**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

***New Year 2019***

***Drawing Closer to God***

 **December 30th, In the Year of Our Lord 2018**

 **Pastor Matthew Diehl**

**(Unless otherwise noted, NAU text is quoted)**

 Being Sunday morning, December 30th, 2018, we have approximately a day and a half before the first seconds of the Year of Our Lord 2019 begins. This is our calendar. It is not exact for those of us who have studied such things, but it is the one we use to recognize our existence in the balance of time. This calendar pivots our human existence from the birth of Jesus Christ or the incarnation. There is always a past, present and future time. The past is static and cannot change. But the past does impact our present and therefore our future. The present is our energy, our life, our light in motion before us and to those around us. The past does persuade our present time in that we pray not to repeat failures in life and to build upon the victories to create an improved future for our families, friends, neighbors, state, country and ourselves.

 We shall never forget that we are in the Year of Our Lord. The fallen world, specifically the secular academic class, obviously does not look at our times as being in the Year of Our Lord. However, they cannot change the fact. They can attempt to change the B.C. to B.C.E. and A.D. to C.E., but then it begs the question what is the difference between B.C.E. and C.E.? It is like they are putting a big sign in front of the sun and calling it the moon. Anyone with half a brain can tell the sign is placed by someone who has a political agenda and does not live a life facing the facts. They are attempting to ignore the basis of our calendar and desiring everyone else to forget the real basis and meaning of our calendar. This leads to the fact that they are wanting to escape the fact that there is The God who created us and this world. They desire no accountability. And to clarify their aim is to wash away any understanding to future generations that THE GOD CREATOR exists.

 It is impossible to erase God. Look at history. There isn’t any government regardless of how oppressive that has erased God from the thought of people: Communist China, U.S.S.R., Nazi Germany, nor any eastern European dictator.

What can account for the amazing staying power of religion? Why, exactly, won’t God go away?

Deep down in a person’s mind/soul they know that they need God. There are unanswered questions. Where do we go from here? Meaning, is there life after death? People seek to prepare themselves for the next life. Is there one authority over all mankind? Are there rules for life that govern the affairs of men that originate from God? The question: Can man govern himself? Is man’s condition so depraved that he recognizes he needs a power greater than himself to sort-out things to govern his life? An honest person will admit that they seem to be ‘out of place’ without a spiritual connection.

**Book: Andrew Newberg**

[Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science & the Biology of Belief](http://www.andrewnewberg.com/books/why-god-wont-go-away-brain-science-the-biology-of-belief):

Professor and Director of Research Marcus Institute of Integrative Health Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital

http://www.andrewnewberg.com/books/why-god-wont-go-away-brain-science-the-biology-of-belief

**Most secular thinkers believe that religion is an entirely psychological invention—born out of confusion and fear—to help us cope with the struggles of living and comfort us in the face of the terrible certainty that we will die. But Andrew and Eugene d’Aquili offer a new explanation, at once profoundly simple and scientifically precise: the religious impulse is rooted in the biology of the human brain.**

**Andrew and Eugene base this revolutionary conclusion on a long-term investigation of brain function and behavior as well as studies they conducted using high-tech imaging techniques to peer into the brains of meditating Buddhists and Franciscan nuns at prayer. What they discovered was that intensely focused spiritual contemplation triggers an alteration in the activity of the brain that leads one to perceive transcendent religious experiences as solid, tangible reality. In other words, the sensation that Buddhists call “oneness with the universe” and the Franciscans attribute to the palpable presence of God is not a delusion, or subjective psychology, or simple wishful thinking. The inescapable conclusion is that God seems to be hard-wired into the human brain.**

**In Why God Won’t Go Away, Andrew and Eugene document their pioneering explorations in the field of neurotheology, an emerging discipline dedicated to understanding the complex relationship between spirituality and the brain. Sadly, Eugene died in August of 1998, leaving Andrew to continue their groundbreaking research and to contemplate such essential questions as whether humans are biologically compelled to make myths, what is the evolutionary connection between religious ecstasy and sexual orgasm, can research on near-death experiences tell us anything about the realness of spiritual phenomena, how does ritual create its own neurological environment, and have we found a common biological origin of all religions?**

