

Dear Friends

As I write this letter my head is still full of the memories of a Baptism service that I have just carried out. Baptisms are always very happy occasions for which family and friends are often willing to make quite long and arduous journeys. However, this was especially the case for one family this morning.

Overnight there had been a very heavy fall of snow and when the family woke up they found that their drive was not only covered by several inches, but also three trees which had been brought down by the inclement weather. Now I have to say that I think it likely that many people would have simply given up on the idea of making the journey – after all, they had no idea how bad the rest of the roads were, and as for the return journey, well all they knew was that snow was still falling and expected to continue to do so for several hours. It was likely to be a challenge.

However, they felt that it was really important that they join the rest of the family on this special occasion so they set about with shovels and chain saws to clear the drive and release the car from it's enforced imprisonment.

Well all this got me thinking. When the wise men set out to follow the star two thousand years ago, they had no idea where they were going, how far it was likely to be or when or how they would get back. They undoubtedly realised that there were going to be challenges to overcome, but, as with today's Baptism family, that didn't stop them setting out. They simply saw the star, recognised it's importance, got together the provisions they thought they were most likely to need for the journey and set off – and I have no doubt that they were very glad they did.

Many people say life is like a journey – starting with our birth then on through our childhood into adulthood and then the twilight years and end of life. As we travel we will all no doubt encounter both good times and challenging times. We will enjoy happy times but also find ourselves contending with much sadder times. There will be times when we seem to achieve everything that we set out to achieve and others where life seems frustratingly stagnant. However, it is in these more challenging, sad and frustrating times that I think we can all learn a couple of very important things from both the wise men and the family travelling to the Baptism.

Both sets of travellers appreciated the enormity of their quest and they knew that their journeys were not going to be easy, however they set their sights on the ultimate destination and steadfastly kept going. In addition, we need to remember that there were a number of wise men who followed the star and there were also three people in the car travelling down from Buckinghamshire. I would like to think that they were all very good travelling companions who helped and encouraged each other as they went along.

The beginning of 2018 heralds a new leg on all of our “journey's”, for some it will be good and uplifting, for others more challenging or seem simply long and tedious. Each of you will be approaching this New Year in a different way. However, just like the wise men and the Baptism family we are not expected to travel alone.

The vast majority of you will have family and friends who you will automatically think about here. But, they aren't the only "Good Companions" who can help you with your journey. We have a Heavenly Father who promises to be with us at all times and in all places – no matter how high the high or low the low – and who can always be relied upon to give us all the support and guidance we need – even at times when those we thought we could rely on most are unable to do so. But it's not just God who wants to share your journey with you, each of our four villages also has it's own Church (big C because it's the people not the building) which want to do so too, helping you, celebrating with you and even mourning with you when things don't quite turn out as hoped for. But more than that, please remember that these churches would also like you to share their journey through the year too. So please, come and support us for any or all of the special events that we have planned, attend some of our services...get involved and enjoy the companionship of the journey shared.

Wishing you all a blessed journey through 2018

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Hona". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.