

Though I see myself as a Radio Three fan, our radio at home is tuned to Classic FM (which I also enjoy). Classic FM describes itself as 'the home of Christmas music'. I'm not so sure about that. It is interesting that almost as soon as Christmas arrives the Christmas music stops, by and large. I suppose we are guilty of that in the church to some extent: it would be a brave minister – foolhardy, even – who insisted on delaying the annual carol service or nativity play until Advent was over. We celebrate Christmas even as we anticipate it. This is not a post-Christmas letter, even though it marks the turning of another year. New Year's Day arrives in the midst of Christmas.

I always look forward to the annual Covenant Service, which, for most of our churches, takes place in January. At the same time, I think it a pity that certain seasonal readings may be set aside for the set readings in the Covenant Service. I believe that the Baptism of Christ should never be omitted: it is the bridge between the mystery of the Incarnation and the ministry of Jesus. It is in a true sense a new beginning, and New Year is about new beginnings, isn't it? Well, for me it is, since I was born in January. But not for the Methodist Church, for which September begins the church year – and when some churches hold their Covenant Service. Not for the 'liturgical year' either, which begins on Advent Sunday – this year our gospel readings are mainly taken from Luke, in case you didn't know.

I don't think that God is much concerned with whether we measure time by the change of minister, or lectionary, or by birthdays, or the date by which treasurers have to finish their accounts, or New Year's Eve parties.

*New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life, and power, and thought.*

Every morning, every moment in the day, is a new beginning:

*New mercies, each returning day
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

There is no looking back on the past year in God's economy:

*Old friends, old scenes will lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and care.*

Just as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, as something to rejoice in now; so we look forward together to God's new beginning, not only on New Year's Day, but every day, loved, forgiven and made new.

I love this prayer of George McLeod's (the Church of Scotland minister who founded the Iona Community):

Keep us in the constant sense of your presence and forgiveness, that, going our way with gladness, we may come at last to those things which eye has not seen nor ear heard, but which, from the foundations of the world, you have prepared for those who love you. Amen.

Happy New Year!

Peter