

**Opening Music Video:** Largo from 'Winter', from Vivaldi's Four Seasons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iy36ObsdD54> 2mins 15secs

**Regular Opening Music: 'Its still not going to rain' by Lizzie Hornby**

**Welcome:** Good morning and Welcome on this first Sunday of 2022. A Happy New Year to you, whether you are here in the church or joining us online. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you, concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome, especially if you are joining us for the first time.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued.

**Chalice Lighting:** As is our custom, we start by lighting our chalice flame, as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

As we step towards an unknown future.  
We rejoice in the winter light, as like this candle flame,  
It warms and heartens us.  
We rejoice in the gift of this new morning,  
We rejoice in the light of this new day,  
May it make plain our paths as this New Year unfolds before us,  
This opportunity for a new beginning ...

**Opening Words:** by Rev John Andrew Storey, a former minister of this church

The ceaseless flow of endless time  
No one can check or stay;  
We'll view the past with no regret,  
Nor future with dismay.

The present slips into the past,  
And dream-like melts away;  
The breaking of tomorrow's dawn  
Begins a new today.

The past and future ever meet  
In the eternal now:  
To make each day a thing complete  
Shall be our New Year vow

Let us open our hearts to each other and to this New Year, as we join in singing our first hymn, which expresses our hopes so well. For those with a green hymnbook, its no 172. The words will appear on the screen:

**1st Hymn:** Green Book No 172 "All are Welcome Here"

**Prayers: a) For this New Year, just begun; by Judith Smith-Valley, American UU**

Eternal Spirit, God of light and darkness,  
at this time of year, when days are short and nights are long,  
as we take stock of life, as we reflect on success and defeat,  
allow us an awareness of how far we have come.  
Remind us of friends and family who remain steadfast and dear to us.  
Remind us to bundle together and keep warm within our family and community.  
Rejoice with us in our accomplishments and mourn with us our losses.  
Help us to make workable resolutions and goals, knowing that our personal lives touch  
and influence the lives of others. Give us perspective to make priorities.  
Be with us, Eternal Spirit, as we render designs and draw blueprints for the year to come,  
..... so be it ... *A M E N*

**A Time of Prayer and Meditation:**

Spirit of Life and Love, At this threshold of another year in the life of the world, We pray  
that the world may not be spoiled by greed. Teach us to be grateful for your bounty, and to  
care for it as we should.

Teach us to limit our desires to what we need for life, Rather than living for desire.

Spirit of Life and Love, As we approach another year in the life of humanity,  
We pray for all our sisters and brothers throughout the world. Teach us to welcome the  
unlovely as well as the gifted, And to care for them as we should.  
May we limit our ambitions to what is healthy for society, rather than living for ourselves.

As we approach another year in the life of the spirit,  
We pray to make connections that will bring peace to all. Teach us to limit our quest for  
truth to that which is loving, and to give it to others as we should.  
May we be bringers of hope in the midst of suffering, rather than heralds of the unattainable.

Spirit of Life and Love,  
Help us to make another year in the life of the world one to look back on with joy.

Early in this New Year,  
I ask the Spirit of Life for renewal.  
Even though my body has been changed by the passing years,  
And my face lined with tears as well as laughter by life's experiences,  
Even though I have fallen short, and not been the best that I  
could be, Even though I have turned away from those in need,  
I ask the Spirit of Life for renewal.

## **A Seasonal Story: 'The Book with many pages'** adapted from a story by Emilie Poulsson

Two children, Mary and John, were playing together a few days after Christmas, when a Fairy in shimmering clothes of many colours and with shiny wings suddenly appeared. She said, "I have been sent to give you New Year presents from Father Time." She gave each child a package, then vanished as suddenly as she had appeared.

Mary and John opened their packages and found two beautiful books, with pages as pure and white as freshly fallen snow ...

.... The months and the seasons passed, and it was Christmas again. A few days later the Fairy returned to the children. "I have brought you each another book" she said, "and will take the first ones back to Father Time."

"Can't I keep mine a little longer?" asked John. "I have hardly thought about it lately. I'd like to paint something on the last page."

"No," said the Fairy; "I must take it just as it is."

"I wish I could look through mine just once," said Mary. "I have only seen one page at a time, for when the leaf turns over it sticks fast, and I can never open the book at more than one place each day."

"You shall both look at your books," said the Fairy. She lit two little silver lamps, so they could see the pages as she turned them.

The children looked in wonder. Could these be the same fair books she had given them a year ago? Where were the clean, white pages, as pure and beautiful as freshly fallen snow? .... Here was a page with ugly spots and scratches upon it...on the very next page was a lovely little picture. Some pages were decorated with gold, silver and gorgeous colours, others with beautiful flowers, or bright rainbows. Yet even on the most beautiful page were ugly blots & marks.