**And finally, there is the compelling and overarching question: Is religion merely a product of biology—a neurological illusion—or does the very fact that our brains function in such a curious way argue that God is not only real, but reachable? In simpler terms: Is God created by, or the Creator of, the brain?**

**These questions and more resonate at the heart of Why God Won’t Go Away. Challenging in its presentation of cutting-edge brain science, yet accessible and engaging, Why God Won’t Go Away brims with illuminating insights into the nature of consciousness, the mystifying mechanics of perception, the neurological basis of human emotions, and the miraculous manner in which the brain tells us what is real.**

**Resting on a firm foundation of solid empirical data, this nevertheless is a book about mystery. As Andrew followed the trail of empirical data, laboring to understand the deepest implications of his research, he found himself led to a place where intellectual analysis wasn’t sufficient, where objective reality didn’t seem so solid, and where the borderline between the world of science and the realm of the spirit is not such a clear one after all.**

**Why God Won’t Go Away bridges faith and reason, mysticism and empirical data. As Andrew takes us on an exploration of the awe-inspiring organ inside our skulls, we find echoes of the infinite buried within its convoluted folds, and we ponder a compelling and surprising explanation for the transcendent tenacity of God.**

 **The reason calendars change** in history is due to a shift in the focus of our existence. In the western or Roman world, before the Christian calendar, there was the Roman calendar based upon the time of the founding of the city of Rome. The focus was on the state of Rome and its leaders. This is what sustained people in the empire. In time, the term “Pax Romana” meant that the Roman Empire brought about peace in the region. Therefore, people could move freely and commerce took place. Using our current calendar as a reference, Rome was founded in the year 754 B.C. So, in the time of Jesus, in the Roman empire, if you asked someone what year it was, or to date a document, it would be the year 754 AUC (Latin: ab urbe condita – From the foundation of the city of Rome).

How did we get here? The Christian Calendar.

Year: 322 verses, 366 occurrences.

Years: 447 verses, 527 occurrences

Yearly: 6 verses

Who Made the change in the Calendar System?

 **Dionysius Exiguus** ([Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_language) for "Dionysius the Humble"[[a]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysius_Exiguus#cite_note-3); c. [AD](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AD) 470 – c. AD 544) was a 6th-century monk born in [Scythia Minor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythia_Minor) (probably modern [Dobruja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dobruja), in [Romania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania) and [Bulgaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria)). He was a member of a community of [Scythian monks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythian_monks) concentrated in [Tomis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constan%C8%9Ba), the major city of Scythia Minor. Dionysius is best known as the inventor of the [Anno Domini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anno_Domini) (AD) era, which is used to number the years of both the [Gregorian calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar) and the (Christianised) [Julian calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_calendar). Some churches adopted his [computus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computus) (calculation) for the dates of [Easter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysius_Exiguus>

Britannica https://www.britannica.com/topic/chronology/Christian#ref523278

The Christian Era is the [era](https://www.britannica.com/science/era-geologic-time) now in general use throughout the world. Its [epoch](https://www.britannica.com/science/epoch-geologic-time), or commencement, is January 1, 754 AUC

(*ab urbe condita*—“from the foundation of the city [of Rome]”—or *anno urbis conditae*—“in the [year](https://www.britannica.com/science/year) of the foundation of the city”). Christ’s birth was at first believed to have occurred on the December 25 immediately preceding. Years are reckoned as before or after the [Nativity](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nativity-Christian-art), those before being denoted BC ([before Christ](https://www.britannica.com/topic/before-Christ)) and those after by AD ([*anno Domini*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/anno-Domini-Christian-chronology), “in the year of the Lord”). Chronologers admit no year zero between 1 BC and AD 1. The precise date of commencing the annual cycle was widely disputed almost until modern times, December 25, January 1, March 25, and Easter [day](https://www.britannica.com/science/day) each being favoured in different parts of Europe at different periods.

