

**Harvest:** In our lives Harvest is very different to that described in the bible; we buy our food in shops and, by the time it reaches our table it's easy to overlook its provenance. Giving thanks for what we have is automatic whereas in the past Harvest could be the difference between life and death, a poor harvest meaning that the rest of the year would be a struggle. Many of us will never have felt the hunger of true starvation or the worry about whether we will eat next week. Nor should we, and yet, there are people nearby who do feel real hunger. People who do not know where their next meal will come from; from those in lands hit by famine, those struggling in war torn countries or surviving in refugee camps, right up to the people in a street near us – people who cannot pay their rent, who have holes in their shoes and survive on food banks. It's tragic that in a world of so much there are still so many with very little.

And thus it's right that we give thanks to God each harvest but, as we know that our own food worries are very distant so too we collect and give to those in need. Just as God advised so many years ago.

**Leviticus 19:9-10 ESV** <sup>9</sup>“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. <sup>10</sup> And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

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**Easter:** Have you noticed how at school you keep repeating things? It's a good way of learning – repeat your times tables, repeat your division, relook at periods of history... it goes on and on but this is how we consolidate our learning and teachers make it exciting by doing it a little differently every time. It's the same however old you are – to learn something new you keep repeating it.

And so it is with our relationship with God, some messages need to be told to us again and again and no better time to think of that than just after Easter when once again we remember the wonder of God's promise to us: Jesus died for our sins. So, each year when we tuck into Easter eggs or celebrate with a huge family meal we do so to remind ourselves that God created us in His image so that we could walk in His path and when we fail (as we so often do), when we forget to love, to forgive, to give then that is OK, because God has forgiven us and He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ to die for our sins so that we don't need to. God forgives our past, present and future mistakes and Jesus' death on the cross is His reminder.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

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**Palm Sunday:** *We have a King who rides a donkey.* This Sunday is Palm Sunday, the day when Jesus rode into town on a donkey and the start of Holy Week; a strange week where Jesus was treated to every different emotion and reaction possible. On Sunday He was the people's saviour, a King, they threw themselves at His feet, bowed in adoration, waving Palm fronds to welcome Him. Oh how quickly they changed, the same people that applauded Him on Sunday were jeering and chanting and calling for His death just a few days later. And, faced with these contrasts, Jesus remained just the same; resolute, forgiving – He came to save and dying for us was part of that plan. Jesus died for our sins. He came a King and gave Himself for us – he knew it would hurt, that He would be cruelly beaten, whipped –and yet He never waived from His path. Our lives can be a little like Holy week – we start each week as great followers of Christ, glowing with His Holy Spirit, filled with love and peace but, sometimes, our daily lives take over. We forget our kindness, we forget to forgive, we forget to live as Jesus would want. But it doesn't matter because our Lord is always there for us, ready to put us back on the right path. So much so that He gave His only Son so that those who had forgotten Him could be saved.

**John 12:13 ESV** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

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**Lent:** Have you given-up something for Lent? We live in a time when *giving-up* is common place – in November lots of men stop shaving to raise money for charity, in January lots of people give-up unhealthy foods and drink; with social media there's hardly a day goes by when we don't hear of something that someone is giving-up. So how is Lent different? For Lent to be different we need to acknowledge God's role in our lives, Lent is not simply about abstaining to make ourselves healthier nor even about sacrificing a great pleasure to remind ourselves how fortunate we are; true Lent is about preparing ourselves to be God's disciples, to accept His gifts and to go out into the world helping to spread His message.

In our busy lives it is sometimes difficult to find a place for worship and peace, so Lent is a time when we can step back and create space. When we give-up for Lent the difference is that whatever we choose to do we *give it up* to the Lord; so that He can bless us with His love and guide us once again, to walk in His footsteps. So this Lent, whether you are giving-up a pleasure or giving-of your time/money, do it with the Lord in your mind and heart and that will be all the difference you need.

**Mark 1:12-14 ESV** The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

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**Epiphany:** Last week we celebrated Epiphany, the time when we think about the gifts that the Wise Men offered to Jesus. Strange gifts that today seem hard to understand. But what about your gifts – did you get the perfect present this Christmas? Did you, like many people in the Western world, get lots of gifts? Perhaps you came down on Christmas morning to a pile of presents waiting to be ripped apart. How many do you remember? Close your eyes and see if you can list everything you received this Christmas. It's hard isn't it? Remembering all those presents – every single one – knowing where they are in your house right at this moment. In fact, the chances are you've already forgotten some of the presents, some of them you might never even use – which, if you think hard about it, is a little sad too.

But with God it isn't like that; in fact the Bible reminds us that the best gifts are not the ones we receive neatly wrapped on Christmas morning. The best gifts come from God; the beautiful sunrise, the intricate shape of a snowflake, life itself – in all its forms. These are the gifts that last, that we can treasure. So this weekend take a moment to thank our Lord for creating us and giving us this wonderful world.

**James 1:17 ESV** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom

there is no variation or shadow due to change.

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