"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? 28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:25-31)

In Jesus’ name, dear fellow Christians at the end/beginning of another year,

Michael. It’s a good bible name. Are there any Michael’s here at this service? (The female version of the name is “Michelle” or maybe “Micaela”.) Michael was the name of an angel in the Bible. Actually the Bible calls him an archangel; some say THE archangel, the chief of all the angels. But it’s also interesting to know what the name “Michael” means. Maybe some of the Michaels here know what their name means. It’s a Hebrew word—really a short Hebrew sentence—that means, “Who is like God?” Who is like God? That’s the question God himself raises at the beginning of our reading. “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.” To whom can we compare God?

• How about those angels, like Michael and Gabriel? Are they like God? No, not really. Yes, they are sinless, and they reflect a bit of God’s shining glory, but it’s not their own. Nor can they do anything without God’s authority behind them.

• What about people? The Bible tells us that in the beginning Adam and Eve were created “in the image of God.” But any resemblance that their holy selves once had to God’s divine nature has pretty much been obliterated by sin. We’re not much like God. No, there’s no one else, no one at all who is like God. No one else can even compare to his divine power and glory.

God doesn’t ask this question, though, just to point out his uniqueness. He tells this to us to bless us and to encourage us. As we stand at the end of another year, it’s natural to look into the future and wonder what’s in store. Maybe you have a lot of unanswered questions about 2006. Maybe the things that look like they will happen in this year are already causing you anxiety. In these verses God tells us about himself in order to give you NEW STRENGTH FOR A NEW YEAR. He reminds us that

1. HE KNOWS YOU, and he reassures us that

2. HE CARES FOR YOU.

I. New strength…because God knows you

“Sometimes I just wonder if God knows what’s really going on in my life.” That’s what God’s people were saying to themselves 2700 years ago. But it has a pretty modern ring to it, doesn’t it? “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my cause is disregarded by my God.” If you sometimes wonder if God really knows or cares about your own personal struggles in life, you’re not alone. For thousands of years God’s people have struggled to trust that God is really interested in their lives.

But God gently reminds us that if we know who he is, we’ll never have to wonder if he really knows us. He starts by directing our eyes to the skies. “Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all
**these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.**” Astronomers tell us that our sun is so large that a million planet earths could fit inside of it. And yet that’s just one of the uncounted billions of stars that we see scattered across the heavens. How did all of this come to be? A result of sheer accident or chance? Surely not. No, not only did I create all these things from nothing in the beginning, God says, but I keep the world moving. I cause the seasons to move and the earth to turn. I keep every star in the heavens in its place and every living thing on this earth in its place just as I designed it. Without me, it would all fall apart in a moment.

Don’t think for a minute, the Lord says, that in the midst of all this I have somehow forgotten about you. I never become worn out or forgetful. I know you. I created you. I keep you alive. I know all things and I certainly know everything about your life. Jesus told his disciples, “Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Matt. 10:30)

What will happen to you in 2006? The remarkable answer to that question is: exactly what the Lord of heaven and earth wants to happen to you—nothing more, nothing less. God is, and will remain, in control of the world that he created.

**II. New strength…because God cares for you**

But that doesn’t necessarily help us or comfort us, does it? It’s one thing to believe that God knows and controls the events of my life. It’s another question entirely for us to know whether those plans God has for us are good plans—or disastrous ones. What does the all-knowing God have planned for me?

To answer those questions, we need to hear more from God about himself—not only about his perfect knowledge, but about his great love. “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.”

God not only knows. He cares. He cares about the “weary” and the “weak”. And with those words God isn’t limiting his love only to certain folks who are having hard times. He’s describing all of us sinners living in a sinful world. He’s describing people like us—“weary” because we can’t carry the burden of our own sins or atone for them. “Weak” because we lack the strength, ourselves, to do the things God requires of us.

God’s love for weak, weary, repentant and grieving sinners finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened.” Jesus took our burden of sin and guilt on himself and carried it to the cross. He made a full payment to God for every wrong thing you have done. He made peace between you and God and announces to you the good news of that peace.

Sometimes it’s sort of amazing to watch the world’s top marathon runners complete. They are able to race through 26 miles at a fast pace. But at the end of the race, they would be lying if they claimed to be as energetic as when they began. If they had to run a second marathon right after the first, you can be sure they would struggle. Some people can endure more than others, but everyone has their limit of endurance.

The same is true of the other hardships we have to endure. “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall.” Whether you’re old or young, male or female, sick or healthy, rich or unemployed, you will face trials and hardships. 2006 won’t be free from anxious moments. You can be sure of that.

But you can be just as sure that you have a source of strength in trials—your Savior Jesus. “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength…” They will run and not grow weary; they will walk and
not be faint.” God didn’t merely say that people who put their hope in him wouldn’t get tired or weary as quickly. He said we wouldn’t be faint or weary at all! The biggest burdens of all—our own guilt, our own status before God, wondering about our eternal destiny—those are burdens that with God we will never need to face. And he guarantees to you that with his strength supporting you, you can endure all earthly sorrows gladly.

After all, God knows you. And he not only knows you, he cares for you. And if God knows you and cares for you, then every distress you face today or this year or in any future year will be part of his loving, carefully designed plan for your life. And if our troubles are all in God’s plan—if our lives are held in his loving hands at every single moment—then can they really burden us? Do we ever need to feel neglected? Do we ever need to feel forgotten? Not with God in control. Not with your Savior’s promises of the forgiveness of your sins and a heavenly home ahead of you.

Conclusion:
A year from now, when we close the year 2006, what will be different? Will we be talking about the next September 11th? Will we be blessed in ways we can’t even imagine? Will God see fit to move some of us to gatherings of Christians in other places? Will he see fit to take some of us to heaven—or to come in glory to judge the living and the dead before the calendar turns again? We don’t know. But we do know this: whether in earth or in heaven, we’ll be able to say with the saints and angels:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

God give you the strength to live for him this New Year. Amen.