

New Year's Around the World

The calendar flips to 2018 at midnight on Sunday. The New Year will be welcomed in a variety of ways.

New Year's Eve, with its emphasis on romance and indulgence, might seem like a totally secular celebration, but underneath all that glitter and sparkle is an ancient holiday with deep spiritual roots.


That's the pronouncement of Waverly Fitzgerald, a writer and teacher living in Seattle, Washington, who is considered a holiday guru, having studied seasonal holidays for more than 25 years. In her book, *The Meaning of New Year's Traditions*, she said that for centuries, and in similar ways, people have been observing the end of one year and the beginning of another.



Here are just a few of the New Year's rituals she has identified from cultures across the centuries and around the world:

- In England, the Twelve Days of Christmas were considered omen days that could be used to predict the weather in the coming year.
- In Scotland, no court had power during these days.
- In Ireland, tradition held that if a person died during the Twelve Days, he or she went straight to heaven.
- In many cultures, people jump into the sea or a local body of water – washing the slate of the previous year clean.
- In Ecuador, people make dummies, stuffed with straw, to represent the events of the past year. These effigies are burned at midnight, thus symbolically getting rid of the past.
- The American custom of spending the night with the one you love and kissing him or her at midnight ensures that the relationship will flourish during the coming year.
- In Greece, it is customary to throw a pomegranate wrapped in silver foil on the threshold to spread the seeds of good luck for an abundant year.
- Neapolitans still wrap dried figs in laurel leaves and exchange them as a kind of insurance of abundance for the coming year.
- Even the color of underwear Brazilians wear on the first day of the New Year has meaning. Pink brings love; yellow, prosperity; and white, peace and happiness.

(more)



“Although many of these customs may seem like, and indeed are, superstitious,” Fitzgerald said, “they all stem from a similar belief: by ending the old year with respect and beginning the new one in the way we would like it to begin, we establish our intentions for the New Year.”

However we may celebrate the changeover, she added, we are acknowledging an important transition and welcoming a fresh start.

What are we to draw from all of this?

While the celebration of the New Year can serve as a great time of reflection and resolve, believers in Christ don’t need superstition or ritual to reset the past and reimagine a better tomorrow.

Scripture assures us that God’s mercies are “new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23 NKJV).

The Apostle Paul said: *Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day* (2 Corinthians 4:16 NIV).

Those are important promises to count on as we enter a new season of our lives.

– Beecher Hunter