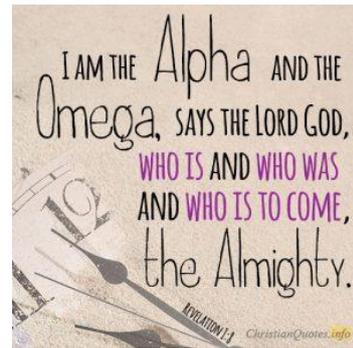


Church at Home for New Year's Eve/Day At the turning of the year

‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’

Hebrews 13:8



There is no shortage of commentary on the year that is passing, with its painful stories of loss, frustration, separation and cancelation. At the same time however COVID 19 has also helped us appreciate some things that we are always in danger of taking for granted, namely: the importance of our key workers, the heroism of our doctors and nurses, the importance of caring for our planet, the power of community spirit and the beauty of nature on our doorsteps. For everyone, this year has been a testing time that has shown us what really matters, which includes of course our friends, our family and our faith. But when even friends and family are ‘taken away’ for fear of spreading this virus, it is our faith that is left. This is faith in Christ who is ‘the same yesterday, today and for ever’; a faith in God’s love that will never distance itself from us, hide its face behind a mask or hesitate to come close with a hug. It is the certain hope of a ‘never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and for ever love’* which no pandemic can take away.

As the year turns, take some time to meditate on the Bible passages suggested below, to reflect on the thoughts and pictures in this church-at-home, and to pray the prayer, so that whatever the New Year holds for us, our faith, hope and love will be anchored in a God who is over us as Father, with us as Jesus, and in us by the Holy Spirit

(*a recurring phrase in The Jesus Storytime Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones)

Here are some suggested Bible readings. As you read them, ask yourselves each time, ‘What is God saying to me here about the year that is passing?’, ‘What is God saying to me now for today?’, ‘What is God saying to me about the year ahead?’

[Hosea 6:1-6](#) – The Prophet invites us to return to the Lord for healing and revival, and to move into an experience of a deeper faith in God

[Psalm 1:1-6](#) – The Psalmist describes the choice before us for the time ahead - a tree rooted in God’s words or chaff blown by the wind

[Romans 8:31-39](#) – Whatever has happened or will happen, the Apostle reminds us that God is for us and that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus

[John 14: 25-27](#) – Jesus speaks of two gifts: God’s Spirit to inspire us and God’s peace to keep us

For reflection and prayer

[Here is a New Year reflection](#) on Philippians 4 by Rev Mark Philips entitled 'No worries?'

Looking back.....

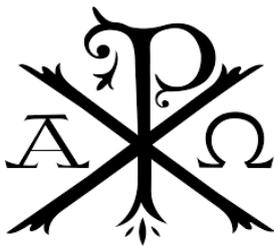
This year of the virus
has stolen the headlines,
taken our loved ones,
and put routines on hold.

This year of that same virus
has taught us who matters,
shown us what is precious,
reordered our priorities.

This year of the virus
has separated us from others,
made us fearful of outsiders,
closed down our communities.

This year of that same virus
has revealed new heroes,
inspired new creativity,
and offered new possibilities.

Out of the darkness, some light has come.
Out of the pain, hope has been born.



*Christ, the first and
the last – the
Alpha and Omega*

Prayer for the New Year

Lord of love,
You are in the unexpected and in
the new.

Just as last year taught us
to take nothing for granted,
help us to trust 2021 into your
hands,
knowing that whatever happens,
nothing can separate us from
your timeless love
and your timely presence.
Amen

This year....

This is the year that has turned
everything upside down;
and particularly for the church.
However, the direction of our mission
is perhaps back on track.
No longer just trying to draw the outside in
But taking the inside out.
Just as God stepped outside
to live as Christ Jesus beside us
remaking us by the Spirit of God from the inside



The gate of the year

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'
And he replied:
'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'

Minnie Louise Haskins.