

# New Beginnings: For the Start of a New Year

*Assembly by Revd Canon Dr Rob James, Canon Chancellor, January 2022*

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I'm not sure what all of you will have done for your new year celebrations, but a particular tradition in Wells is for people to gather on the Green, outside the Cathedral. It's a great place to hear the bells as they are rung at midnight and also to see the firework displays from both the Rugby and Football clubs. This year there were also fireworks at the far end of the Green too. Before the pandemic, 100s would gather. Last year, there were not many at all, but this year we were back up to 150 or 200.

Of course, the New Year is a quite random date really. There is nothing especially important about 1st January. In fact, before 1752, the country kept New Year as 25th March. So January, February and up to 24th March would be counted as one year, then the year would change at midnight. In the old calendar, this would still be 2021. Obviously, changing the year number on the 1st of a month was neater, and the logic to January is probably that it is the month when the days begin to lengthen, and it is also at one of the new beginnings marked in Christianity – God coming to the world in the person of Jesus at Christmas. But March 25th also had a logic to it. It is known as Lady Day. The mathematically observant amongst you will have spotted it's exactly 9 months before Christmas and it is the day on which Christians have traditionally remembered the Angel visiting Mary, and Jesus being conceived. Other ways of counting the year number also exist. You will be familiar with the Chinese New Year and dating system, some you will also know the Islamic system, and other systems besides. Every civilization has some way of marking the passage of time.

Whatever reason we might have for celebrating the turning of the year on any particular date, humans seem to need to note the passing of time. We are very aware of time, and that awareness seems to grow the older we get. As we zoom around the Sun and as the seasons change and the years change, we become more and more aware of the gift that time is and how precious it is. We who are bounded by time must learn to use it well. That does not mean always being busy, but it does mean making sure that our lives have the focus that we want them to have, and that God wants our lives to have. Wasted time can be many things, but it might be time spent being very busy earning lots of money because that's what you have been told to do, when really you have a vocation to something else entirely. Watching the number change from one year to the next is a time that many people spend at least a moment trying to find some focus for their lives. Hence, New Year's Resolutions, things that someone wants to do in the coming year, which are usually code for taking steps towards being who they want to be.

You don't need to share this with anyone else, although it can help to discuss it with a close friend, but maybe New Year is a good time to think about what you want your life to look like – that's as much for staff as for pupils, and as much for me as for anyone else. We have the gift of another year. The gift of time in which to discover who we truly are – in Christian terms, to discover who God knows us as. This isn't about being self-centred, but it's about discovering who you most truly are so that you can be the best you can be in the world. Being fully alive is the best way to serve God and others. Don't let anyone tell you what your New Year's Resolutions should be – many will try to tell you what or who you should be, but only you can answer that. Time is a gift and it's never too early and or late to begin to use it well, to be ourselves and through that to bless the world. New Year is a good time to think about this, for it starts the year with a sense of purpose and direction.

None of us, not one, know for sure what time will bring us, but we are not powerless and we can choose who we are and how we live, in time, no matter what.