The Christian Era was invented by [Dionysius Exiguus](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dionysius-Exiguus) (*c.* AD 500–after 525), a monk of Scythian birth resident in Italy; it was a by-product of the dispute that had long vexed the churches as to the correct method of calculating [Easter](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Easter-holiday). Many churches, including those in close contact with [Rome](https://www.britannica.com/place/Rome), followed 95-year tables evolved by Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, and by his successor, St. Cyril; but some Western churches followed other systems, notably a 532-year cycle prepared for Pope Hilarius (461–468) by [Victorius of Aquitaine](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Victorius-of-Aquitaine). In [525](https://www.britannica.com/event/Middle-Ages), at the request of Pope St. John I, Dionysius Exiguus prepared a modified Alexandrian computation based on Victorius’ cycle. He discarded the Alexandrian era of Diocletian, reckoned from AD 284, on the ground that he “did not wish to perpetuate the name of the Great Persecutor, but rather to number the years from the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Somehow Dionysius reckoned the birth of Christ to have occurred in 753 AUC; but the Gospels state that Christ was born under Herod the Great—i.e., at the latest in 750 AUC.

Dionysius’ [dating](https://www.britannica.com/science/dating-geochronology) was questioned by the English saint [Bede](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Bede-the-Venerable) in the 8th century and rejected outright by the German monk Regino of Prüm at the end of the 9th. Nevertheless, it has continued in use to the present day, and, as a result, the Nativity is reckoned to have taken place before the start of the Christian Era.

The new chronology was not regarded as a major discovery by its author; Dionysius’ own letters are all dated by the indiction (see below). The use of the Christian Era spread through the employment of his new Easter tables. In [England](https://www.britannica.com/place/England) the Christian Era was adopted with the tables at the [Synod of Whitby](https://www.britannica.com/event/Synod-of-Whitby) in 664. But it was the use, above all by Bede, of the margins of the tables for preserving annalistic notices and the consequent [juxtaposition](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/juxtaposition) of historical writing with calendrical computations that popularized the new era. Outside Italy it is first found in England (in a charter of 676) and shortly afterward in Spain and Gaul. It was not quickly adopted in royal diplomas and other solemn documents, however, and in the papal chancery it did not replace the indiction until the time of [John XIII](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-XIII) (965–972). The Christian Era did not become general in Europe until the 11th century; in most of [Spain](https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain) it was not adopted until the 14th and in the Greek world not until the 15th.

 I am going to try to remember to place an A.D after the 2019 on everything I sign this year. I encourage everyone to do the same. Be prepared to witness.

The Chinese calendar is based on lunar cycles or **phases of the moon**. Chinese months begin with a new moon, and have a full moon on day 15. As a new moon comes roughly every 29½ days, Chinese calendar months always have 29 or 30 days.

 The beginnings of the Chinese calendar can be traced back to the 14th century B.C.E. Legend has it that the **Emperor Huangdi** invented the calendar in **2637 B.C.E.** The Chinese calendar is based on exact astronomical observations of the longitude of the sun and the phases of the moon.

What Is the Current Year in the Chinese Calendar?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Chinese year** | **Zodiac animal** | **Gregorian calendar** |
| 4712 | Horse | January 31, 2014 |
| 4713 | Ram/Sheep | February 19, 2015 |
| 4714 | Monkey | February 9, 2016 |
| 4715 | Rooster | January 28, 2017 |

**Moving Forward in Time with God**

With the passing of each calendar-day, we move forward, putting one foot in front of the other. Tuesday morning will come with the notation that the first day of the New Year 2019 will begin. There will be great celebration throughout the world. In the industrialized world, the Christian calendar turns the page with the mark of the New Year. It is reasonable to say that the world population, which is 7.7 billion people, will mark the beginning of the New Year based upon the calendar that is founded upon the incarnation of God as Jesus Christ. I observe that many of the 7.7 billion will not wake up on January 1st, 2019 and say, “We are so blessed to begin another year under the title ‘Year of Our Lord.’” They will not have a thought about Jesus, God, the incarnation or look upon God as the sustainer of their life. It is just another day, another month, another year. But we, we have an opportunity with God and our neighbor. We start the New Year with the thoughts and the witness that God is the sustainer of our lives and our purpose for living.

