**Messy Church – March 2023**

**Women in the Bible at Easter**

At various points in the gospels, a number of women are mentioned. They are never mentioned as disciples, those are all men, but there seem always to have been women around. Today we are looking at some of the women who appear in the Easter story, as well as elsewhere in the gospels.

The activities are:

1. Mary the mother of Jesus – John chapter 19, verses 25 to 27 – **Mothers’ Day card**
2. The women who travelled with Jesus – Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3 – and who tended his body – Luke chapter 23 verse 53 to chapter 24 verse12 – **melting moments**
3. Mary Magdalene – a woman who Jesus healed – Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3 – and who then followed him, and was the first to see him after he rose to life again – John chapter 20 verses 1 – 18 – **pictures to identify, in the celebration**
4. Wife of Pontius Pilate – Matthew chapter 27 verse 19 – **folded hands for prayers**
5. Mary and Martha – Luke chapter 10 verses 38 to 42 – **clay jars**
6. Palm Sunday crowds – Luke chapter 19 verses 28 to 40 – **palm cross, in the celebration**

**Stories and Activities**

1. **Mary the mother of Jesus** – John chapter 19, verses 25 to 27

When Jesus went to Jerusalem for the last time, lots of his friends went with him, or were there when he arrived. One of them was Jesus’ mother, Mary. The last story we have about Jesus and his mother is only told in John’s gospel. When Jesus was on the cross, he looked down and saw John and Mary, together, in the crowd. He said to Mary, “Woman, here is your son.” And then he said to John, “Here is your mother.” The gospel says that John looked after Mary from that time onwards. (In those days, like in many Middle Eastern and Eastern countries still today, women mostly did not have jobs outside their homes, and men were expected to look after them. There was no governmental assistance, like a pension, or social security.)

**Pop-out Mothers’ Day card**

**You will need:** a print out of the card, best done on paper, colouring pencils or crayons, scissors

Print the master image which comes with the pack, and colour it in, then fold the card in four, along the T shape in the middle. Cut along the bold lines at the top and bottom of the daisy and ease forward, folding along the dotted lines and making a crease down the centre of the daisy. The daisy will 'pop out' each time the card is opened. You might want to trim the card at the side and the bottom (there is a line on the back of the card which could be used to give a guide).

**Talk about:** your mother – what would your life be like without her? Think about how much she loves you, and does for you, and how often you thank her for what she does.

1. **The women who travelled with Jesus** – Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3 – **and who tended his body** – Luke chapter 23 verse 53 to chapter 24 verse 12

Luke chapter 8 says that Jesus travelled around, with the twelve disciples and “some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.” This means that as Jesus travelled, he didn’t always have to rely on finding someone in a new place who would feed him, he had people who would look after his needs.

In chapters 23 and 24, where Luke is describing the death and resurrection of Jesus, he talks about the “women who had come with him from Galilee”, and names some of them as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. There were others, unnamed.

**Melting Moments**

**You will need:** the recipe sent with the pack, the tools and ingredients listed.

Follow the recipe to make your cakes.

**Talk about:** the fact that even Jesus needed food, and people to help him do his work. He had the disciples, who learned from him, but he also had women, although few of them are named, and even fewer are remembered when we talk about Jesus’ friends.

1. **Mary Magdalene** – Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3, John chapter 20 verses 1 – 18

We have already seen Mary Magdalene in Luke, from her journeying with Jesus, to his death and resurrection. John tells us more about that first Easter Sunday and Mary’s place in it. The women had gone to the place where Jesus’ body had been put to finish preparing it for burial – they would put herbs and ointments on the body, and wrap it up – the process would take some time, and there had been no time on the Friday, the eve of the Sabbath day. On the Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, they could do what they had to do, and take the time they needed. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance of the cave, and that the body of Jesus was not there. John tells us that Mary went to tell the disciples, and Peter and John followed her back to the tomb. When they found that what she had said was true, they didn’t understand what was going on, and went away again. Mary stayed, crying, in the garden around the cave. Then she saw the angels in the tomb (Luke mentions the angels appearing outside the tomb) who asked her why she was crying, so she explained, and then she turned around and saw a man she thought was the gardener. The man asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for, and she explained again! The man called her by her name, and then she recognised that it was Jesus. He told her to go and tell the disciples that he was alive, which she did.

