BBC Calendar for Lent Day 28

Previous day

Father Forgive Them (Part 1)

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

There was a man who unfortunately couldn't speak a word as he was mute, but he was asked how he'd describe the word 'forgiveness'. He took a pencil and wrote, 'It is the beautiful fragrance a flower yields when trampled upon.' Words are like windows! They let us see into the speaker's mind and heart.

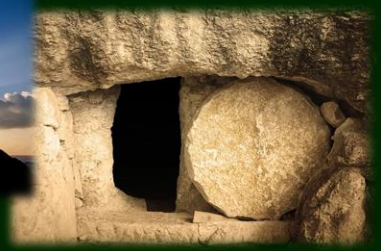
The first recorded words Jesus spoke from the cross were, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." This was the first of the seven sentences he spoke from the cross and was the foundation for the others he uttered. Jesus possessed a deep, godly, divine and forgiving heart, even towards those that were causing his excruciatingly painful and slow death.

Isaiah 53:10 opens the window into the heart of God the Father when it says, 'Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.' This does not mean that God took a fiendish delight in the suffering of Jesus, but rather the death of Jesus had God's approval because it was in accordance with his eternal will. The Saviour who died at Calvary in history was slain in the heart of God from the world's foundation.

God took human hatred and used it to demonstrate divine love. He is in the process of doing this even today. On Calvary's hill that fateful day, there were three deaths, three different kinds of death… (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Father, for your great salvation plan, agreed with your Son before the dawn of time. Thank you that Jesus fulfilled it perfectly at just the right time in history



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 27

Previous day Next day

Justification (Romans 3:24)

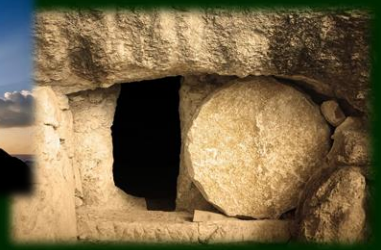
'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus'

The doctrine of **Justification** provides the answer to the all-important question of how the unrighteous - sinners of 'the deepest dye' - like you and me, can be judged as righteous (i.e. sinless) in the sight of a righteous and holy God. (Psalm 24:3-4; Isaiah 1:18).

'Justification' arises from the language of the law-court and the Day of Judgement. The biblical idea is that God, the righteous Judge, declares the verdict of **'just'** (or righteous) on the accused (defendant), the unjust, who, apart from the mediatorial efficacy of Christ, the Just One, would be guilty of transgressing God's perfect standard of righteousness, as revealed in the Law of Moses. It must not be confused with the doctrines of regeneration, sanctification and glorification. It is not that the sinner is *made* righteous, which is the purpose of these teachings. Rather they are *declared* righteous and acquitted (or pardoned) by God of all guilt; that is, they are **justified**, or, as some preachers put it, **'Just-as-if-I'd'** never sinned! In other words, Christ's righteousness is credited to the sinner through faith in 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:20). So, at the heart of the gospel is the incredible truth that we sinners, though worthy of divine judgement, can know real peace with God today through the forgiveness of sins, and so experience true freedom. 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Romans 5:1). This is truly 'Amazing Grace!' *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Father God, that through the work of Jesus, his perfect righteousness is credited to us and you view us as free of all guilt. What an amazing exchange!



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 26

Previous day Next day

Mary (Part 2)

[For Part 1, see Day 6]

Mary with Jesus and the disciples were all at a wedding, when the wine ran out. She mentioned it to Jesus and soon the water in the jars became wine! 'He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.' (John 2:11). The teaching he also gave then must have made **Mary** see and feel his effect and power as well.

We read in Mark 3 that the family of Jesus looked for him as he spoke to a crowd indoors. They were concerned about him and didn't understand his purpose (v 21). Perhaps **Mary** was puzzled when she heard him say "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother".

Surely **Mary** followed him, prayed for and listened to him and to all she heard about him. What torture later to see her son hanging on a cross, perhaps remembering the angel's words to her years before. Jesus, as he died, committed her into the keeping of John, showing that he cared deeply for his mother, as **Mary** witnessed the last hours of Jesus's earthly life (John 19:25-27).

After the Ascension, Luke tells us in Acts 1:13-14 that she was in an upstairs room in Jerusalem praying with the eleven remaining apostles, other women and the brothers of Jesus. **Mary** knew her son was alive again, had conquered death and ascended to heaven, but must surely have known that this was just the beginning! *(Brenda)*

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, on this Mothering Sunday, we thank you for all mothers and pray that they will cherish and care for each child as Mary did for her son.

BBC Calendar for Lent Day 25

Previous day Next day

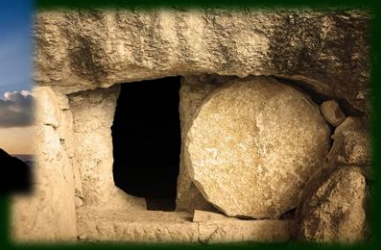
Spring is Coming!

Have you noticed that **springtime** is approaching? The days are lengthening, the weather is (sometimes) warmer, the daffodils are starting to flower, the birds are singing and the lambing season is underway.

