

Lent 2021

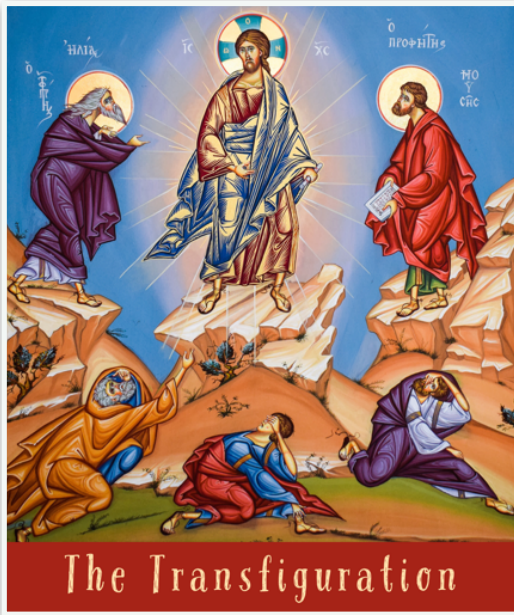
Inside Out

This Lent we will
be looking at the
connections
between our inner
and outer lives.

All Saints Church
Ouzel Valley Team Ministry

There are lots of different ways to keep Lent, the most important thing is that this time becomes a time of drawing closer to God. In this booklet I will go through the themes from the Sunday before Lent until Holy Week, I hope that you find it helpful,

Mother Cate.



Week 1: Transfiguration Before we begin...

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, but the preparation begins on the Sunday beforehand. The gospel this week is always the story of the transfiguration, where Peter, James and John see the unveiled light of Jesus' holiness.

It is a moment that gives us focus and direction as we look towards this challenging season of Lent and we seek to follow Jesus into the wilderness of our lives. It is a moment when the inner becomes outer, in this case the glory of Jesus can be seen by his friends. Through Lent we will look at the suffering of Jesus and this moment reminds us that his death on the cross will not be the end of the story. It also makes it clear that the glory of God is not given to Jesus at the resurrection or ascension, but is always there.

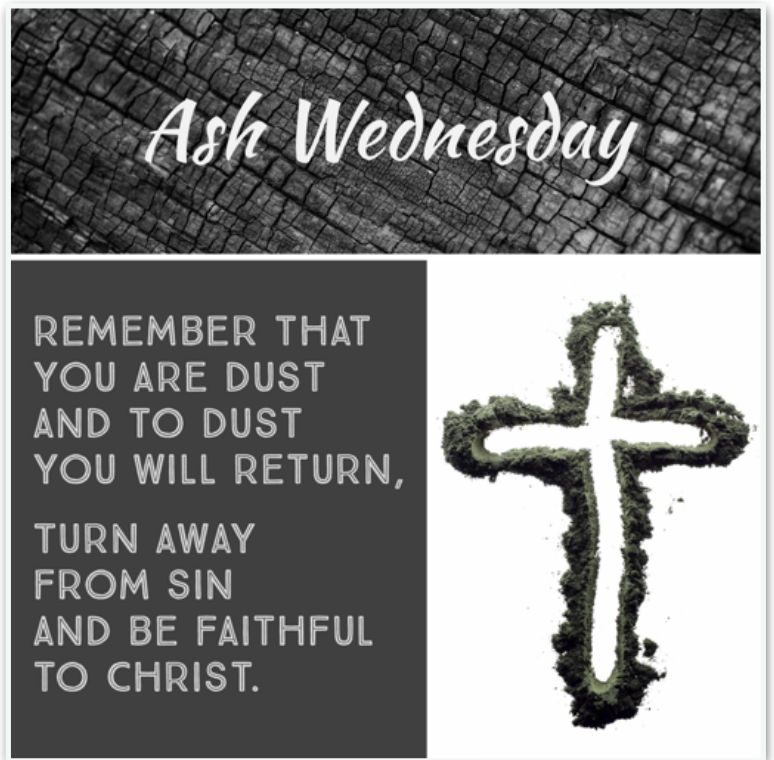
So as we prepare for Lent and think about how we will keep it, we should be looking for those things that will make the light of Christ shine in our lives. Traditionally this has been done through prayer, fasting, reading the Bible and acts of charity; this is often supported by giving something up or taking something up.

Only you will know what is right for you to do this year, but it's not about self improvement or self punishment. Whether you decide to focus on your inner or outer life, to give something up or take something up, whatever you choose should bring you closer to God inside and out.