**Pictures to identify – we will do this in the celebration**

We will use pictures of people you know – but not their faces. Perhaps their hands, or the backs of their heads, or even their ears. Have a piece of paper handy, and something to write with, and you can write down the answers, and see how many you get right.

**Talk about:** Mary was crying, which might make it difficult to see who was talking to her, but she also wasn’t expecting to see Jesus walking around. Do you sometimes not recognise people you know when you see them in a setting which is not usual for them to be in (as far as you are concerned)? Perhaps if you met one of your teachers in a shop, you might think “I know that person” and not be able to think who they are.

**4 The wife of Pontius Pilate** – Matthew chapter 27 verse 19

When Jesus was arrested, he was taken to the palace of the high priest in Jerusalem and was questioned there by various members of the Jewish council. When they decided he was guilty of blasphemy, which under Jewish law had a death penalty, they sent him to the Roman governor, a man called Pontius Pilate, to be sentenced to death, because they had no power to have someone executed.

Pontius Pilate didn’t want to have Jesus executed, because he knew that the Jewish authorities were just trying to get rid of Jesus because they didn’t like what he said. Pilate knew he wasn’t guilty, but he had a problem – if he didn’t do what they wanted, they threatened let the emperor know that Pilate was allowing rebels to go free. In the process of this “trial”, Pilate received a message from his wife, telling him “have nothing to do with this man who only does right, I have had dreams from God because of what is happening.” Despite this message, Pilate gives in to the Jewish authorities, and orders Jesus’ execution.

**Praying hands (folded hands for prayers)**

**You will need:** a piece of paper (scrap paper will do, if it is clean on one side), pencil, scissors

Fold your piece of paper in half, with the clean side inside, so that the side of your hand can be placed along the fold. Draw round your hand, so that the side is against the fold, and then cut out the hand through both layers of paper. When it is unfolded, your hand will look like two pages of a book. If there is someone you would like to pray for, write their names on the clean page.

**Talk about:** doing what is right. Sometimes, we know that what other people are doing is wrong. It is scary to try to stop them, or even to just not do what they are doing, especially if there is a crowd of people around us. How can we not join in?

**5 Mary and Martha** – Luke chapter 10 verses 38 to 42

Mary and Martha were sisters, Martha the elder and Mary the younger. They lived together in Bethany, and they had a brother called Lazarus.

The first time they met, Martha invited Jesus to come to their house to eat, and he accepted the invitation. While Martha was preparing the meal, Jesus talked to his friends. Mary sat beside Jesus, on the floor, and listened to his conversation. Martha, busy cooking, was cross that Mary was not helping her, and went to Jesus and asked him to tell Mary to go and help her, rather than sitting around. Jesus told Martha that it was not necessary to be so busy she had no time to listen, and that Mary had chosen the right thing to do, and he would not tell her not to.

**Clay jars**

**You will need:** clay or plasticine or play doh

Make jars and plates (if you have enough stuff). People of Jesus’ time stored flour, oil and other things in clay jars, and they ate from clay plates.

**Talk about:** is it right to let other people do all the work? Who should look after guests, or should they be left alone while the work is done?

6 **Palm Sunday crowds** – Luke chapter 19 verses 28 to 40

This story appears in all four gospels, but they each have slightly different details.

