

All Saints Alive

READER'S VIEWPOINT

What is the meaning of Lent?

Janet Bird explains

Although to me it seems like no time at all since Christmas we are now in the season of Lent. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and goes through until Easter Saturday - a period of 40 days (not counting the Sundays because we celebrate the resurrection every Sunday).

The actual word Lent comes from the old English word *lencten* meaning the lengthening of days – the season of Spring.

The 40 days of Lent reflect the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness facing up to many temptations prior to setting out on his ministry.

The observance of Lent originated in the 4th century and was a time of preparation for those who were to be baptized at Easter. Today we still remember our own baptism on Easter Sunday when we renew our baptismal vows.

Lent was traditionally a time of fasting, again commemorating the time Jesus spent in the wilderness.

On Shrove Tuesday households would make much of using up food such as fat, sugar and meat in preparation for the frugal fare to be consumed during Lent.

Other names for Shrove Tuesday include Mardi Gras (literally "fat Tuesday") and Carnival (which comes from a Latin phrase *carnem levare* meaning "removal of meat,")

In some countries the three day period preceding the beginning of Lent, the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday are still kept as a time

of Carnival with colourful parades and much eating and drinking.

Each Wednesday in Lent in the River Room at Castle Hall a simple lunch of soup, bread and cheese and fruit can be enjoyed at the very reasonable cost of £2.50. The churches in Hertford take it in turns to do the catering and all proceeds go to Christian Aid. This is a good opportunity not only to support the work of Christian Aid, but also to meet and chat with fellow Christians.

Many people still view Lent as a time for fasting, a time to give up something which you enjoy like chocolate, sweets or alcohol, but more importantly we should be taking the opportunity to use Lent as a time of prayerful preparation and study. Rather than giving something up for Lent we should try to do more. Make time for prayer and study and do more to help others; make time to look more closely at our lives, time for repentance and a chance to make a new start.

Jesus spent 40 days in the desert being tempted by the devil; tempted to forsake the word of God and to put God to the test. Many of us find that life today puts many temptations in our way and we may find it difficult reconcile the way we live with the teaching of the Bible.

Lent provides the perfect opportunity for some spiritual soul searching. Just as Jesus was preparing for his ministry so we should be preparing for our own ministry and seeking guidance from God as to what form it should take. Even those of us who may feel that we know where our ministry is going can seek

guidance that what we are doing is God's will.

There are many books available that we can study during Lent or we can attend special Lent courses. In Hertford this year we are fortunate to have a 5-week course, to be held at the United Reformed Church in Cowbridge, starting on Wednesday 28th February at 8pm.

The course, run by Churches Together and entitled 'Simplicity of Life' Matthew 5-7, will be led by the Bishop of Bedford the Right Reverend Richard Inwood and will be looking at the challenges set to us by Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. There will be talks on weeks 1, 2, 4 and 5 whilst on the middle Wednesday, 14th March there will be discussion groups.

This is not only a good opportunity to study the Bible but also to meet and share fellowship with Christians of other denominations. The course is open to all and if you need help with transport please let me know.

During Holy Week there are several additional services held at All Saints', which historically have not been very well attended.

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Eve are very important days in the life of the Church and these services help us to focus on Christ's suffering.

On Thursday we can spend time with Jesus in the upper room as he prepares to face his accusers and his death on the Cross.

On Friday, following the family service at 9.45 we can join the procession to Calvary (or at least as far as Bircherley Green) and join in the open-air act of witness with the other town churches followed by an hour at the foot of the cross from 2 until 3.

In the evening we can share in the sadness of Jesus' family and followers as they mourn their Lord and Master as we listen to the version in St Matthew's Gospel set to music by *J.S.Bach*.

We can take time to meditate on our own faith as we prepare to celebrate the joy of Easter Day.

On Saturday evening we can bring these threads together in the service that leads from our Vigil into the Service of light – the proclamation of the Resurrection - and then to the renewal of our Baptismal Vows.

What is the meaning of Lent? It is a time for reflection, a time for sacrifice, a time for renewal. A time when we as we prepare to celebrate the glory of the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Who's Job?

As usual, given the time of year, last month's magazine had a fair number of requests for help.

One reader came across the following whilst wandering around Peterborough cathedral and found it struck a chord:

This is a story about four people named *Everybody*, *Somebody*, *Anybody* and *Nobody*.

"There was an important job to be done and *Everybody* was sure that *Somebody* would do it. *Anybody* could do it, but *Nobody* did it.

Somebody got angry about that, because it was *Everybody's* job.

Everybody thought *Anybody* could do it, but *Nobody* realised that *Everybody* would wait for *Somebody* else to do it.

It ended up that the important job wasn't done and *Everybody* blamed *Somebody* because *Nobody* did what *Anybody* could have done.

Given that '*Nobody*' wants to be an '*Anybody*' it's good that there are plenty of opportunities for '*Everybody*' to be '*Somebody*'!!