**Messy Church – 15th March 2025**

**Lent**

The activities are:

1. **Jesus’ baptism: sponge painting with figures:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 to 17, Mark chapter1, verses 9 to 11, Luke chapter 3, verses 21 and 22
2. **Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day): pancakes**
3. **Ash Wednesday: new start:**
4. **Mothering Sunday: cards or photo-frames:**
5. **Passion Sunday: cleansing the temple: sheep masks:** Matthew chapter 20, verses 12 to 13, Mark chapter 11, verses 15 to 18, Luke chapter 19, verses 45 to 46, John chapter 2, verses 14 to 17 (In the Celebration)
6. **Palm Sunday: palm leaves:** Matthew chapter 21, verses 1 to 10, Mark chapter 11, verses 1 to 11, Luke chapter 19, verses 28 to40, John chapter 12, verses 12 to 16 (In the Celebration)

**Stories and Activities**

Many of the stories and activities that we think of to do with Lent are not in the bible at all. They have developed out of the symbols which are in the bible, but they are not referred to in the bible. So some of our activities today have no bible references.

Lent is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) between Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The last day before Lent starts is Shrove Tuesday.

**1. Jesus’ baptism: sponge painting with figures:** Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 to 17, Mark chapter1, verses 9 to 11, Luke chapter 3, verses 21 and 22

This story is told in all four gospels, although the version in John is the story as told by John the Baptist himself, and doesn’t actually mention the baptism of Jesus, just the surrounding events.

Baptising someone in the time of Jesus meant a holy person – as John was thought to be – taking the person to be baptised into a river, or a lake (like Lake Galilee), and making them go right under the water. The idea was that they were saying they were sorry for the wrong things they had done in their lives, and they wanted to be a better person in the future. Symbolically, they were ‘dying’ to their old life – drowning it – and starting again.

This is still what baptism means – it is why Baptist churches only baptise people who are old enough to understand what it means. Of course small children and babies cannot understand what it means, so in churches where small children and babies are baptised, it really means that their parents and god-parents promise to help them live good lives, and when the children are old enough to understand what was done, they ‘confirm’ the promises made for them when they were younger.

Jesus arrived where John was talking and baptising. John pointed him out to the crowd that was already there, saying that he himself was definitely not as good as him. Jesus waited for John to finish baptising for the day. Then he asked John to baptise him. John said that it should be the other way round – Jesus should baptise him, John! Jesus said that for the time being, it should be John baptising Jesus, and John agreed.

They went into the river together, and John baptised Jesus. As they came out of the water, all four gospels say, the Spirit of God landed on Jesus, in the form of a dove.

**You will need:** a piece of paper, some paint, pieces of sponge, and, if you want, the print outs of two people, representing John and Jesus. You may want to colour these in before you cut them out: you will need felt tip pens or colouring pencils, scissors and glue

Paint the paper with sponges dipped in the paint, to show a river and its banks. If you want, colour and cut out the figures of Jesus and John, and, when the paint is dry, stick them onto your background.

**Talk about:** being sorry about bad things you have done, and how you can show you are sorry. What happens if you have said sorry and then you do the same thing again?

**2. Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day): pancakes:**

There is no mention of Lent (in so many words) in the Bible. What there is, is a statement that when Jesus had been baptised, he went into the desert for 40 days, when he didn’t eat anything, and “was tempted by the Devil” – this may be a personification of Jesus working out how he would tell other people about God, which would be different from how the Jewish authorities were doing it.

When the church was formalising how it did things, many years later, these 40 days became the period we call Lent. Because Jesus went hungry (but not thirsty) there were restrictions on what people were allowed to eat. This mainly applied to relatively rich people, as what they were not allowed to eat mostly wasn’t eaten by poor people anyway. The leftover bits of these traditions have been reduced to pancakes – because the most important thing that was banned was flour. There actually wouldn’t have been a lot of eggs and milk around at this time of year, but any that were, would be used up, with the flour, before Lent started.

Shrove Tuesday was originally the day people went to church and confessed their sins to the priest – the equivalent of Jewish people saying they were sorry, and wanted to be baptised, to John. When you were ‘shriven’ (the present tense of ‘Shrove’), you were forgiven – baptism could only be done once!