On the day we remember as Palm Sunday (which may not have been a Sunday at all), Jesus finally got to Jerusalem for the last time. It was getting close to Passover, and lots of people were going to the city for the festival. The roads were crowded. He may have stopped overnight at Bethany, with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but the gospels tell us that when he got to Bethphage, which is close to Bethany, he sent his disciples into the village ahead of him, to fetch a young donkey. He told them to tell the owner that “the Lord needs it” if they were questioned. When they brought it back, they put some cloaks on it for a saddle, and Jesus rode the donkey down the hill, and up into Jerusalem. The disciples were so excited that those who hadn’t put their cloaks on the donkey put them on the road for the donkey to walk on. Other people cut branches from the trees and waved them, or put them on the road. Some people began to shout – it may have been the disciples who started it, or other people who recognised Jesus – “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” and other similar things. According to Luke, there were Pharisees (important Jews) in the crowd, and they wanted Jesus to stop his disciples shouting. Jesus told them if the crowd stopped shouting, the stones would shout instead!

**Paper palm cross (in the celebration)**

**You will need:** a strip of paper about ½inch wide (a centimetre wide), so a piece of A4 paper (can be scrap paper), a pair of scissors.

Watch the video on YouTube, and follow the instructions

<https://youtu.be/x5dcu-pOIpY>

**Talk about:** traditionally, the Palm Crosses that are given out in church are made from the sort of palm leaves that may have been spread on the road as Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem. Can you imagine being excited enough to shout and wave?

**Celebration**

We’ll sing ‘We have a king who rides a donkey’ <https://youtu.be/gSbEEwik2hs>

The week we call ‘Holy Week’ starts on Palm Sunday. Imagine the scene. Jesus sends two of his followers to get a donkey for him to ride. That seems really odd, but one of the prophets has written about a new king coming to Jerusalem and riding, not a big horse like you would expect, but a donkey. The people who lived in Jerusalem knew that, so they understood what it meant.

As soon as Jesus got on the donkey and started to ride into Jerusalem, all his followers started to cheer. They put cloaks on the donkey for him to sit on and threw more on the ground in front of the donkey. As they cheered, they grabbed branches from palm trees and waved them in the air. And they yelled “Hosana to the king”. More and more people joined in, and soon there was a big procession, led by Jesus, all shouting and waving palm branches.

We make palm crosses to celebrate that. As we haven’t got palm leaves to make them from, we’ll use paper. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5dcu-pOIpY&t=3s>

The people in charge in Jerusalem didn’t like Jesus. They didn’t like him saying he was God’s son. They didn’t like him telling them off for the way they treated other people. They didn’t like him leading big processions. They were afraid. They were afraid that ordinary people would stop doing what they were told. They were afraid that the Romans would see this as a rebellion and destroy Jerusalem. They were afraid that they might be wrong.

So on the evening of the Thursday of that week, after Jesus had had a special meal with his followers and gone out to the Mount of Olives, they went and had him arrested. He was tried three times, each of them with fake evidence, once by the Jewish leaders, once by Pilate, the Roman governor and once by King Herod. Pilate was the one who had to make the final decision. His wife told him to have nothing to do with it, but he gave in, then washed his hands.

Jesus was killed on a cross by the Romans. He could have got out of it but he didn’t, because he wanted to show everyone how much God loved them.

Sing Jesus’ love is very wonderful <https://youtu.be/WcgplHIntJc>

Because Jesus died just before the start of the Jewish Sabbath, he couldn’t be buried properly for another day. The women (who we talked about in our activities) came to the tomb he’d been put in to do the proper things for the burial. When they got there, the tomb was empty. Jesus had risen. Most of them went back to the room they were meeting in, but Mary stayed behind. She saw a man she thought was a gardener and asked where Jesus was. It was Jesus! Why didn’t she recognise him?

Do you recognise these people? (pictures of people will be projected)

Jesus spoke to Mary and she recognised him from his voice.

Our prayer

Dear God, we don’t really understand why Jesus had to die, but we know he died because he loved us and you love us. Help us to learn what it means to be loved by you, and help us to act like you love us.

Thank you for our mothers who look after us, and thank you that, although the first Easter must have seemed really horrible, we now have good things to celebrate at Easter. Amen.

We’ll sing Lord I lift your name on high. <https://youtu.be/c12Ta6_WJrw>

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>