**Messy Church – February 2023**

**Lent**

The activities are:

1. The baptism of Jesus – Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 – 17
	1. Doves – in the Celebration
	2. Edible baptism
2. The temptations – Matthew chapter 4, verses 1 – 11
	1. Desert sand picture
	2. Rock cakes
	3. Freestanding paper tower – in the Celebration
	4. Concertina people
3. What does Lent mean? And what does it mean to the Church
	1. Historically – why pancakes?
	2. Now?

**Stories and Activities**

1. **The baptism of Jesus** – Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 – 17

This story appears in all four gospels. When Jesus was grown up, about 30 years old, his cousin John was baptising, in the River Jordan, people who wanted to change their lives, because they believed that they should be different, and better. Jesus went to John and asked to be baptised. John said that Jesus should be baptising him, but when Jesus insisted, John agreed, and baptised him in the river. As they came out of the water, the gospel of John says that John the Baptist told people that he saw the Holy Spirit of God come down like a dove and settle on Jesus.

* 1. **Doves** – we will make these in the celebration
		1. **With fan-fold wings**

**You will need:** a print out of the dove (card is best, but paper works), a sheet of paper (scrap will do), scissors

Cut out the dove, including the slot in the middle. Fan fold the sheet of paper, working from one of the short ends. Put the fan folded paper through the slot in the body of the dove, till it is half way through, and spread the wings out.

* + 1. **Origami dove**

**You will need:** paper, scissors, a flat space to work in, either a print out of the instructions, or a tablet or phone with the instructions on

Follow the instructions to make the dove. You don’t have to use coloured paper, and you could use newspaper. Don’t use very fragile paper, like tissue or crepe paper.

1. **Edible baptism**

**You will need:** a paper plate, some ready to roll icing or marzipan, liquid icing coloured blue, food colourings, jelly babies

Colour the ready to roll icing or marzipan to look like rocks, if you have food colourings, or just shape it to look like rocks and river banks, and put them across the plate, leaving a space between two rows. Use the blue liquid icing to make a river in the space. Use the jelly babies to show Jesus and John in the river. If you have enough, you could make a crowd standing on the rocks, watching what is going on.

**Talk about:** trying to change your life. How much effort might it take? What might make you want to change?

1. **The Temptations** – Matthew chapter 4, verses 1 to 11

This story appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. After John baptised Jesus, Jesus went off into the desert that runs beside the Jordan. The Bible says that he spent 40 days in the desert, without any food (not without any water). At the end of that time, Jesus, says the Bible, was hungry! The Devil came and tempted Jesus. There were three different temptations, each one about how Jesus would try to influence people. So there are three different activities, one for each temptation, and a general one, a sand picture of the desert.

* 1. **Desert sand picture**

**You will need:** the pre-printed picture, glue and glue spreader, sand in yellows and browns (or use sand from a garden centre). If you want to draw your own picture, you will need a piece of paper, and a pencil. You might want to work on a tray, so that the sand does not go all over your table, and so that you can tip the sand back into its container more easily.

If you are drawing your own picture, do that first. Spread glue on each area carefully, one area at a time, and then spread the sand over the glue. Shake any loose sand off the paper before you spread glue on another area. If you are using different coloured sands, put the loose sand of each colour back in its container, before you spread the next area of glue. If you have drawn your own picture and you have garden centre sand, you might want to colour in some areas of the picture with crayons, to show the different rocks better.

* 1. **Rock cakes**

The first temptation was for Jesus to make stones into bread, because he was hungry. It was also a temptation to encourage people to be his followers because he could provide everything they needed. This kind of Christian work used to be called making “rice Christians” – encouraging people to come to church because they would be fed, in cultures where many people were hungry. Jesus knew that simply feeding people would produce followers who were not real Christians, they would just be saying that so that they could have meals when they wanted, rather than believing in what he was saying about God, and how much God loved them. His words to the Tempter show his understanding of this – the scripture says that human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.

**You will need:** the recipe, which also gives a list of the tools and ingredients you will need, (this will be emailed to you, or you can find it on the website), the ingredients and the tools.

Follow the instructions.

**Talk about:** the fact that people need food – but they also need God, and food for their minds and spirits, not just their bodies.

1. **Free standing tower** – in the Celebration

The second temptation had Jesus standing on the highest point of the temple. The tempter told him to let himself fall off the roof. The bible says God would not let his son be injured, and would send his angels to catch him. This was a temptation to make followers by being spectacular – like being a pop star or famous actor. Jesus knew that this wouldn’t give him followers who really believed what he said about God, it would just make him a celebrity. He told the tempter that the bible also says that one should not try to make God do things just because he can.

**You will need:** newspaper, sticky tape, scissors possibly.

See how tall you can build a tower – take a picture of it and send it to us!

**Talk about:** doing things to get a reaction from teachers, or parents. Is it a good idea, or does it just get you into trouble?

1. **Concertina people**

The third temptation had Jesus standing on a high mountain, from where he could see the whole world and its people. The tempter said that he would give all of it to Jesus if he would bow down and worship him, the tempter. Jesus said that the bible says people should worship only God, and serve only him. Our bible says that at this point, the tempter went away, and angels did come and help Jesus.

