

## Reflection for New Year's Eve 2021

Look forward in Hope

Stand firm in Faith

Look back with Thanksgiving

And underpin all these with Acceptance

As we stand at the end of what has been a difficult year for many let us put aside the doom and gloom of the news media, fake news and fear merchants and look back with thanksgiving for all that has been especially good in this year of 2020.

For our parish family at St. Mary's we can all give thanks for a comfortable home, clothes to wear, good food to eat, a free health service and so many other things that we take for granted in what we used to call "normal times". So much of what we have missed in lockdown has been the trappings of modern life, the habits of a lifetime, the routine we were used to: but just stop and think of what we have gained.

The church building has been closed or only partially open, but we have rediscovered the temple of God's creation. Many of us have had time to sit and enjoy the song of the birds, the beauty of spring and summer blossoms and autumn leaves, the taste of freshly picked home grown vegetables and fruit, and been reminded of Who really provides for our bodily needs. We have reconnected with other people even when cut off from social contact. We have benefited from the wonders of the internet as we have learned to use Zoom and FaceTime, Skype and other means of seeing each other. In this way some of us have actually seen more of our more distant friends and relatives during lockdown. Maybe you could not cuddle your youngest grandchild – but did you smile when the little one tried to kiss your image on her Dad's iPad or teach you the virtual hug?

Then there are all those who have given so much of their time to help those locked in or self isolating or less able to do their own shopping; those who have spent long hours finding ways to bring livestreamed worship to our computers, tablets and smart phones, those who worked so hard to make small congregations possible, and the large numbers who were needed to give us two wonderful outdoor services in the summer or braved the cold of late December for the drive through Christingle.

Add another page of things you have to be thankful for in 2020 and then heed St. Paul's advice and "in everything give thanks".

So to the present: stand firm in the faith. Can you truly echo Cardinal Newman's great hymn

"Firmly I believe and truly  
God is Three and God is One;  
and I next acknowledge duly  
manhood taken by the Son.  
And I trust and hope most fully  
In that manhood crucified;

and each thought and deed unruly  
do to death as He had died.  
Simply to his grace and wholly  
light and life and strength belong.  
and I love supremely, solely,  
him the holy, him the strong.”

So we move forward into 2021 with hope. The writer to the Hebrews tells us “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (*Hebrews 11, v1 RSV*)

As we move forward in hope may we take care not to lose the best of what we have gained in 2020. May we continue to enjoy and explore new ways of outdoor worship. Continue to enjoy the labyrinth in warmer weather, and not forget to go for a walk “on the wild side” once a week. Maintain the habits of prayer and Bible study for which we have had more time during lockdowns – in other words keep time for God in our daily lives. And remember that what we do for others we do for our Lord. When I was an undergraduate I lived for a time with a retired priest and his wife, not knowing then that their nephew would become the Bishop of Norwich who licensed me as a Reader twenty years later! Over the kitchen sink Aunt Harding had pinned a hand written note saying “Divine service performed here three times daily.”

And remembering where our hope truly lies I finish this year with the words of my grandfather’s favourite hymn

Jerusalem the golden,  
With milk and honey blest,  
Beneath thy contemplation  
Sink heart and voice oppressed,  
I know not, ah, I know not  
.What joys await us there,  
What radiancy of glory,  
What bliss beyond compare.

They stand, those halls of Zion,  
All jubilant with song,  
And bright with many an angel,  
And all the martyr throng;  
The prince is ever in them,  
The daylight is serene;  
The pastures of the blessed  
Are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the throne of David;  
And there, from care released,  
The shout of them that triumph,  
The song of them that feast;  
And they, who with their leader,  
Have conquered in the fight,  
For ever and for ever  
Are clad in robes of white.

O sweet and happy country,  
The home of God’s elect!  
O sweet and happy country,  
Tat eager hearts expect!  
Jesus, in mercy bring us  
To that dear land of rest;  
Who art, with God the Father  
And Spirit, ever blest.

*St. Bernard of Cluny (12<sup>th</sup> century) translated  
by John Mason Neale*

So as we leave 2020 I wish you all many  
blessings in 2021 as you stand firm in your  
faith and look forward in hope.