As Brenda reminded us at the start of this calendar, our word **'Lent'** is derived from the word 'lencten', old English for 'spring'. We are already more than half way through Lent, and tomorrow will be the 4th Sunday, which has a special significance, being known as **Mothering Sunday**. It may be more commonly referred to now as Mother's Day, with the accompanying trappings of cards, flowers, presents and breakfast in bed for some, but was originally a day when workers returned to their 'mother churches' for a rare day off! However, it gives us an opportunity to think of the mothering aspect of God's love, which we will remember in our service tomorrow. We hope you will join us, and you may wish to have a square piece of paper to hand! All will be revealed... *(Judith)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, God, that you are both Father and Mother to your children. We remember those for whom tomorrow may be a difficult day, for all sorts of reasons, and pray that your love will surround each and every one.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 24

Previous day Next day

Counsellor (Part 2)

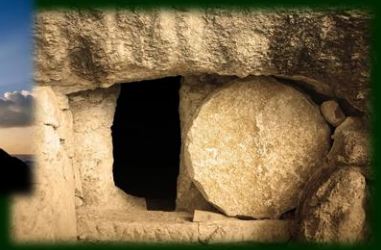
He gave the disciples a promise of 'another Comforter', which they were incapable of understanding, and to add confusion: "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." (John 14:18). Jesus said that he was 'going', yet somehow he would still be there! How? His personal presence had been brief, now it seemed that he would leave them. Speaking of the Comforter he used the Greek word allos, which means 'another of the same kind'. He was saying, "I'm going to pray to the Father and he will give you another **Counsellor**, another Comforter, another helper of exactly the same kind as I am."

As we face the unknowable future, and move towards Holy Week with Christ's passion, trial and crucifixion, we need to accept by faith, the presence of the Comforter who came on the Day of Pentecost to dwell in the church. He came at our conversion to dwell in our hearts (1 Corinthians 3:16). We should be filled with joy knowing that his indwelling presence is with us forever, and through his Spirit, we can face each new day whatever good or bad may come our way.

It's with eagerness and anticipation that we should listen for his voice as he speaks to our innermost being, as we study the scriptures, pray, and see a needy world. If we love our Lord and his people, shouldn't we be fully co-operating with this divine Comforter and **Counsellor** as we walk through this day and future days? For the disciples, the page of how they had been with Jesus was closing and was history, but a new page, a new dawn was opening up - and the same Jesus who had walked with them in the past was walking with them into the future. *(Bill)*

A Prayer for Today

Dear Heavenly Father, in the Name of Jesus, stir up within us the fullness of your Holy Spirit. Enable us to live in his power and use his gifts that you may be glorified.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 23

Previous day Next day

Counsellor (Part 1)

"I will ask the Father and he will give you another **Counsellor**, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth" (John 14:16-17)

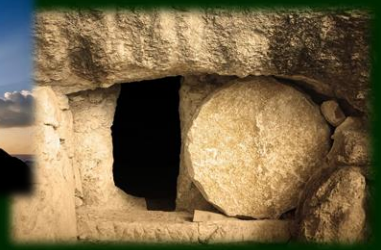
There are often sad and solemn moments in our lives when something gently ends. Like an old year moving off the pages of time into history. In contrast, it is exciting when a new year arrives, and is a blank page upon on which we will write new things that we never dreamt would happen during the year. The future can be seriously daunting and create an increasing anxiety within us. More so now, with the COVID pandemic which has taken so many lives and destroyed normal peaceful family life. COVID gives us a future that can look fearful and leaves many of us plagued with a sense of helplessness and insignificance.

Our Lord's disciples were horrified at thinking of the future without the comfort of his continuing companionship. He sought to allay their fears and challenged them to faithfulness with his promise of another **Counsellor**. Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus concentrated upon the twelve apostles. Much time was spent in seclusion to avoid his enemies and to strengthen the twelve for the task ahead with great and precious promises to fortify and encourage them.

"Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust me" (John 14:1). "Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, even greater, for I am going to be with my Father. You can ask for anything in my name and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father" (John 14:12-14). (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord, for being our refuge in times of trouble, keeping our feet steady upon the road and watching over us.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 22

Previous day | Next day

Names (Philippians 2:10-11)

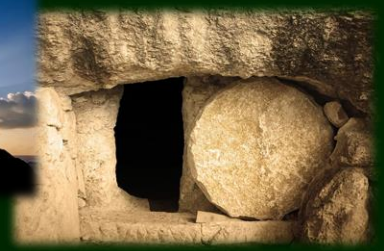
Have you ever thought what the meaning of your **name** is? Have you linked your **name** or names to any circumstances in your life? Sometimes I do. With some research amongst us, some **names caught my eye** (apologies if your name is not mentioned - everyone matters). Let's start with our church pastor:

- Alec - defender of the people (no wonder he is our pastor)
- Colin - victory of the people (well done, Colin)
- Paul - means humble (I have always thought our Paul comes across as warm; no surprise, as humble people are warm)
- Trevor - from the LARGE village (hello Trevor)
- Judith - means from Judaea (no way! Judith looks more English than Judaean)
- Janet - means God is Gracious (Janet actually comes across as gracious)
- Adewale (Western Nigerian origin) means the king/crown/royalty came home (perhaps I shall be going home after all) and of course, I had to be biased and put my name

Our **names** definitely do matter, as they are the symbol of our identity, but there is a **name** that means more than all of the world's populations combined, because 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth'. Any time life is more beautiful than first feared, look to **that name** and show your gratitude to him; more importantly, any time life is overwhelming, call on **THAT name** to which every knee should bow! *(Victor)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Prince of Peace, speak calmness to every troubling situation in our lives.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 21

Previous day Next day

Singing the Crucifixion

Various composers have written beautiful works about the passion and death of Christ. Two that remain in my memory are Stainer's 'Crucifixion' and Maunder's 'Olivet to Calvary'.

