

Old prayers for the new year

by [Edward J. Blum](#) and [Kate Bowler](#)

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For this end-of-the-year post, we asked our favorite historians and writers to share prayers from the past that could serve as guides for our present.

**From [Martin E. Marty](#):**

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;  
Curb those who by deceit and sword  
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son  
And bring to naught all He has done.

O Comforter of priceless worth,  
Send peace and unity on earth;  
Support us in our final strife  
And lead us out of death to life.

[full text](#) by Martin Luther

**From Amy DeRogatis:**

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear? . . .

[full text](#) by [Mary Oliver](#), 1992

**From [Nicole C. Kirk](#):**

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone . . .

[full text](#) by Howard Thurman

**From John Wilsey and Phillip Luke Sinitiere:**

We pray tonight, O God, for confidence in ourselves, our powers and our purposes in this beginning of a New Year. . . .

[full text](#) by W. E. B. Du Bois

**From [Paul Putz](#):**

I pray that every passing hour  
Your hearts may bruise and beat  
I pray that every step you take  
May bruise and burn your feet!  
. . . I pray that you may live to writhe  
'Neath every pang we've known  
Then haply may Almighty God  
Spare the supreme avenging rod  
And say the miles that you had trod  
Shall of themselves atone!

[full text](#) of "A New Year's Prayer for 1915" (from WWI)

**From [Carol Howard Merritt](#):**

Open unto me—light for my darkness.  
Open unto me—courage for my fear. . . .

[full text](#) by Howard Thurman

**From Janine Giordano Drake:**

Blessed Michael, Archangel,  
defend us in the hour of conflict;

be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil.  
May God restrain him, we humbly pray;  
and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host,  
by the power of God, thrust, down to hell, Satan,  
and with him the other wicked spirits

who wander through the world for the ruin of souls.

Amen.

Translation used in Ireland [of a prayer from the Latin mass](#)

*Our weekly feature Then and Now harnesses the expertise of American religious historians who care about the cities of God and the cities of humans. It's published in partnership with [the Kripke Center](#) of Creighton University and edited by [Edward J. Blum](#) and [Kate Bowler](#).*