**You will need:** The recipe sent with this booklet, the ingredients and tools listed.

Make pancakes and share them

**Talk about:** giving up luxuries, to think about what is important in your life. What foods would you consider luxuries?

**3 Ash Wednesday: new start in life:**

Having gone to church individually on Shrove Tuesday, and confessed their sins, on Ash Wednesday Christians went to church together for a serious service. They were told about changing their lives, and about what they shouldn’t eat in the next 40 days. To symbolise this new start, they had ashes marked on their foreheads in a cross shape.

Traditionally (now) the ashes are made by burning left over palm crosses (or the congregation’s own palm crosses) given on Palm Sunday last Lent, and mixing the ash with a little olive oil, so that it is sufficiently sticky to stay on the forehead.

In many churches, this is a relatively new tradition – in the Church of England, and the Methodist Church, this service has only recently become popular, although Ash Wednesday has been in the church calendar all along.

**Talk about:** starting again. There are lots of occasions when ‘starting again’ is possible – New Year is a very popular one – and many people wish they could start again on a regular basis. What would ‘starting your life again’ mean to you?

**4. Mothering Sunday: cards or photo-frames:**

Before Mother’s Day became an occasion when lots of money was spent on mothers (before Father’s Day, Grandparent’s Days were invented) there was a Christian festival. The fourth Sunday in Lent was called Mothering Sunday. In the UK there are various ‘logical’ origins, which may, or may not be linked.

There is the tradition that people should go to their ‘mother church’ – the church where they were baptised. This would be their parish church, and because most people lived all their lives in a relatively small location, it would not be difficult.

At one time, one of the traditional readings for this Sunday was from St Paul’s letter to the Galatians, chapter 4, verses, which said “

A third tradition is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, people who were ‘in service’ – maids and manservants – had a day off on this day, to visit their mother, or their mother church (or both). People who lived where they worked might not get very many days when they could go home, so this would be special. Simnel cakes have also been associated with this day – a gift of a cake for a mother.

**For the card, you will need:** a piece of card, of a size to make a pretty card, colouring pencils or felt tip pens, or stick on flowers (or a combination!)

Decorate the card, and sign it for your mother, or grandmother, or other person of importance in your life.

**For the photo-frame, you will need:** 2 pieces of card to fit either a 7 x 5 or a 6 x 4 photo. If the card is thick cut the pieces the same size and use tape to fasten them together. With thin card, the front piece could be made ½” bigger on three sides and the excess folded over the back and glued. Mitre the bottom corners. Before fastening it together, cut out either an oval or if you prefer a heart shaped hole in the front piece so that you can see the picture. Decorate the front of the frame with coloured pencils or stick on flowers. Put a picture of you in the frame!

**Talk about:** your background – where do you come from, where are your ‘roots’. If someone asked you where you were from, would you talk about your home town, or your family background. If you have lived in a lot of places, where is home? Do you think about ‘Mothering’ in this context?

**5. Passion Sunday: cleansing the temple: sheep masks:** Matthew chapter 20, verses 12 to 13, Mark chapter 11, verses 15 to 18, Luke chapter 19, verses 45 to 46, John chapter 2, verses 14 to 17. (in the Celebration)

Strictly speaking this story belongs in Holy Week, which we will cover next time, but it is one of the traditional readings for Passion Sunday, the 5th Sunday in Lent.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he went to the temple to pray. He discovered that the first courtyard, called ‘The Court of Gentiles’, which meant that anyone could go in, even non-Jews, was crowded, like a street market. There were stalls selling doves, or sheep, or calves. There were stalls changing everyday money into temple money – like changing Pounds for Euros before you go on holiday.

Jesus was so distressed that all this was going on where people might be trying to pray that he started turning the stalls over, and letting the animals go, especially the cages of doves. He said that the temple had been intended to be a house of prayer, but that all these traders, and those who allowed them to be there, were turning into a den of thieves.

**You will need:** a paper plate, scissors, cotton wool, thread, or yarn, and glue. You might also need a pencil to mark where the eyes should go. If you need help, ask an adult

Put the paper plate in front of your face, with the top of the plate against your face. Mark – or ask someone else to mark – where your eyes are, on the bottom of the plate. Cut holes where your eyes would be, so you can see when you are wearing the mask. Cut holes also at the same level, at the edges of the plate, and thread yarn or string through, long enough to tie at the back of your head. Spread glue over the rest of the bottom of the plate, and stick cotton wool to it, to make the sheep’s face.