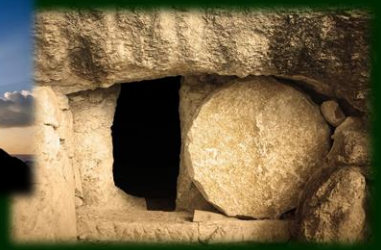
When I was in my teens I was in the choir at Leamington Road and we sang one of these two works on alternate years on Palm Sunday, with an augmented choir and 'imported' soloists. We were in a row up in the choir, ladies in front and the men behind and at the side – I wonder what it sounded like!! The photo *(click to enlarge)* shows the choir gallery (at that time a pipe organ was there rather than a curtain). It made you very familiar with the Bible words and feel the emotion of the solos and choruses. It was moving to sing words like 'Crucify Him', 'We have no king but Caesar' or to cry out 'Barabbas'.

One of my favourites was 'God so loved the world...' from 'The Crucifixion'. You can listen to that song sung beautifully here. The same work ends with a moving congregational hymn, which you can listen to here: "All for Jesus, all for Jesus, this our song shall ever be; for we have no hope, nor Saviour, if we have not hope in thee."

Choir and congregation sang it enthusiastically; the choir, not only because of its words and tune, but because our little choir had again successfully sung through that great work! *(Brenda)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord, for every reminder in word, song, music or art, of all that you have done on our behalf. May we never lose sight of it.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 20

Previous day
Next day

Pontius Pilate (Part 3)

Surely **Pilate** knew the crowd was being manipulated, but his job, on behalf of Rome, was to restore peace and calm. So he gave the crowd a choice, Jesus or Barabbas. Whatever it would take to remove the heat out of the situation, he was willing to do it.

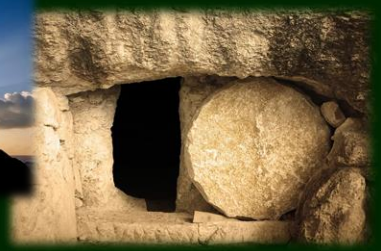
What was his thought pattern at that vital moment? Surely the crowd wouldn't want a murderer, a trouble maker, an insurgent like Barabbas released among them to carry on his nasty work, rather surely they would want the innocent and gentle-natured Jesus? Was he seeking Jesus' release via the crowd's reasoning? Whatever his reckoning, it went spectacularly wrong. The priests made sure of that! So Jesus was handed over for crucifixion.

What happened to **Pontius Pilate** after that? Later on he was responsible for the violent suppression and slaughter of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim, their sacred mountain. He was recalled back to Rome by Emperor Tiberius to answer for his actions, but Tiberius died before **Pilate's** return. Whether the Senate (Rome's governing body) dealt with the matter, no one knows, but like all rich Romans of the day, he more than likely would retire from civil life and live in luxury on the Naples coast, in a palatial villa.

Note: During excavation work, coinage minted during Pilate's governorship has been found, and also very recently a ring with his personal insignia on it. Was it his, did he lose it, or did he give it to someone he favoured who lost it? *(Bill)*

A Prayer for Today

What kind of love is this? What kind of man is this, that died in agony? He who had done no wrong was crucified for me. Thank you, Lord, for the love of Jesus.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 19

Previous day Next day

Pontius Pilate (Part 2)

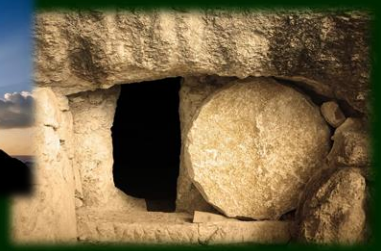
Philo of Alexander, a Jewish philosopher, said that **Pilate's** rule was corrupt and full of bribery. He allowed executions without trial and was cruel and vindictive. His behaviour wasn't all that different from other Roman rulers, but none did it more ruthlessly than **Pilate**. As long as he kept insurgency, riots and unrest under control, the Legate (higher-ranking Roman military officer) would not interfere with his command.

During his ten year governorship, his greatest ally was Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. At Jesus's trial, **Pilate** couldn't find anything to indict Jesus with: as far as he was concerned, it was purely a religious matter. **Pilate** was headstrong, ruthless, authoritative; he wasn't the type to be cowed by anyone or any crowd. Jesus's predicament wasn't a bother to him, despite the fact that his wife interceded for Jesus (Matt 27:19). What really bothered him was the restlessness of the crowd and ugly way it was behaving. The mob was probably made up mainly of temple priests and supporters of Barabbas, not the people of the town of Jerusalem!

They had been agitated and stirred up and the mood had turned vindictive and venomous, just as the priests had hoped for! **Pilate** could see that this could overspill and become a riot maybe turning into an uprising. He had to do something to quell the uproar! (Read the final Part 3 tomorrow)

A Prayer for Today

Help us, Lord, not to act solely in the interests of our own comfort and selfish desires, but to do what is right whatever the cost



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 18

Previous day
Next day

Pontius Pilate (Part 1)

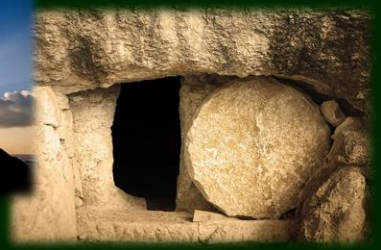
Pilate could find no charge against Jesus, yet he allowed an innocent man to be put to death. What kind of person would let that happen and why? Little is known about **Pontius Pilate's** early life and what happened to him after his Judean period, but his name is mentioned in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds ('suffered under Pontius Pilate') and in a few ancient writers' historical works. At Jesus' trial he is often portrayed as weak, ineffectual and abdicating his responsibilities by capitulating to the crowd, but is this really the case?

