

## Thought for the Day

*Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.*

*For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>*

*Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)*

*Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.*

### **Thursday 31 December**

#### **New Year's Eve**

#### **Psalm 90**

Psalm 90 reflects on God's eternity, compared to our fleeting lives, God's perspective on our tiny goings on. It's a good psalm for New Year's Eve and we look back at the year past and forward to the new year. It might help us to put it all in perspective. 'A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday'.

There are some odd traditions on NY Eve around the world. We all know about singing 'Auld Lang Syne' – although this year don't sing it with anyone else except your household! –and 'first footing' in Scotland on Hogmanay.

Special foods feature in many cultures:

In Chile the special food would be lentils, while in Spain you eat 12 white grapes at midnight as the clock chimes 12. Presumably that's about luck for the next 12 months.

Eating any ring-shaped treat like a ring doughnut symbolizes "coming full circle" and leads to good fortune.

Wassail is a drink like punch and its name is from the Gaelic for 'good health'.

In Swiss homes, dollops of whipped cream, symbolizing the richness of the year to come, are dropped on the floors—and allowed to remain there! I find this hard to believe, having lived in Switzerland and experienced their devotion to cleanliness. You have to have your car's engine steam cleaned before taking it for its MOT lest the garage mechanic should get his hands oily.

Making a lot of noise—from fireworks to gun shots to church bells—seems to be a favourite New Year's pastime across the globe.

We celebrate the end of the old and the beginning of the new. It seems an auspicious moment. And linked to that we make new year resolutions- generally about being a better person or eating less or more healthily or otherwise reforming ourselves in some way. A form of repentance and amendment of life.

Isn't it interesting that the secular world celebrates like this, echoing much of religious observance. Human beings like tradition, and even ritual. There is actually a movement called Sunday Assembly which is exactly like going to church on a Sunday except without the God aspect. It started in 2013 and its quite popular.

The church year begins on Advent Sunday, but there are many starts of different kinds of year – we could mention the school year, the tax year, and so on.

They are all artificial dates, manmade dates, just like the date of Christmas which reflects more the old pagan Saturnalia mid winter festival than the likely date of Christ's birth, which the scholars tell us was probably sometime in the spring.

But having chosen and designated these dates they become very significant for us, like our birth dates, wedding anniversary and so on. We give special meaning to particular times and

seasons. We shape our year and our lives in this way. It helps us to make sense of the passage of time and to motivate us through the year.

Meanwhile it is still the festival of Christmas and we are in day 7 of 12, 7 swans a swimming if you like that carol. I hope you can go out for a walk today and maybe you'll be by a river or lake where there are swans. Just be thankful that no 'true love' has delivered 7 of them to your doorstep expecting you to look after them.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*