

## Column

One of the oldest gods of the ancient Roman world was one by the name of Janus. He was believed to look after doors and gateways. It is for this reason that his name got attached to the first month of the new year. The Romans called this month *Januarius*; we call it January.

More than that, statues of Janus often depicted him as having two faces, each looking in opposite directions. He is therefore perfect for the new year since that is what people do as one calendar is pulled down and another is hung up. They look back at the road they have travelled over the past 12 months and forward into the midst of the unknown.

Janus is a mythical god, but thank goodness the God unveiled for us in Jesus Christ is not. He is in fact lord of both past and future. In Revelation 22:13, we hear Him say: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Jesus is the reality of which Janus is the parody.

There is, nevertheless, something we can learn from Janus. That is, to pause and reflect where we have come from and where we are headed.

As we look back, we shall surely find moments of joy and sorrow, inspiration and perplexity, achievement and failure, progress and regression. Yet, through all these ups and downs, if we look carefully, we shall find that there was Someone walking beside us and perhaps even at times carrying us.

God's past acts of faithfulness give us cause for hope and courage as we look in the opposite direction, into a future all unknown. Words loved by millions throughout many generations come to the fore: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort [strengthen] me."

Janus has no reality; but Jesus, the One who puts a human face on the invisible God as no one in all history (Colossians 1:15), has. Take courage and look to Him.

In 1939 three months after the Second World War had begun in Europe, King George VI included a portion of a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins in his Christmas broadcast to the British Empire. In some accounts, it was 13-year-old Princess Elizabeth who found this poem and give it the King. It reads:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: / "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown". / And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. / That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way".

These words still stand and serve as a guide as we enter 2023.

*O ETERNAL Lord God, who hast brought thy servants to the beginning of another year: Pardon, we humbly beseech thee, our transgressions in the past, and graciously abide with us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (English Proposed Book of Common Prayer, 1928)*

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