

Hope Refreshed

By Heather Ford Lark

For many, a new year has a quiet way of stirring hope. I, for one, find there's a quiet wishful anticipation on New Year's Eve of what may be, what could be, in the year ahead, and I have a calendar with beautiful images painted by my daughter, one for each month of 2026, many pages- as yet blank- but ready for new events, and new opportunities, prayers finally answered.

In many churches, the first Sunday of Advent was marked by the lighting of a candle representing Hope – the hope that comes through Jesus Christ – and maybe also for us all the hope of some nostalgia and warmth, good cheer, carols and gifts.

Already that is an increasingly distant memory, but God is still writing our story, and whatever the past year held for each of us, hope is not exhausted. That hope can be refreshed day by day.

As the year begins, maybe we look back, and remember joys we wish we could experience again and losses we wish we could undo. Scripture encourages us to remember the past, but not to live there.

Whilst God meets us in our memories, He also invites us forward. A new year is an invitation to place the past—good and bad—into God's hands and trust Him with what comes next.

Christian hope is not wishful thinking or warm feelings. It is grounded in the unchanging character of God. Circumstances change, emotions fluctuate, and plans go wrong, but God remains faithful. When we say our hope is “refreshed,” we are not saying that life will suddenly be easy. As Christians we are declaring that our confidence is anchored in Jesus who does not change.

Not everyone enters the new year feeling excited. Some step into January exhausted, carrying unanswered prayers and heavy hearts. Already for some there has been trauma and loss, such as those experiencing the horrific fire in a Bar in Switzerland early on New Year's Day. Even in this first week of the new year, we may have lost a loved one, experienced sadness, or simply find our energy low, and our motivation lacking, as winter's cold, dark evenings combine with post-holiday anticlimax, or financial stress due to having spent more than we intended.

If that is us, or someone we know, we can take note that God does not ask us to pretend we are okay; He invites us to come as we are. Hope is refreshed when we stop striving and start looking to God, trusting that He is at work, experiencing His help, especially when we feel weak and flat, and when bad or sad things happen.

January often comes with resolutions and goals, and carefully outlined plans, but hope grows when we hold our plans on open hands- but hold firmly to our faith.

The experience of many is that when we offer our plans to God, we are not giving up anything good; because God's purposes are always larger, wiser, and more loving than what we can imagine. The One who made us surely knows us better than we know ourselves.

And this gift of hope is not meant to be hidden, kept from view because others do not feel it. In a world marked by fear, division, anxiety and uncertainty, Christians are called to live differently—not because life is easier for us, but because Christ is with us.

When we respond with grace instead of resentment, faith instead of fear, and love instead of indifference, we become living examples of hope renewed. This is not denying pain or avoiding realities, but rather choosing to believe that God is still redeeming, still restoring, still comforting and strengthening.

Only today I read in a Church Times newspaper (from June 2025) about an Iranian woman, Samira, who started to attend an underground church around the time of the 2022 protests that followed the death in police custody of a young woman, Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for alleged violations of the law on head coverings. I read

that Samira was drawn to the church after witnessing how a Christian friend was able to remain so calm amid the turmoil.

People around us notice how we respond and react even though we may not see it for ourselves. Our hope becomes a light—not blinding or boastful, but steady and warm—pointing others toward Jesus Christ.

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to refresh our hope is through prayer. We may wonder if we have the right words to pray, but I think honest, as-it-really-is prayer is what matters, rather than something we think we ought to say.

As the year begins, and throughout, we can bring God our hopes and our worries, as well as our gratitude. We can remind ourselves that we are not walking into the future alone.

Maybe we can pray something like this:

Lord, I don't know what this year will hold, but I trust You with it. Renew my hope and be with me and help me day by day." Amen.

The same caring God who brought us through last year will walk with us through this one too.