

New Year Message from the Bishop of Burnley

I love New Year, but it also reminds me of one of the most embarrassing incidents of my life. I was at a family New Year lunch and my cousin had turned up with his new girlfriend; a beautiful, posh, wealthy young woman dressed in a fabulous electric blue dress which seemed rather out of place amidst our scruffy family.

Over pudding, wanting to make her feel welcome, I offered her some cream to go with her apple pie. I shook up the can, pointed the nozzle at the plate she was holding out to me and squirted. I don't know what went wrong.

Maybe it was the angle, but the cream seemed to bounce off the surface of the pie and splattered itself all over the front of her fabulous dress where the stain grew and grew.

The party broke up soon after that, as did my cousin's chances of marriage.

I wished I could have gone back to the beginning and started all over again. And that's a wish that many people make quite often. When we make a mistake, hurt another person, get our lives in a mess, we want to go back to the beginning and start all over again.

Well here's the good news. In Jesus you can do exactly that. In the birth of Jesus God has done something new – not new to him, but new to us.

He has sent his son. And because God has done something new, so we can start anew. In that child there is forgiveness, new life, a fresh start.

As we begin this new year, where in your life would you like to see or make a new start?

I am praying at the moment for three new starts.

The first is for a new start in our political life. May the angry and discordant voices that bombard us at the moment sit down together and listen to each other so that together we can carve out a new future for our nation and go on being a voice for peace and justice in our world.

The second is for a new start for the poor. So many of our urban areas are ravaged today by the contemporary four horsemen of the apocalypse – low-paid jobs, universal credit, debt and austerity.

These things are preventing people from taking control of their lives or finding solutions to their problems. Let's pray for a more just nation in which all can be set free to fulfil the potential God has given them.

And the third is a new start for the planet. We human beings are in danger of becoming a blight on the surface of the earth; polluting it and cooking it with our addiction to oil-based consumerism.

May we take seriously the climate deal recently made in Poland and all play our part in living in harmony with this beautiful world that God has made.

And I am not just praying for those three new starts. I am praying that I might play my part in them as I make a new start myself with Jesus. Because I know that whenever I turn to Him, He sets me free to use my gifts in his service.

What new starts are you praying for as this new year begins?

Perhaps it's a new start in your family, in your community, or in our world?

In Jesus there is always a new start. And that new start begins with you. Have a very happy new year.