

Stories of Hope (1): New Year customs

- How much do you know about New Year customs around the world?

The Netherlands

- Bonfires of Christmas trees; fireworks
 - symbolising putting the past behind them in order to focus on welcoming the new...

China

- Visit family and friends
 - fire-crackers (bangers!); lots of them!
 - red lanterns
 - new clothes and other presents
 - special food
 - hope for good prosperity in the coming year...

Japan

- In December, the Japanese throw **Bonenkai** or "forget-the-year" parties
 - again, a way of putting the problems and concerns of the past behind and preparing for a new beginning...

Spain

- 12 grapes at midnight for 12 happy months

Scotland

- First footing
 - coal
 - whisky, shortbread...
- *And New Year Resolutions*
 - stating one's intentions, or hopes, for the year ahead...
- Bible doesn't have much to say about New Year directly!
 - but it has lots to say about **hope**
 - as we have recently celebrated New Year...
 - **and in the midst of credit crunch / recession, what has God got to say to us about hope?**
 - **we'll explore that during the course of the service...**

Stories of Hope (2): New Year hope

- Shout out favourite stories of hope:
 - what elements are common to them?
- Looking for things like:
 - threat of evil
 - need for heroes or warriors
 - fact that often these heroes or warriors are unlikely or overlooked
 - need for hope even in the face of despair
 - encouragement and strengthening coming from a key good character (Obi Wan Kenobi, Gandalf, etc)
 - epic battles or conflicts
 - bravery and struggle
 - risk or self-sacrifice
 - and ultimately the triumph of good over evil
- So many of our favourite stories follow this pattern:
 - Lord of the Rings
 - Star Wars
 - Harry Potter...

- We need hope just as much in our daily lives - probably why we like these **hope stories** so much
- That's what the writer of Hebrews was thinking about as he wrote:
 - warning, first, of the danger of listless, lazy, pointless living - living without hope (v.12)
 - and wanting to remind his readers - **and us!** - that the story of God and his interactions with us is an epic story, laced with hope
- Writer to Hebrews - like Obi Wan or Gandalf encouraging us
 - epic story - God has defeated evil
 - Jesus is the living proof that God's promises can be trusted
 - the hope we have when we put our trust in Jesus is an anchor for the soul (v.19); **"anchor for our lives"** (GNB)