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38-39).

I also pray that you enjoy this peace each time I conclude my sermons as I say these words: “*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen*” (Philippians 4:7).

What marvelous blessings the Lord gives to us in the Aaronic Benediction! The Lord’s Divine power and His love stand behind each of those words!

To such a benediction, Christians of all ages have gladly said: “Amen!” So, may you no longer take those words for granted! To this blessing, we can say “Amen” to God the Father, our Creator and Preserver, who blesses and keeps us! We can say, “Amen” to God the Son, our Savior and Lord, whose face shines upon us and is gracious to us! We can say, “Amen” to God the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, who turns His face toward us and gives us peace! May the name of the Lord bless you in this New Year – and all the days of your life! Merry Christmas! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**