On Ash Wednesday we traditionally come to church to have the sign of the cross placed onto our heads with the burnt ashes of last year's palm crosses.

This year you might like to try something different to mark the start of Lent so here are a few ideas:

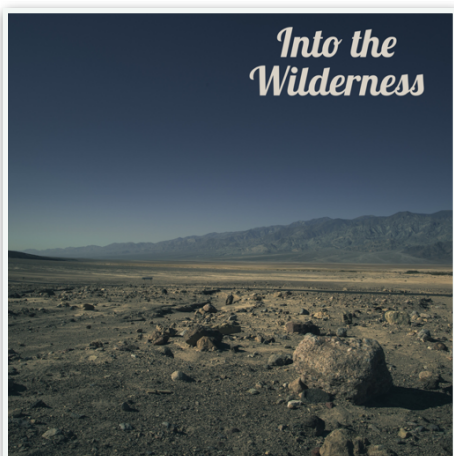
- Read Psalm 51
- You might like to use the Jesus Prayer.
"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
After a time of self reflection and acknowledging that we all fall short of the ideals of the Christian life, this short and simple prayer can be used as a reflection or repeated in a time of silence. As we recall our own faults and failings, we remember too God's unfailing love for us.
- Think about your breath, let it come in and go out naturally. Remember that your breath comes and goes connecting you to the world. We are made from the dust of the earth and given the breath of life. As you breathe give thanks for your life, which come to you as a gift. You might like to reflect on what you take in to your body, to your mind and your soul and what you give back to the world. Hold all this before God in prayer, asking for God's strength and courage to grow in love and faith both inwardly and outwardly.



Week 2: Into the Wilderness

Going into the wilderness with Christ is a central theme of Lent. We remember that after his baptism the Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness and experienced various temptations. The tradition of giving something up is to share in the hardships Jesus experienced and to follow the pattern he sets us. As we are thinking about how our inner and outer life connects it is a helpful image to think about. Some of us may reflect on how we think and feel which will change our behaviour and choices, others may concentrate on what they do with their bodies, through fasting or exercise to bring new understanding about mind or soul.

For the most part we live comfortable and protected lives, to deliberately seek discomfort seems counterintuitive. As with so much of life it is the motivation that is key. If all we are doing is to prove to ourselves that we can forgo a favourite treat then we have missed the point. We go into the wilderness, we put ourselves in a place where we are uncomfortable, mentally, physically, or both, in order to better know ourselves and God. Think of it like an experiment. We need to observe the effects that the new conditions produce in our lives. The disciplines that we have committed to should be a daily reminder to focus our lives on God.



As you set off into whatever the wilderness of Lent will bring to you, you will need to go humbly. Allow yourself to feel the discomfort that reminds you of your dependence upon God, but be kind to yourself too, we are learning that love remains even when everything else is stripped away.

Week 3: Take up your cross

What does it mean to you to take up your cross? We all have burdens to bear in this life and they will be different for all of us. Many of us will have burdens of mind, body and soul; the things that we have to live with and work through. The words of Jesus are clear, discipleship comes at a cost.



If we are to reach the heart of faith, to let our lives truly be shaped by it, we need to be prepared to take up our cross and follow in Jesus' footsteps. But like anything else in faith we should not cling to our cross either, if it becomes something that keeps us trapped in a cycle of self-pity, anger or jealousy, then we have not understood what is being asked of us.

This week you might want to speak to God about what burdens you are called to bear and what you need to let go of. Just like the tension and connection between our inner and outer lives, the tension between taking up and letting go runs throughout Lent.

Our faith will never make our struggles go away, but holding them before God can transform how we feel about them. We see in the cross that Jesus carried that God knows and understands human suffering. Nothing that we experience is ever outside the reach of God's love and it is important that we are honest with God about our pain, struggles and weakness. We may want to put only our best on show to God and others, but what we see in the cross is that God can and does work through our brokenness to heal the world.

Week 4:

Clear out!



This is not a week about home improvement or tidying up! Sunday's gospel is about clearing the money changers out of the temple. Of all the weeks of Lent it is perhaps the hardest week to apply generally to our lives. Even those who are socially or politically active are unlikely to be promoted to emulate this particular action, so what are we to make of it?

Jesus is, in essence keeping the space that should be for God clear. He is angry at those who are getting between those who come to worship and their God for the sake of profit. The word that we have for Lent in English originates from the older word "lencten" which simply means the spring season and refers to the days getting longer. So in a way Lent is about spring cleaning the soul, and like all those chores around the house and garden we clean the physical space to improve our lives.

