

Step into 2019 with Jesus!

Bishop Stephen's New Year message for 2019



One of the joys of 2018 was returning to Spain to walk part of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. I first completed the northern Way of St James in the autumn of 2016. It's deeply satisfying for the soul when prayer, solitude and the unrelenting tread of boot leather come together. During the pilgrimage, yellow arrows painted on lampposts guided me through mountainous terrain. I came to rely on these arrows in this unfamiliar, beautiful place.

One year yielding to another can be unsettling. We look back at the past year and think of the unexpected things that happened. We know the year ahead is full of the unforeseen but hope that our loved ones and ourselves are kept safe from harm and sadness.

We each approach the New Year in different ways. Memories of the past and expectations of the future will lead some of you to go to bed early and gladly miss Jools Holland's Hootenanny. Many of our sisters and brothers in the diocese now spend the hours around midnight in prayer and praise.

Where I walked in Spain, Christmas and the New Year pass with little fanfare. Instead, young people look to the Epiphany on the sixth of January. On the night before, children will leave their shoes on the windowsill stuffed with hay and carrots to feed the horses of Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar as they make their pilgrimage to Bethlehem to worship baby Jesus. The children hope that the Magi will leave them a present in return for horse food. They might also delight in the thought that these exotic travellers will carry them in their hearts as they come into the presence of the saviour of the world.

2019 does not come with yellow arrows painted on lampposts to help guide us through the unforeseen territory ahead. We wouldn't have a fulfilling earthly pilgrimage if we did. Perhaps the children of Spain have the right idea. They bathe in the light and joy of the Epiphany; where simply being in the presence of Jesus provides the hope and trust needed to navigate the year ahead with joy.

With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name 'Stephen' in a cursive script.

Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell
Bishop of Chelmsford