



The New SHOFAR

January 1st - A New Year in the Lord

Matthew 2:13-23 - The Flight into Egypt

In The Year of the Lord 2017 – 2017 AD

It is without apology I insist on recording the annual passing of time with the letters AD after the particular year that has passed or we are welcoming in – AD being a shorthand way of writing *in the year of the Lord*. We have been marking our Christian calendars in that way since the Scythian Dionysius Exiguus introduced the AD system in AD 525. Why is this so important? It is because in speaking of time in this way we are professing faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, a lordship that continues down through the ages and will continue until the end of time itself. History was changed with the birth of our Saviour and through his life, death, resurrection and ascension we now understand our own identities and the meaning and purpose of all human life very differently

Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End

We believe Jesus was sent by his Father to carry out a sacred mission here on earth. The God of love who created the world and all of humanity out of love could not accept the rejection thrown back at him by human sin. Beginning with Abraham, Moses and the prophets our loving Father worked away at bringing all peoples back into a right relationship with himself and with each other. This is what the Bible calls the *saving works of God* (salvation).

When none of these holy men and women were able to convince people to repent and to turn back to their Creator and their God, the Father sent his Son Jesus. He came to give witness to our true identities and to open up for us the way we were to live in God's creation. At the same time he opened up to us the love God has for us – and not just for us but for each and every human person. This includes *lepers* and *tax collectors* and especially the *poor and the powerless*. We were told how we were to treat everyone as our *neighbour*, our *brother* or our *sister*...including our enemies.

Jesus is the way we experience the love, the forgiveness, the joy, salvation, healing, justice and compassion of God. We are made whole again and one again with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The only guaranteed way to find God is in and through Jesus the Christ.

We begin this new year of our Lord with a commitment to live as he lived, to love as he loved, to forgive, welcome, show compassion, patience and kindness as he showered these gifts on everyone. For Christians this is the one, single resolution that will change our lives in unimaginable ways. Everything we do in life will be powerfully transformed if only we make this coming year *our year of the Lord 2017*, living and acting with Christ as our beginning and concluding our deeds and our relationships with Christ as our ending. This will not happen by chance. It needs to be intentional, carried out in prayer and offered to God as a sacrifice of love.

A new year's resolution for the disciples of Christ

We have been tasked by God at our baptisms to continue the divine mission in the world today. We do this by bringing Christ alive *in the flesh* so that people can experience God's love. What does that mean? First and foremost it is the *witness of a Christian life* that is most basic form of mission. If Christ is not brought alive in the way individual believers (and faith communities) speak and act, then

the world will be starved of the gifts God has for them. Look around the world and we can see how true this is. Remove Christ from the centre of human living and chaos grows.

The Church has always understood this kind of witness to be an active way of living. It means promoting peace, justice, human rights and the value of all human life. It means providing a witness to the power of community, a bridge between the Scriptures and our cultural settings and a voice for a genuine human dignity. St Francis of Assisi said it well when he instructed his followers to *preach always and if necessary, use words*. We are to be the hands of Christ in the world.

Therefore, this year I commit myself to... working within my local faith community in order to help turn it more and more into a congregation of men and women who believe in the Gospel and who live by it. This means nudging the Church away from being somewhere to which a person can go when they are seeking after faith to becoming *the supreme means by which God has established that the Gospel should be demonstrated in human life and human community (Warren)*.

I can do this through a range of intentional actions:

- ***Growing my life of daily prayer:*** Before I can convince others that God is very much a part of their every waking and sleeping moment, I have to believe this to be true and to live accordingly. Our minimum in prayer should be – morning and evening with prayers of thanks before eating.
 - But why not try also ... praying before I start something new
 - praying before meeting someone/after meeting someone – praying for them
 - making a short prayer when I hear bad news
 - making a short prayer of thanks when I hear good news
- ***Growing my life of worship:***
 - Try adding an “extra” opportunity for worship by attending morning prayer or evening prayer; a Eucharistic celebration during the week at a convenient church?
 - Joining my local community when it gathers for sung evensong?
- ***Read the Bible:***
 - Is it odd we have to add this one here to our list? The Bible is God’s revelation to us and in it we can hear God speaking in so many ways and can respond to the divine voice by using sacred language. If we are to come to know Christ as our Alpha and live with him as our Omega, we must – must read the Bible daily.
 - One very simple way of doing this is by taking up the *Lectio Divina*.
- ***Share my faith with other believers:***
 - Growing in Christ means growing in my knowledge of the faith and the best way that can be done is in collaboration with others. Therefore – I could join a Bible Study group or start my own.
 - Take part in home study groups or parish study groups/sessions.
- ***Be as Christ to others:***
 - Intentionally set myself the task of reaching out to another person – locally or in my parish community – with a gesture of love, patience, kindness and/or mercy. This is a specific something I set myself to do each week.
 - Set about building bridges back to people with whom I have been separated – choosing people I have decided I do not like and be as Christ to them.
 - Take up a new work/ministry/activity in my parish prayerfully offering the extra time it takes up to God in prayer.

Every other New Year goal I might like to set myself will come alive when I put Christ first. By making 2017 truly *a year of the Lord* a new life becomes a reality and nothing can be said to be impossible. Priests and people alike, we all need to do a fair bit of repenting, a fair bit of self-sacrificing and a great deal of spiritual work if we are to give God a chance to work through us.