It is a time to clear and clean, to make space, in our lives and in our homes. As Christians, it is especially a time to make space for God. Perhaps you might want to make a special place in your home where you pray? It may be as simple as placing your Bible, or an icon nearby the place you sit or kneel when you talk to God. When we make a place for God it makes a statement about God's place in our hearts and our lives. We shape the space we live in to make a connection with what we believe, to make space for what is important to us.

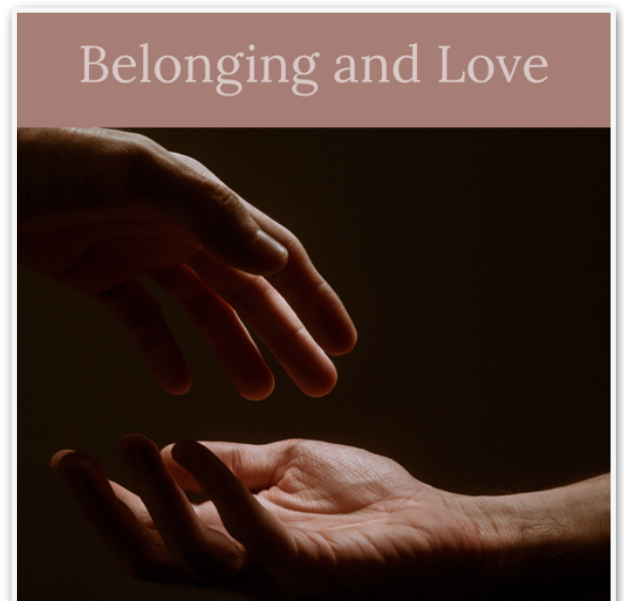
Week 5: Belonging and Love, Mothering Sunday

We so often think about Mothering Sunday in terms of our own mothers and families, but, of course it was originally the Sunday when people returned to their “mother” church. In practice this meant that people had a chance to go home and see their families at the same time and would often take flowers when they went.

Perhaps it is the perfect time to reflect on the life of faith that we share. Although Lent is about personal repentance and reflection, it is also a corporate exercise. We acknowledge together that we get things wrong and on Mothering Sunday we celebrate our relationship to others in church and in the rest of our lives.

Part way along the journey, we can pause and lift our heads. Take a moment to look at the beauty of the world around you, take time to give thanks for everyone who has nurtured you and shown you God’s love. We belong together as God’s people, and whatever we learn about ourselves in this season we learn to share, living and loving together.

May God, who gave birth
to all creation, bless us:
may God, who became incarnate
by an earthly mother, bless us:
may God, who broods as a mother
over her children, bless us.
May almighty God bless us,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.
Amen





Week 6:

Losing and Finding

Sometimes we are so sure.
This week we are challenged to see that sometimes we only find things through losing something else.

Part of the inside out nature of Lent is the challenge to look again at all the things that we take for granted, the things that we are sure about. If we have been Christian for a while we become so used to the words of Jesus when he says that those who lose their life will find it. Let yourself hear those words again...

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

As we enter Passiontide and our focus shifts away from trials and temptations and towards Jesus suffering and death we are forced to look at how willing we are to follow along this path.

We cannot understand these words of Jesus as an academic exercise. We need to trust where we are being led through prayer and discernment. As we seek to live the Christian life we get glimmers of the eternal life that can be ours if only we can follow in humble faith. And eternal life is not only what comes after death, it is that fullness of life that Jesus promises. The trouble is that we can only find it if we are willing to give something up and trust in the one who goes before us.

Week 7: Holy Week

Thy will be done...