**Talk about:** people being excluded – like the people who couldn’t pray for the crowds of other people changing their money, or buying their sacrifices.

**6. Palm Sunday: palm leaves:** Matthew chapter 21, verses 1 to 10, Mark chapter 11, verses 1 to 11, Luke chapter 19, verses 28 to40, John chapter 12, verses 12 to 16 (In the Celebration)

A week before Easter, Jesus and his friends were approaching Jerusalem. As they reached the top of the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley to Jerusalem, Jesus told two of his disciples to go into the next village and bring him the young donkey they would find, tied up outside a house. He said that if anyone asked what they were doing, they were to say that the Master needed the donkey. When they came back to Jesus with the donkey, the disciples put their coats on the donkey, instead of a saddle. Jesus got on the donkey and started to ride it down the hill. Some versions of the story say that the people of Jerusalem had heard Jesus was coming, and came to meet him, and other versions say that there was a crowd on the road anyway, including the disciples. These people spread their coats on the road, and when they didn’t have coats, they took branches from the trees beside the road, and spread those on the road.

We are going to make palm leaves.

**You will need:** a lolly stick (or a piece of garden cane), some green paper, a pencil, scissors and some glue. If you don’t have green paper, use white (scrap will do) and paint it green. There is a template in the Messy Church pack, as well.

Fold your paper in half (or use two pieces) and stick a lolly stick, or garden cane along the diagonal. Draw an oval from the top corner, almost to the bottom corner (look at the template). Cut the notches almost to the middle – but not quite! If you are using white paper, paint it on one side, and when it is dry, paint it on the other side.

**Talk about:** what can happen when crowds gather – either for good, or for bad. Jesus was popular – but next time we will talk about another crowd, who followed someone else’s direction.

**Celebration**

Today we have been thinking about Lent, going right up to Holy Week, which we will look at next time. We actually need to start just before Lent, with Jesus being baptised by John. Jesus came to John, who was baptising lots of people, and asked to be baptised. John realised who Jesus was, and said that he didn’t need to be baptised, but Jesus insisted. Afterwards, God’s Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. The Jesus went into the desert for 40 days, where he fasted. Lent is a remembrance of that Fast. On Pancake day we use up certain foods as pancakes. On Ash Wednesday we have a symbolic new start.

Sing O Lord, all the world belongs to you <https://youtu.be/jJMaNZ84xsw?si=QFLkDXv0hLDXxM-T>

Although all the Sundays in Lent are special, the first named one is Mothering Sunday. This is often called Mother’s Day now, but was originally an opportunity for servants living away from home to go back to their “Mother Church”. Of course they could visit their family as well, so mothers were included with Mother Church.

The next Sunday is called Passion Sunday. Here we start to think about Jesus’ death. I also associate it with Jesus’ feelings for his people, the Jews, for the Temple, and for what God wanted them both to be. Jesus saw the traders in the temple. They were making a profit out of people who just wanted to please God, and getting in the way of people who weren’t Jews (Gentiles) who wanted to come close. The market was in the court of the Gentiles, which was as far as a non-Jew could go into the temple.

We’re going to make sheep masks, because sheep were among the animals being bought and sold.

Sing We have a king who rides a donkey. <https://youtu.be/gSbEEwik2hs?si=Vywbt9zF7rB4QhKu>

Do you remember which day we think about Jesus riding a donkey? It’s Palm Sunday. Jesus came into Jerusalem riding a donkey. He’d sent two disciples ahead to get one, and he rode it in. Other disciples put coats on it for Jesus to sit on, and waved palm branches or threw them on the ground in front of the donkey. There were a lot of people travelling in to Jerusalem, and before long there was a big procession. The Temple leaders weren’t very happy, but there was nothing they could do about it at the time – they thought there would be a riot if they tried.

We’ll make palm leaves to wave.

Let’s pray.

Dear God at Lent we remember when Jesus started his ministry. As we grow older, let us know what you want us to do and, if we’ve not started already, tell us how and when to start.

Amen

Sing One more step along the world I go. <https://youtu.be/7PXV3dwaeNU?si=gijtWyMZHdN5eWde>

Next Messy Church is 19th April which is Easter Saturday. See you then.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

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

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (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>