He came from the equestrian (middle class) strata of Rome's society. It may have got his lofty appointment because of a connection of his, Sejanus, who was a favourite of Tiberius the Roman Emperor. He would more than likely have had a military background. He had to be a good leader of men and be proficient in army matters. Because of his status and standing, the army would give him total respect, loyalty and obedience. Only a strict authoritarian, military background person could have suited this position, as Judea was a known high trouble spot.

Pilate was the fifth Governor of Judea and served under the Emperor Tiberius from 26AD to 36AD. A span of 10 years was quite a remarkable length of time to serve in such a position, so it would appear that he was a competent governor. He did not have autonomous rule of Judea as he was responsible to the Legate (higher-ranking Roman military officer) of Syria. (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

A Prayer for Today

We pray today, Lord, for Christians who are mistreated for the sake of the name of Jesus



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 17

Previous day Next day

Crowds

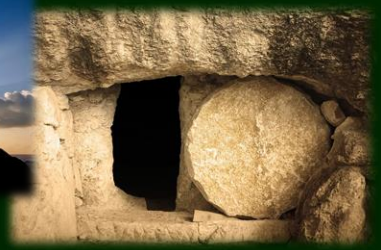
Those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it. Only dead fish go with the flow. Go the extra mile; it's never crowded. *(Popular Sayings)*

The story of Jesus is a story about **crowds** and multitudes. We constantly find Jesus in the midst of a crowd, teaching people and healing the sick. (Luke 5:15). We see the crowd outside of a house where Jesus is preaching and when a stretchered man is lowered through the roof by his friends for the Lord to heal him, as they are unable to get any closer because of the vast throng. We have the miraculous feeding of the 5000, and Palm Sunday involves the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where the crowds hail him as their King by waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna in the highest!" And yet days later, the same people are shouting for Jesus to be crucified.

Crowds have a mind of their own. They can be exhilarating in a football stadium, but threatening on the streets. They are used as an excuse for lack of independent thought: "I only did what everyone else was doing!" But the gospel is addressed to individuals, to people like you and me. Jesus always had time for those who were thrust into the shadows by the crowd. He took time out to heal blind Bartimaeus, to save Zacchaeus, the hated tax-collector, and to confirm the healing of the sick woman who touched his robe, as they were being jostled along by a crowd. Yes, we often find ourselves in groups and mass gatherings, but let us ensure that we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus (WWJD - What Would Jesus Do?) and *not* on following the crowd! *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

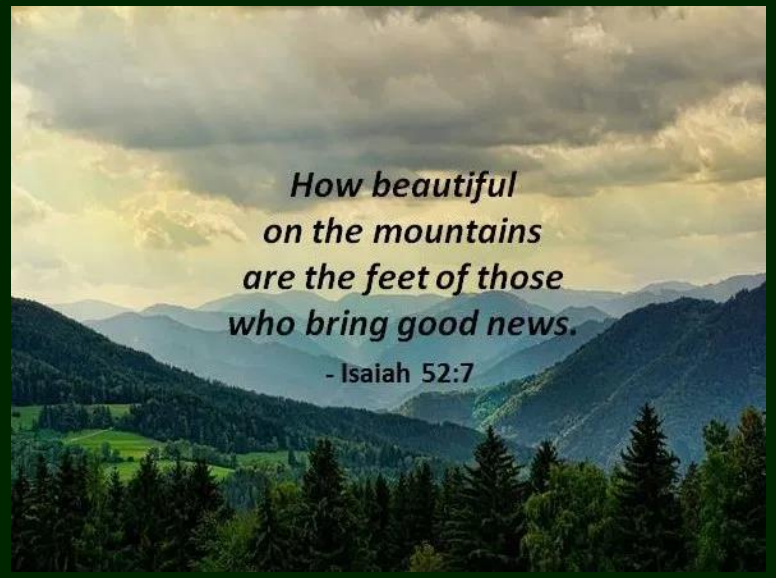
Lord Jesus, transform our thoughts, words and deeds so that we might turn away from sin and live the Gospel



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 16

Previous day | Next day

How Beautiful on the Mountains…



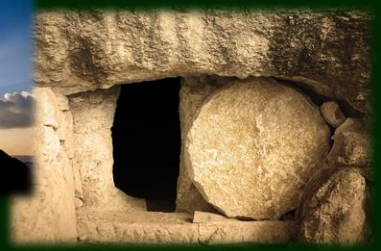
You may well not be interested, but I'm going to tell you anyway, I don't really like feet! Of course they have their uses – we'd fall over without them, but I'd never have made a chiropodist. Babies' feet are, of course, not an issue, they are beautiful and soft and adorable, but as we age…

At work, we used to weigh and measure all the children coming to clinic as accurately as was practical, which meant asking them to remove their shoes. Whilst this did not always present a challenge to one's sense of smell, in certain cases (usually teenagers!) it did. If you have never smelt a sweaty foot, you may indeed count your blessings. Then of course, feet change as we grow older - hard skin, callouses, corns, bunions.