Therefore, we look at this New Year with the **goal of drawing closer to God than last year**. We look at the New Year with optimism that as we grow closer to God our lives will mature and our relationships with our neighbor will also grow in a positive direction. We look at our spouse and children and see that we have an opportunity to improve our relationship with them under God’s love. So, the New Year is one of positive opportunity that we shall not put aside.

**First**

**Drawing Closer to God -**

God wants us to draw near to Him. We have already received an invitation. Do not think you have to be asked again.

**Ecclesiastes 5:1** Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and **draw near to listen** rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.

 2 Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few.

 3 For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

**James 4:8** **Draw near to God** and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

**Hebrews 7:19** for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we **draw near to God.**

**Hebrews. 7:25** Therefore He is able also to save forever those who **draw near to God** through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

**Second**

**God’s invitation is open-ended. There aren’t any time limits.**

**Joel 2:32** Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, for there will be an escape for those on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the Lord promised, among the survivors the Lord calls.

**Acts 2:21** Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

**1 Corinthians 1:2** To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord both their Lord and ours.

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

**Third**

**Remember, sin can be an impediment for God to hear you.**

**John 9:31** "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him.

 **Proverbs 15:29** The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

**Psalms 145:19** He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry for help and saves them.

**Isaiah 1:15** When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

**Proverbs 28:9** Anyone who turns his ear away from hearing the law even his prayer is detestable.

**Job 27:9** Will God hear his cry when distress comes on him?

**Isaiah 59:2** But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen.

**Job 35:12** There they cry out, but he does not answer, because of the pride of evil people.

**Psalm 18:41** They cry for help, but there is no one to save them they cry to the Lord, but he does not answer them.

**Psalm 34:16** The face of the Lord is set against those who do what is evil, to remove all memory of them from the earth.

**Proverbs 15:8** The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

**Probers 21:13** The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will himself also call out and not be answered.

**Isaiah 58:9** At that time, when you call, the Lord will answer; when you cry out, he will say, Here I am. If you get rid of the yoke among you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking,

**Jeremiah 11:11** "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to bring on them disaster that they cannot escape. They will cry out to me, but I will not hear them.

**Jeremiah 14:12** If they fast, I will not hear their cry of despair. If they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. Rather, I will finish them off by sword, famine, and plague."

**Jeremiah 15:1** Then the Lord said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel should stand before me, my compassions would not reach out to these people. Send them from my presence, and let them go.

**Ezekiel 8:18** Therefore I will respond with wrath. I will not show pity or spare them. Though they call loudly in my hearing, I will not listen to them."

**Micah 3:4** Then they will cry out to the Lord, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because of the crimes they have committed.

**Zechariah 7:13** Just as he had called, and they would not listen, so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord of Armies.

**Fourth**

 **But then the positive outlook: The Lord hears our prayers.**

**1 John 1:8-2:1 (CSB17)**

8 If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**Psalm 34:15** The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry for help.

**James 5:16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.

**John 9:31** We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to him.

**Hebrews 13:18-21 (CSB17)**

18 Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, wanting to conduct ourselves honorably in everything.

 19 And I urge you all the more to pray that I may be restored to you very soon.

 20 Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus-- the great Shepherd of the sheep-- through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

 21 equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

 **Fifth**

 **Praise God through prayer and witness.**

**Deuteronomy 10:21 (CSB17)**

21 He is your praise and he is your God, who has done for you these great and awe-inspiring works your eyes have seen

**Hebrews 13:15-16 (CSB17)**

Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

 16 Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.)

**Sixth**

Allow God’s **faith to work in you** to a greater compacity. Put your-self in action for God.

**James 2:14** 4 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him?

**James 2:17** 17 In the same way faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead by itself.

**James 2:22** You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; (Jas. 2:22 NAU)

**Seventh**

 **Increase your understanding of God’s Word.** If you have not done so already, make a commitment to study God’s word more this year.

**1 John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

**1 John 2:4-5** 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

 The spiritual point here is not to memorize biblical text for the sake of knowing. The spiritual application of God’s word is most important. God commanded the biblical writers to write.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9** 6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**Proverbs 7:1-3 1** My son, keep my words And treasure my commandments within you. 2 Keep my commandments and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye. 3 Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.

**Luke 1:1-3 1** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,

 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servant s of the word,

 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;