Mary and John looked up at the Fairy. "Who did this?" they asked. "Every page was white and fair as we opened to it; but now there isn't a single blank place in the whole book!"

"Shall I explain some of these pictures?" said the Fairy, smiling at them.

"You see, Mary, roses blossomed on this page when you let the baby have your toys; and John, this pretty butterfly, is on this page because you tried to be kind and pleasant the other day, instead of starting a quarrel."

"But what made this blot?" asked Mary.

"That," said the Fairy sadly; "came when you told a fib - and this one when you didn't do what your mum asked. Every ugly blot and scratch in your books was made when you were naughty. Every pretty thing in your books came when you were good."

"Oh, if we could only have the books again!" said Mary and John.

"That cannot be," sighed the Fairy. "You see, they are dated for this year just ending, and now they must go back into Father Time's bookcase, but I have brought you each a new one. Perhaps you can make these more beautiful than last year's."

So saying, she vanished, and the children were left alone, but each held a new book open at the first page. And on the cover of each book was written in letters of gold, "For the New Year."

## **Reading: 'The Old Year' by John Clare**

The Old Year's gone away  
To nothingness and night:  
We cannot find him all the day  
Nor hear him in the night:  
He left no footstep, mark or place  
In either shade or sun:  
The last year he'd a neighbour's face  
In this he's known by none.

All nothing everywhere:  
Mists we on mornings see  
Have more of substance when they're here  
And more of form than he.

He was a friend by every fire,  
In every cot and hall --  
A guest to every heart's desire,  
And now he's nought at all.

Old papers thrown away,  
Old garments cast aside,  
The talk of yesterday,  
Are things identified;  
But time once torn away  
No voices can recall:  
The eve of New Year's Day  
Left the Old Year lost to all.

## **A Meditation for New Year - 'Each Day' by Rev Andy Pakula**

With each new day, we are offered another step in life's sacred journey, an invitation to join in the flow of life that streams around us .....

Today, we may face a barren desert landscape to cross, parched as our reserves of hope dwindle .....

Some days, a lush oasis appears, offering its succulent gifts of joy to delight our hearts  
Each day, we arrive, but not to stay ...

We travel on, pilgrims in search of the holy land that glistens in our dreams,  
Journeying toward a destination that we must seek and that none ever reach

Spirit of the journey, God of many names, may we step out boldly, venturing eagerly forward  
accepting all that each mile has to offer .....

May we know that within the journey itself lies our destination  
And that the holy city waits to be discovered in every heart. AMEN

**Silence of about 1 ½ mins, followed by**

**Piano music by Lizzie Hornby approx. 3 mins**

### **ADDRESS – New Year Thoughts**

“Happy New Year” to you all, whether you sitting here in the church or watching online. Surrounded by tinsel, cards and the Crib scene and the Tree, as here in church and maybe at home, for we are only part way through the 12 days of Christmas, it is incredible to think it’s a year since we had no option but to watch at home or read services last January - so much has happened in those twelve months! Some of it good, some otherwise.

Our prayers and meditations have reflected on the dual nature of existence as we journey through life. It’s appropriate that the first month of a New Year is called January, after the two-faced Roman god Janus. He looked both back at the past and forward to the future. The New Year offers a chance to reflect on past events, whether good, bad or indifferent, hopefully learning something from those experiences, and to look forward, to find a way ahead, with the help of family and friends, whether, as Andy Pakula writes, we feel we are facing a barren desert landscape, or delighting in some lush oasis.

The past year has been a very mixed one, for individuals in our congregation, for the church itself and of course, for the whole world. We remember the events, we tell the stories - we celebrate the joys and support each other through the sorrows. Several of us had very difficult things to deal with, experiencing health conditions ourselves, or concern for the well-being of loved ones. We may feel helpless, thinking we can do little to help, but the seemingly trivial support we *can* offer *is so important*, whether its sending a card, making a phone call, or in more recent months, making a visit in person, and even meeting up, to remind them they are not alone, and still very much part of our caring community.

But we also had cause for celebrations, including arrival of grandchildren and great grandchildren, the re-opening of our building for services of worship and community events, and enrolling six people into formal membership.

In the wider world, of course, overshadowing all were enormous concerns for the health of humanity in the continuing pandemic, offset to some extent by the progress of vaccination programme in the rich countries, but so many in poorer countries have yet to have even one ‘jab’. As has been said many times before, in this place and in many other places around the world, ‘None of us is safe until all are safe’.