Yet these were exactly the sort of feet Jesus chose to wash at his last meal with his friends. One of the most menial tasks you could find - and he did it, to show his loving, caring compassion. "I came not to be served, but to serve", he said - do we follow his example? If it's good enough for Jesus, shouldn't it be good enough for us? *(Judith)*

A Prayer for Today

Help us to follow your example, Jesus, in caring for others



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 15

Previous day Next day

Peace Be with You (John 20:19) *(Part 2)*

The first lines of Horatio Spafford's hymn refer to his dreadful loss and his painful grief: 'When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows, like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say: it is well, it is well with my soul.'

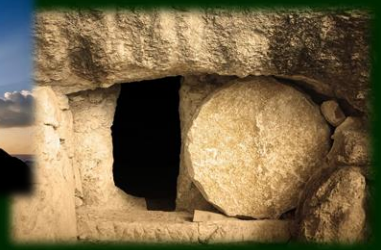
The bereaved parents had the greatest comfort in knowing that all four children had accepted Christ as their Saviour at one of Mr Moody's evangelistic meetings, shortly before the fatal voyage.

Three times in John 20 the risen Lord Jesus said to the disciples, **"Peace be with you"**, but previously Jesus had explained to the disciples a deeper meaning to what he meant when he spoke of peace. In John 14:27, he said it was a gift and that it was a peace that he gave that the world couldn't give. It's a peace that we, as humans, just cannot fathom out, for it is totally different from what the world refers to as peace. The world's peace is circumstantial and depends on comparison. God's peace overshadows and drives away the anxiety of the world. It transcends all understanding. No matter what we face, a tragedy, illness, even death, in God's peace we will be able to handle it. Our faith in God dispels our fear and leaves us content, whatever life brings. Mr Spafford and many millions of other believers have experienced God's true and amazing peace.

'That evening, on the first day of the week, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them and said, "Peace be with you!"' (John 20:19). *(Bill)*

A Prayer for Today

Prince of Peace, we bless you for our lives and ask for peace in our mind, body and soul. Please forgive our faults and heal and remove everything that is causing stress and sorrow in our lives



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 14

Previous day Next day

Peace Be with You (John 20:19) *(Part 1)*

Whenever I feel overwhelmed by circumstances that come crashing into my life, and I start to bemoan my misfortune, I often turn to a hymn that has given me a lot of comfort. My gaze then gets diverted from myself to Christ. Here is the story of how this hymn came about.

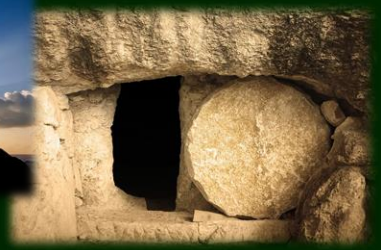
In 1874 a French steamer, the 'Ville de Havre', was on her homeward voyage from America. It collided with a sailing vessel midway across the Atlantic and sank within half an hour. One of the passengers was a Mrs Spafford, wife of a Chicago lawyer, along with her four daughters. As the vessel sank she knelt with her children in prayer, asking God that if it was possible they might be saved, or be made willing to die, if this was his will for them. The ship went down and all four children were lost, but Mrs Spafford was rescued by a sailor rowing over the spot where the ship had sunk. She was floating in the water. A few days later she was landed at Cardiff and she sent this telegram to her Christian husband, Horatio Spafford: 'SAVED-ALONE'. He kept and framed the telegram and hung it in his office.

Two years later, Moody and Sankey (American evangelists) were staying with the Spaffords. During this visit, Mr Spafford wrote, in commemoration of his children's' death, the hymn 'It Is Well with My Soul', with its triumphant chorus, which has become such a favourite all over the world. The music was composed by Philip Bliss. *(Bill)*

Listen to the hymn now by clicking here and read more about it tomorrow.

A Prayer for Today

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) - Lord Jesus, you call us to repent and to believe - for the kingdom of God is at hand



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 13

Previous day Next day

Give Thanks

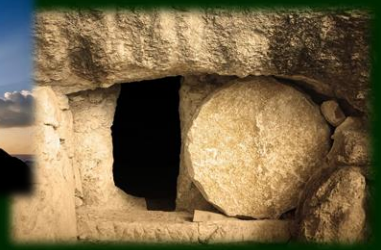
'I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of your wonders.' (Psalm 9:1)

This verse, with its tone of optimism, in the real sense (a Christ-like mind, in this instance) is a divine admonition, along with Psalm 100:4-5. It is easy to give thanks when we have food on our tables, favourite drinks in the fridge, wines (for the connoisseurs), offspring who are exceeding expectations, relatives that are supportive and selfless and friends that are outrageously loyal, with beautiful souls. However, when life is going the way we envisaged is not the only time to be **thankful**. In Philippians 4:6-7 we read 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

God's wisdom and human hard work and diligence have given a light at the end tunnel for the enemy all mankind share now: COVID! Even before this dreadful pandemic there were problems, like illnesses, setbacks, disappointments, etc, and these will continue, even after the majority get the jab. It is **THEN** when we should be most thankful, because God is not only our Heavenly Father when we have all we desire, but even in our greatest despair, he was, is and will still be ours, as he has promised never to forsake us. *(Victor)*

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, we are thankful for the good days we have enjoyed and are still enjoying. We pray that you will strengthen us to be more grateful in times when life does not go as we planned



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 12

Previous day Next day

New Life in Spring

As we sloshed through the mud on our 'exercise' around Dean Clough reservoirs recently, I thought of a poem by e e cummings called 'In Just Spring', where he talks about the world being 'puddle-wonderful' and 'mud-luscious'. It is certainly that, at present, now the frost and snow have gone. On coming home, I looked at the garden and saw snowdrops dancing in the sunlight and the splash of yellow against purple of crocuses and the opening buds of early daffodils - so beautiful and hopeful!

