How has your year been? What’s the journey been like through the last 12 months?

I found myself starting a life history this past week, rather to my surprise. I think it may be seen something to do with turning sixty earlier in the year. I wonder if you’ve ever embarked on the same thing? If you have, did you give it a title? Perhaps you’d like to let me know at the end of the service what it was? I’ve tentatively called mine, ‘I wouldn’t change a thing’: not that that is exactly true, or even largely true, in terms of each specific event. But the events together add up to a journey, and if the journey had been different, I would not have ended up here – and here is a place I’m thankful to be.

Journeys are at the heart of the Christmas story. The Journey to Bethlehem, of course – which is also the title of our gloriously chaotic Christmas Eve Nativity service here in the Cathedral – the journey Mary and Joseph make from their home town of Nazareth to Bethlehem – incredibly challenging, it the late stages of pregnancy, I often think. But there’s also the journey made before that, of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth in the bill country. And the journey later with the child, fleeing from the terror of Herod (what did May and Joseph do with the gold the wise men brought – they used it to pay for the flight to Egypt!) But before and after those journeys, there is the journey of God to be with his people, and the journey of God’s people to come back to God. Life itself is a great journey – for some, a journey home, if they know their home is heaven.

Journeys are defined by their starting points and destinations – after all, a journey is, by definition, not made by staying in the same place. It’s good to be clear about where we are going, and it can help to mow where we’ve come from. A moment or two reflecting on that, especially at these turning points of the year, is always worthwhile. What decisions could I be making, perhaps to get my life back on track?

But journeys are not only about destinations. We often say here in the Cathedral that reconciliation – something we might think our country needs now – is helpfully defined as ‘journeying from a fractured past towards a shared future’. We recognise that the fractures in our own lives and in our society will never been completely healed until the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth, and that will never come until one the last great journeys, the journey of Jesus’ return and of our gathering before him for judgement. In the meantime, we journey – and one of the other great decisions to make is not only about where we are heading, but who we will make that journey with.

Who will you journey with in this coming year? And what will be the character of your journey? It’s sometimes said that if your vision defines what you are aiming for, your values describes the character of your journey – and we may follow a person not so much because of where they are heading, but because of what they would be like to travel with. What are your values? What might they say about you? Sometimes we choose to associate with others, because of what that might say about us.

Here in the Cathedral we think a lot about journeys, and about our values. We have a journey build right into our incredible building – a journey from destruction to rebuilding, from fracture to healing, from devastation to hope. Simply to walk through the building is to make a journey, a journey that we pray will form us into those who can walk through despair in the world bring a message of hope, of love, of God’s promise of resurrection. These are messages we believe the world longs to hear – and we would love to encourage you to join us, if you wish, in this coming year. We have been reflecting a good deal on our values that will characterise that journey, too – values that we pray will characterise our journey together. There are seven of them:
Hospitality – of both people and ideas

Faith and Spirituality – being open to the challenge and resources of God

Reconciliation – embracing and welcoming difference and diversity

Art and Creativity – expressing the life of God amongst us in ways beyond words

Risk Taking – confidently stepping out of the familiar in the service of God

Excellence – always reaching beyond our present practice and experience

Community – respecting and caring for one another

If those sound your sort of thing, then you might want to consider finding out more about this Cathedral community and how you might be a part of it.

Whatever the journey we find ourselves making, it will have some parts that are good, and easy, and others that will be more challenging. The poem that Kathryn read earlier by Madeleine L’Engle, ‘Following the Star’, was really the inspiration for this address. It describes the journeys made by those seeking Jesus, those journeying once again to this place of awe and wonder we find ourselves in this evening. And it recognises that the journey we make each Christmas sits within and around all the journeys we make, and can, if we choose, give them meaning. All those journeys seeking to give or to receive love. All those journeys made in search of meaning, or significance. All those journeys fleeing from danger, or running, unwittingly, into it, find their resonances within the Christmas stories. All those journeys, shorter, or longer, in which we have discovered that the dark is not without stars, that there are places of joy, sacred places in which we open unexpected treasure. Journeys in which we find that we have to travel lightly, shedding burdens on the way in order to be free to move.

Life is a journey, in which we have been given sacred companions, seen and unseen, human and angelic. Here, this Christmas, we give thanks for those who have accompanied or pointed us on the way – and for the times when we have been able to do the same for others.

I have been enjoying a prayer of blessing recently, with which I will end this address:

Life is short, And we do not have much time, To gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So make haste to love, and be swift to be kind

And may the blessing of the one who journeys with us, the Father who created you, the Son who saved you, And the Spirit who gives you life, Be with you today and always. Amen.