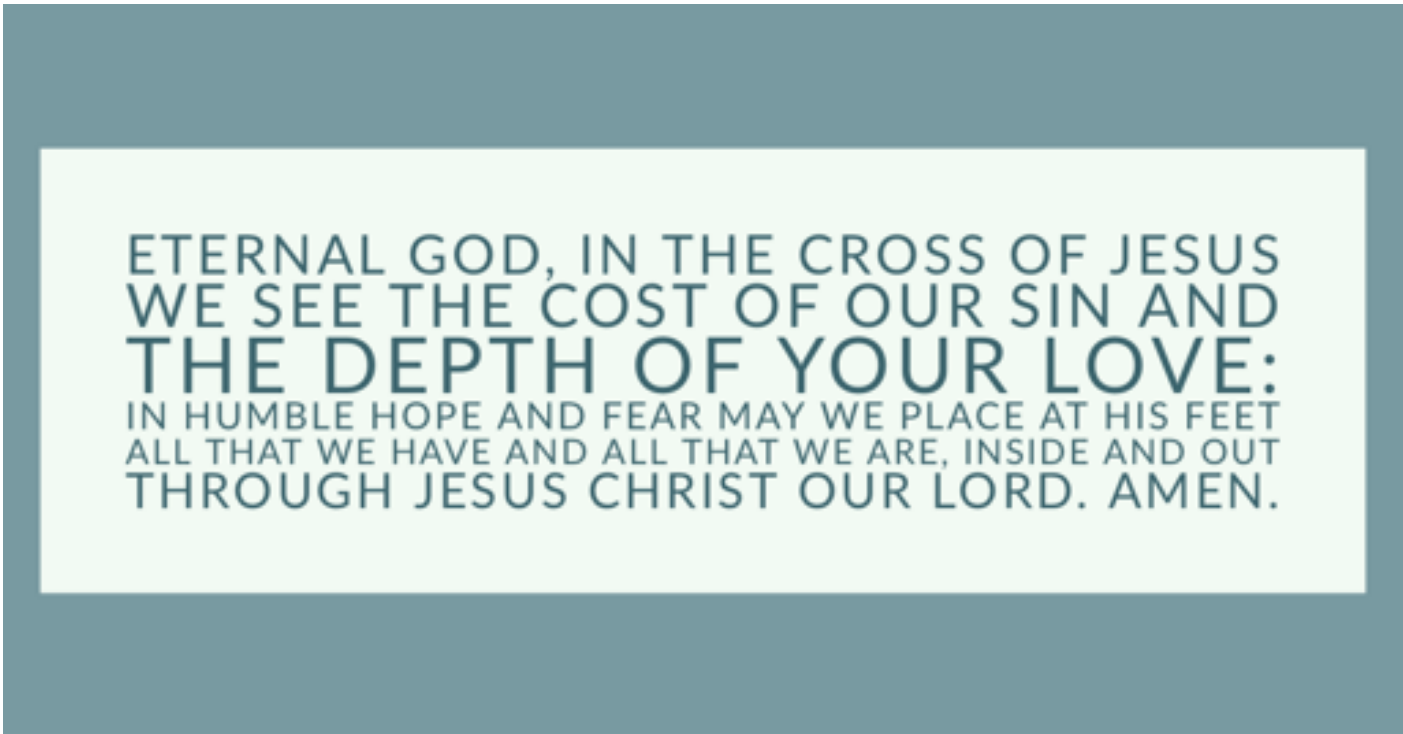
This week we walk alongside Jesus as he goes to his death. It is a demanding week if we take it to heart, but we do so because Jesus suffered and died for us and because it is the only door to the new life that follows.



It is a week with a lot of structure and “outer” practices. Traditionally we have the procession and drama of Palm Sunday, the Stations of the Cross and daily Holy Communion until Maundy Thursday when we remember the Last Supper. Then we have Good Friday with the three hours at the cross, and the emptiness of Holy Saturday with all the questions that the empty tomb poses. We can do all the “outer” things, but if they do not touch our hearts then we have wasted our time.