On Day 1 of our Lent Calendar we read that 'Lent' comes from the word 'lencten' meaning 'spring' when, as the days lengthen, things suddenly shoot up from the ground. The bulbs are in the dark for months and then out the flowers burst.

It led me to think of Jesus being in the dark of the tomb and all seemed lost, but like the bulbs in the ground shoot up, he conquered death and rose from the grave. It gives us such joy and hope! *(Brenda)*

'Because he lives, I can face tomorrow, because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because he lives!'

(W & G Gaither)

A Prayer for Today

Thank you Lord, for the returning spring and its reminder of all your promises and the hope and joy you bring if we give you our trust

BBC Calendar for Lent Day 11

Previous day | Next day

The Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11)

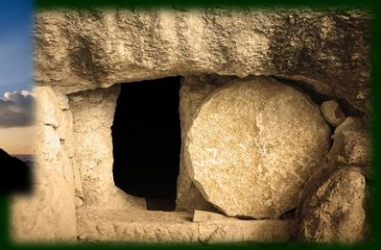
During Lent, we remember the 40 days and nights Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness, being tested and tempted (the same word in Greek). Jesus had just been baptised by John the Baptist, seen the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove and been affirmed by his Heavenly Father, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

After such a wonderful experience, he is now in the desert! So often for us too, after having experienced God at work in our lives, the devil will then try to attack us. Jesus was being tested by God and he tests us too, but it is only the devil who tempts us to do evil. Jesus gives us the model to fight temptation. For each of the challenges, he responds, quoting from Scripture. Satan knows who Jesus is, but taunts him with, "If (Since) you are the Son of God…" He is tempting him to use his powers for his own ends, rather than to glorify his Father. Jesus responds, "It is written…" His knowledge of Scripture was absolute; knowing the Bible helps us too – to challenge us but also to comfort and reassure.

The apostle Paul writes, "…God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear…he will also provide a way out so that you can stand." (1 Cor 10:13). During this, our time in the COVID wilderness, we have this hope, that our God is faithful and will provide a way out. *(Jane)*

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, thank you that you do not leave us to manage the trials of life on our own. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to follow in the way that Jesus showed us



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 10

Previous day Next day

Betrayal

Lord, it was I led you there; the way to Calvary.
Dipped my hand into the dish, betrayed you with a kiss.

Lord, it was I ran away from the garden then.
Denied I ever knew your name when your captors came.

Lord, it was I washed my hands, my own blame to free.
Scourged and saw how much you bled, placed thorns upon your head.

Lord, it was I freed the thief; you - I had crucified.
Fastened by nails upon the tree, I let you die for me.

Father forgive, Father forgive, a cry of love through agony.
Not for himself he pleads, but for you and me.

(Ruth Martin)

We remember our sister Ruth with fondness and gratitude for the words she shared with us through her poetry.

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving yourself for me, unworthy as I am. Free me from anything that obstructs my way to you. Cleanse me of thoughts filled with anger, envy or self-pity.

BBC Calendar for Lent Day 9

Previous day Next day

Lockdown Lent

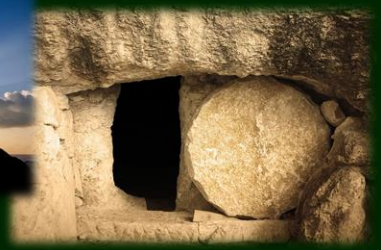
Lockdown may have had its challenges, but it's also been an opportunity for some of us to look afresh at the beauty of the created world.

Walking through Corporation Park most mornings *(click to enlarge the pictures)*, there is so much to appreciate. The birdsong was probably one of the first things to be noticed 12 months ago, when the lack of traffic made the area very quiet and peaceful. Since then, we've been able to watch the changing seasons and delight again in the wonders of the natural world. From the host of golden daffodils last spring, to the silhouettes of the leafless trees in winter; from the gorgeous blue skies and sunshine we so quickly forget, to the snow at the start of this year, and the shrieks of delighted children sledging down the slopes - we have so much to be thankful for.

No wonder 'God saw and it was good' - yes it was and still is! *(Judith)*

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful world in which we live. We give you thanks for the beauty that we so often take for granted - the rain glistening on a spider's web, the water sliding off a duck's back, the colours of a falling leaf, and ask that we would stop and marvel at your creation



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 8

Previous day Next day

I Thirst

"I thirst." (John 19:28) We can understand at some level why Jesus, on the cross, experienced a terrible **thirst**. He had lost much blood and, before the unusual darkness, had been hanging unprotected in the sun. Jesus, fully God, was also fully human. This expression of human need, John tells us, was to fulfil the scripture – in Psalm 22, David, under Holy Spirit inspiration, wrote: 'My strength has dried up like sun-baked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.' (Psalm 22:15).