The health of the planet itself is a huge concern, as we witness increasingly unpredictable weather, affecting natural and human habitats with their attendant loss of human lives and economies, examples we’ve seen in parts of the world this past year, even these past few days. Even here in UK, record breaking unseasonably high temperatures. Humanitarian consequences of war and conflict add to the worry. In the darkest moments, I wonder what can I, do to help? How best to spend my time?

How should we spend our time on this earth? We don't have forever to decide, as we've made so rudely aware this past year. Every January reminds me of this, as yet another year seems to have flown by. At such times, it's easier to understand why the ancient Psalmist said, "So teach us to number our days, that we might get a heart of wisdom." Indeed, realising that my own days are numbered reminds me that I must choose wisely about how to spend them. There are many paths to follow. Some may lead me deeper

into the wonder and mystery, toward greater awareness and appreciation for the miracle of life, and I pray for the wisdom to decide which paths are best.

It's important not to let ourselves become discouraged if our individual efforts seem paltry. I read somewhere the words of Dr. Charlie Clement, past-President of the Unitarian Universalist in USA following what became known as 'The Boxing Day Tsunami' nearly 20 years ago.

"It is important to believe that you can make a difference. History is seldom made by individuals but rather by the sum of their responses in any situation. Your contribution no matter how small, in the face of the massive needs can make a difference."

He continued by saying how important it is to persevere, quoting from the Talmud: 'Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

Do justly, now. Love mercy, now, Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

He said, "I suppose the Talmud is speaking here of the quality of transcendence – of our connection to the larger universe, where we appreciate others and are grateful for their efforts. Where we, despite it all, maintain some sort of spirituality and hope for the universe"

I think someone who would have agreed is South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who died a week ago at the age of 90. His many decades of work campaigning against apartheid and later for Peace and Reconciliation in its aftermath, as well as for equal rights for women in the clergy and for the LGBTQI community were recognised around the world and included the Nobel Peace Prize. He understood that we cannot allow ourselves to be haunted by past events, but have to address the wrongs before we can move on. In '**No Future Without Forgiveness**' he wrote "the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage."

In *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World* he wrote "Transformation begins in you, wherever you are, whatever has happened, however you are suffering. Transformation is always possible. We do not heal in isolation. When we reach out and connect with one another—when we tell the story, name the hurt, grant forgiveness, and renew or release the relationship—our suffering begins to transform... "When we stay stuck in the unhappy story of what we have done we deny ourselves the

gift of transformation. Learning from our past is not the same as being held hostage by the things we have done. ***At some stage we must let go of the past and begin again.***"

What has happened in the past cannot be changed, as the children in our story learnt; once a day has ended, we cannot go back and change it, whether we have beautified it with kind words and deeds, or spoiled and blotched it with bad behaviour and selfishness.

As John Clare wrote in his poem, "The Old Year's gone away to nothingness ... and time once torn away no voices can recall":

I'm not going to leave you there!

So what can we do? We cannot change the past, however much we look back with longing or regret. Fretting will achieve nothing, we *cannot change what has been done*, we get stuck in a circle and there's little chance of moving on. So we do what we *can*. We can learn from our past. That, as Desmond Tutu counselled, is not the same as being held hostage by what we have done. "*At some stage we must let go of the past and begin again.*"

My thinking is maybe that's what New Year is really all about – *letting go of the past and beginning again.*" Lets try that, concentrating on the things we would like to see happen, and begin again, working towards them together, in whatever ways we are able.

Remember, it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. So write a list and light a candle and you've made your start, and may our stories be a little more how we would like them to be in the year ahead. In the words of our final hymn, let us pledge ourselves to greater service, to show the world a new community. **AMEN**  
So lets raise our voices and sing our final hymn,

**2nd Hymn:** Green Book No. 192 'A New Community'

**Closing Words:** Prayer for New Year - Written by Win Andrews, sister of Eve Brown and sister-in-law to our own dear Ralph Brown. Win played an active part in church life for many years, and was a kindly host to Committee meetings and other events. She wrote this prayer for New Years Eve 2005, the words as true today as they were then:

"Early in this New Year, let us give thanks for friends and fellowship, and particularly the fellowship of this community.

Let us be one in hatred of all wrong,  
One in our love of all things sweet and fair  
One in the power that makes thy children free  
To follow truth and thus to follow thee.  
May we face the uncertain future with courage, kindness and integrity.

Grant us the gifts of sympathy and companionship, and the grace of good humour and laughter to lighten our path through the New Year.... Happy New Year!"

**Extinguish Chalice**

**Closing Music Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEc2P-hOqgl>