**You will need:** paper, pencil for drawing, colouring pencils in flesh tones, if you have them, otherwise use what you have.



Hold your piece of paper so that it is wider than it is tall, then fold it up in zig-zags, like a fan – you should have four or five layers. Make sure they are the same width. Draw a person on the top fold, so that the feet and the arms reach the fold. (The picture just shows the hands touching.) Cut round your person, through all the layers of paper, and carefully unfold the layers, so you have a chain of people. Colour them in so that their faces, hands and feet are all the colours people can be.

**Talk about:** all the people of the world are welcome to be part of the church – welcome to be part of God’s family. All we have to do is accept that God is our God, and Jesus is our saviour.

1. **What does Lent mean? How does the church behave?**

“Lent” is the six weeks (40 days) before Easter – the 40 days from Ash Wednesday (the day after Pancake Day) to the Saturday before Easter Sunday. The word comes from Old English, and means “lengthening”, meaning the days are getting longer – it is spring. Lent and the remembrance of Jesus’ time in the desert do not appear in the bible. The remembrance started in the 300s AD. The idea was that people should have some understanding of what Jesus had suffered, and while they went hungry, people should think about their own lives, and how they could be more Jesus-like.

When Lent was first practiced, Christian people were allowed to eat only one meal in the day, and it should be a plain meal – rich people were not allowed to eat all the fancy things they usually ate. Meat, which was rarely eaten by ordinary people, was forbidden to the rich as well. Later, the last day before Lent started became a feast day, so that people could use up all the things they wouldn’t be allowed to eat for the next six weeks – eggs, milk and sweet stuff. (Flour would continue to be eaten – people who had no bread were likely to starve to death.) This is why we eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day).

When the going hungry part was relaxed, it became popular to give up something you really liked for Lent. When Tina was a child she was expected to give up sweets. It didn’t mean that she could save her pocket money and spend it on sweets after Easter – the money she would have spent on sweets was sent, after Easter, to a charity.

Nowadays, most people, even in churches, don’t give up things for Lent, but many church people do special activities. There are study courses which focus on doing things differently – not just for Lent, but for always, so people are changing their lives, just as Jesus and John asked people to. The charity Action for Children runs an activity programme for Lent, called Count Your Blessings, which involves people doing small things every day which might, in the long run, make changes to their everyday lives. They also give money for some of the activities in the programme, which is sent, after Easter, to Action for Children, to help in the work they do with children and families who are struggling to live together.

**You will need:** a piece of paper and a pen or pencil to write with. Think about the food you have eaten today – or might have for tea. Write down anything that has eggs or sugar in it. Consider what your meal might be like without them.

**Talk about:** small things you could change in your lives, which could make a difference to you, and the world around you.

**Celebration**

We’ll start by singing Spirit of God unseen as the wind <https://youtu.be/ozWAspk5Zcg>

Baptism isn’t something that Christians invented. Jews used Baptism to symbolise washing away of sins, and this was what John (the Baptist) was doing. He wanted people to be ready for when Jesus started teaching. He was very surprised when Jesus asked to be baptised. He knew Jesus was the Messiah sent by God, so he thought Jesus should do any baptising. But Jesus insisted, and after he was baptised, John saw the Holy Spirit descend onto Jesus like a dove.

We’re going to make doves either as origami or as simple card and paper versions. Patterns for the doves, and a video for how to do the origami are on the website or attached to the email.

After this, Jesus went into the desert for 40 days, with nothing to eat. He must have been really hungry. The Bible says that the Devil tempted him three times. The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. We made rock cakes to represent this. Feeding hungry people can be a form of bribery. While we should always try to help people, and while there is nothing wrong with telling people that you’re doing it to show God’s love, we must never help people just to get them to come to church.

The second temptation was that the Devil took Jesus up to the top of the Temple, and said that he should jump off, because if he really was the Messiah, God would protect him. Jesus said that this was trying to test God, and we shouldn’t do it. Sometimes people say that if you follow Jesus, all your problems will go away; it’s not true. God will help with the problems though.

We’re going to see if we can make some tall towers from newspaper.

The third temptation was to worship the Devil, because he said that everyone would bow down to Jesus if he did. That’s what the concertina people are about. Sometimes we are tempted to do wrong things because we want to get a good result, such as stealing money to give it to the poor. Jesus shows that we have to do the right things in the right way.

We’ll sing Jesus’ love is very wonderful <https://youtu.be/WcgplHIntJc>

Lent is a time when we get ready for Easter, firstly by remembering Jesus in the desert and then by thinking about the Easter stories. Giving up something, and using the money to help other people is one way we can do this, although we can just make a bit more effort to learn about Easter and to be helpful.

Our prayer

Dear God, we like pancakes and Easter eggs and we sometimes forget what these are all about. Through baptism and in the desert you prepared for your ministry and for the first Easter. Help us to find out what that meant, and to be more like you in the way we live. Amen.

We’ll sing Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you. <https://youtu.be/OdQYmGTsKmE>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share some of them on the Church Facebook page or in the Monthly Magazine (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team

We’ll have a Zoom meeting open for those who can’t come to the church. Our end of Zoom will go on YouTube during the celebration, but we won’t put pictures from your end on. Contact me if you want the link for Zoom. Look out for the broadcast on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw/videos>