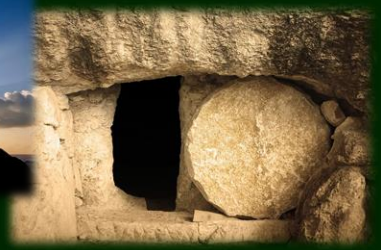
Yet Christ's **thirst** was more than just physical. The Bible also describes a 'spiritual' thirst - the desire for fellowship with God our maker (e.g. Psalm 63:1-2). Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had enjoyed eternal fellowship with his Father up until this moment. Then, on the cross, as he bore our sins, he was cut off from that fellowship – and so experienced an intense spiritual thirst.

Jesus is a sympathetic saviour who is well acquainted with every form of suffering - physical and spiritual. He was prepared to face them so that *our* spiritual thirst might be quenched for ever.

'I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold, I freely give the living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live!" I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream: my thirst was quenched, my soul revived and now I live in him.' *(H Bonar)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all you suffered on our behalf. Thank you for the new life that has flowed from your sacrifice on the cross.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 7

Previous day Next day

The Curtain

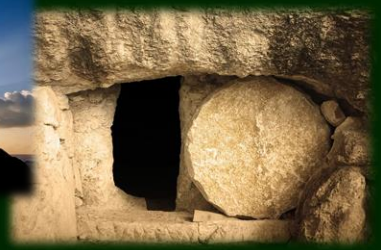
As Christ died, Mark's Gospel tells us that the **curtain of the Temple** was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). This seems a strange detail until you realise its significance. In Exodus 26, God set out his plans for the Tabernacle, the Temple's forerunner, specifying the making of a **curtain** to be hung before the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence. The **curtain** was a barrier - sinful humans could not enter the presence of God and live. Only the high priest could enter, only once a year, to make an Atonement sacrifice.

When the **curtain** tore at Jesus' death, it signalled a new era. Jesus was the final Atonement sacrifice, his death sufficing for all sinners for all time, allowing all who rely on his shed blood to enter God's presence whenever they want, as often as they want, with no intermediary needed. The **curtain** was thick and about 30 feet tall - and ripped top to bottom, a sure sign of God's hand at work, eager to open the way for repentant sinners to come to him.

So often we take it for granted that we can talk to God, present requests or just enjoy being with him. Let's remind ourselves afresh of the privilege Christ's death has brought. In a year when so many have not been able to enter the homes of loved ones, it's great to know that we can always enter God's home to talk with our Heavenly Father. His door is always open. *(Debbie)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of prayer and open access to your presence – free to us and so costly to Jesus. May we exercise this privilege regularly.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 6

Previous day Next day

Mary (Part 1)

In our Advent calendar we remembered that 'Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.'

Soon after the birth, she and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and, whilst there, a devout man, Simeon, expressed the words we read in Luke 2:29-32. Mary and Joseph marvelled at this and also words about Jesus from the prophetess Anna. In Matthew we hear how God sent the family as refugees to Egypt, as Herod wanted Jesus killed. Later, back in Nazareth, they settled into life with Joseph working as a carpenter and, together with Mary, raising Jesus and the rest of the family. She must have noticed how special he was as 'the child grew and became strong in spirit' (Luke 1:80).

When Jesus was twelve, we read about the family visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover where, thinking they had lost him in the crowd, they searched everywhere for him. We hear the worry in her voice, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (Luke 2:48) - and also feel their puzzlement when he says he had to be in his Father's House. So 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men' and we read that his mother treasured all these things in her heart' (Luke 2:51-52) trusting that all would go well. *(Brenda)*

A Prayer for Today

May we too, Lord, along with Mary, treasure the thoughts of Jesus in our hearts, and ponder continually all that he has graciously done for us.

BBC Calendar for Lent Day 5

Previous day
Next day

The Gospel of the Kingdom

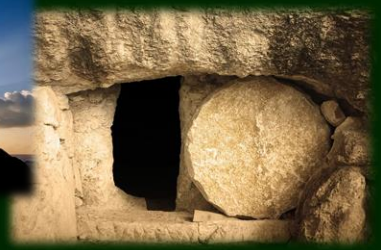
After his temptations, Jesus returned to his home county of Galilee and started to preach the **gospel of the kingdom** (Mark 1:14,15). The 'kingdom of God' is better translated as the 'kingship of God', as the stress of the original Greek is not so much on the 'realm' over which God rules, but on the nature of the reign itself. The term recalls the promise of the Old Testament prophets that God himself would come in person and save his people and rule over them (Isaiah 40:10,11). In other words, the coming of the kingdom is the coming God's messianic rule, marking the age of salvation through the 'outpouring' of the Spirit.

During the ministry of Jesus, whenever his kingship was welcomed, kingdom-blessings, like the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, were experienced. After the events of Easter and the Ascension, these kingdom-blessings have gone global, for his Lordship is now universal. That is why the disciples were given the Great Commission to go into the whole world and make disciples of all nations. Thus, wherever Jesus Christ is lifted up, his kingly, saving power can be felt in the here and now.

Are we living fully, today, in the power of God's rule? For the living Lord Jesus can make a big, eternal difference to your life and mine. *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord, create space in my life for more kindness and less spitefulness, greater generosity, fewer self-centred needs, stronger compassion and weakened judgement of others.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 4

Previous day
Next day

Forgiveness

The story of the deceased 'Yorkshire Ripper' springs to mind. This brutal, heartless and cold murderer, with a wife at home, killed young women in the dead of the night in a cowardly yet cold manner. He had done nothing worthy of **forgiveness**, in particular in the hearts and minds of his victim's relatives. The intriguing thing is that the son of his second (recorded) victim, whose Mum was fatally murdered in Leeds, said in various media outlets that he forgave the man who killed his Mum. Justifiably, he could have resented that man throughout his life - for the terrible experience of the untimely snatching away of his mother, for having to live in care and other pitiful reasons, BUT he chose to forgive, and did this both privately and publicly. The picture to the right *(click to enlarge it)* depicts Mary Magdalene, who mercifully received the **forgiveness of Jesus** and was recorded to then have lived a holy, unblemished life for the rest of her days. As we are freely enjoying the redemption that comes from being heirs and heiresses of THE gracious King, let us imbibe the spirit of forgiveness towards every and anyone who has wronged us. *(Victor)*

'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.'

Romans 3:23-24

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, clear away the clutter of petty grudges, remove smudges of resentment and bitterness, and grant me the grace to forgive as I have been forgiven.

BBC Calendar for Lent Day 3

Previous day Next day

It Was for Me

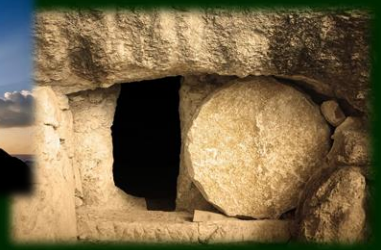
As a boy, Jesus preached in the temple, well pleasing to his Father God.
Baptised by John in the Jordan - “Son whom I love” came God’s Word.
Now led by the Holy Spirit, a journey to the wilderness he made
And tempted 40 days by the devil, to every temptation he said,
“You must worship the Lord and serve only him,
His angels guard me wherever I am led. Do not put your God to the test.”
Then the devil finished his tempting and fled.
Jesus now began teaching and healing, crowds flocked to hear what he said.
Some mocked and jeered, others listened, trusted and believed.
All this time, Jesus continued to obey and do as his Father willed,
At God’s appointed time, triumphantly entering Jerusalem, another scripture fulfilled.
Having celebrated the Last Supper, soon after he was betrayed and tried,
And as he hung on the cruel cross obeying his Father’s will,
The awful price for our sins was paid. Lord, please help us to appreciate and thank you for the great sacrifice of love you made. *(Morag)*

“Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Lord for loving me. You went to Calvary, there you died for me. You rose up from the grave, to me new life you gave. You’re coming back again, and we with you shall reign. Thank you Lord for loving me.”

(A Revell)

A Prayer for Today

Lord, may we appreciate what it cost for you to give your only Son for us. Let our lives show your love shining through so others will want to get to know you too.



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 2

Previous day Next day

It Is Finished

Most of us, probably all of us, go through life and leave behind us unfinished business – projects we started but didn't complete, letters we meant to write but never got round to, places we meant to go with our children, but never quite found the time.

There's only one person in history who could truly say that he finished completely and perfectly everything he set out to do. The whole purpose of Jesus' life and ministry was to go to the cross, there to give his life for ours, satisfying completely the rightful judgement of God the Father against sin.

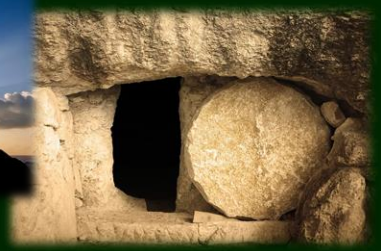
When Jesus said on the cross, **"It is finished!"**, it was not a cry of despair, but one of triumph. In Greek it's just one word – Tetelestai. It was the word that was stamped on a debtor's bill when they had finally made the last payment that cleared them completely of their obligations – proof that they could no longer be held liable for what they owed. It meant 'paid in full'.

Jesus, the humble, obedient servant of God, fulfilled his Father's mission perfectly. He finished the task and paid in full so that we never have to. **Hallelujah!**

A Prayer for Today

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10



BBC Calendar for Lent Day 1

Next day

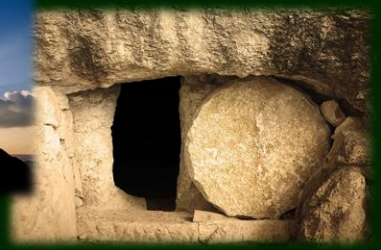
Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is traditionally a day of repentance when Christians confess their sins and profess their devotion to God. It is the period before Easter, when Christians remember Jesus's withdrawal into the wilderness for 40 days and nights. A wilderness is a rough, uninhabited or neglected region, not the sort of place where you would want to spend a long time.

The word '**Lent**' originally came from the word **'lencten'** meaning 'spring', a time when the days start to lengthen and things begin to spring up. You have probably noticed that happening this year. During **Lent**, many people decide to try to deny themselves as Jesus did and give something up that they love - perhaps chocolate, sweets or biscuits.

It is also a time to commemorate the passion and death of **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God, our Saviour, and an opportunity to think about all that it means to be a follower of him. *(Brenda)*

'Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him, he has conquered death, he is King of kings; accept the joy which he gives to those who yield their lives to him.' (*C Simmons*)

A Prayer for Today

Enlarge my heart with a spirit of gratitude this Lent, so that I recognise the simple gifts that lay in abundance all around me. In your precious name, I pray.