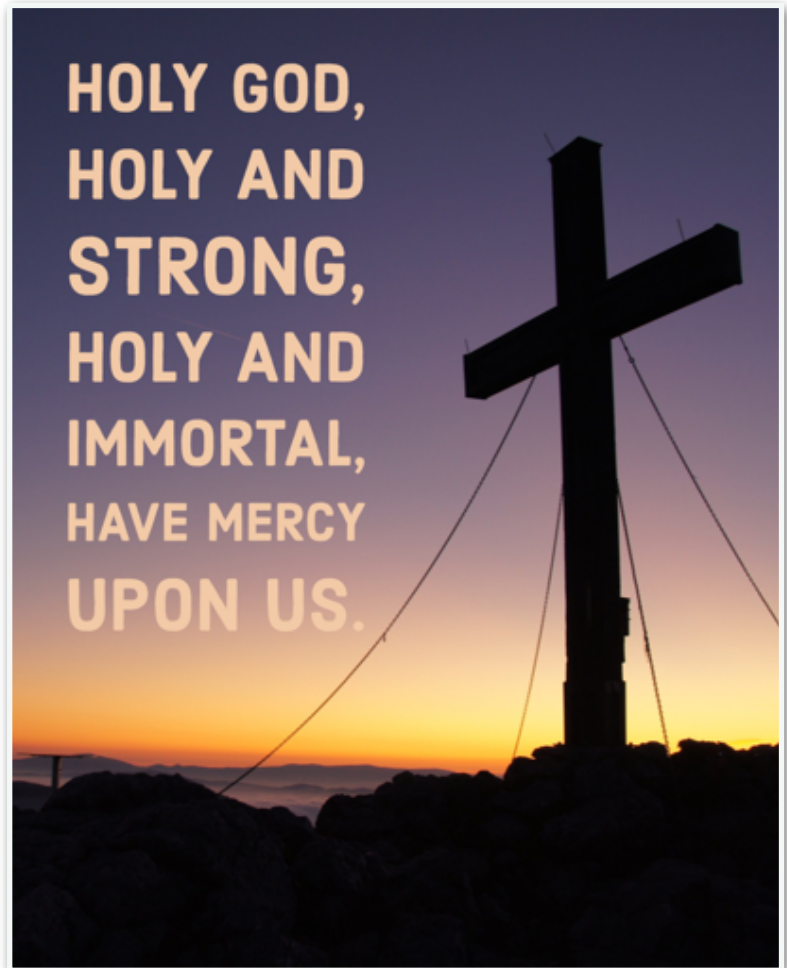
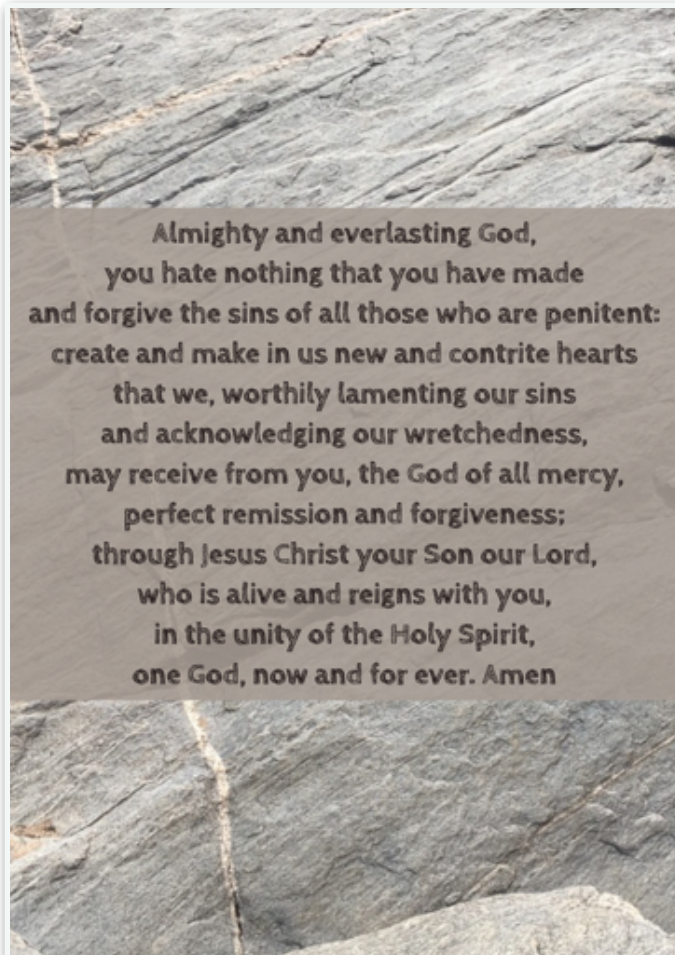
To truly keep Holy Week is a demanding experience, but as with all of Lent, the more you seek to protect and insulate yourself from it, the less you will be able to enter into it. One year, a long time ago, I was away from home for Holy Week and went to keep Good Friday in a church I didn’t know. The three hours was filled with talking as if silence, and the reflections it might bring, would be far too overwhelming. As successive people talked they repeatedly mentioned Easter Day, as if we couldn’t bear to face Good Friday without the reassurance of the joys and celebrations to come. But that’s precisely the point of Good Friday, to allow ourselves to feel the pain and the rawness of what happened, to confront ourselves with the enormity of God’s own Son dying for us.

All our letting go comes into sharp focus as we come to the cross. Whether we have been concentrating on our inner life, addressing our thoughts and feelings, our prayer life and study; or on our outer life, taking up a discipline, letting go of a physical comfort or setting a new pattern for our life; this is, quite literally, the crux of it all. We bring all that we are to the foot of the cross, to the one who suffered and died for us.



ETERNAL GOD, IN THE CROSS OF JESUS
WE SEE THE COST OF OUR SIN AND
THE DEPTH OF YOUR LOVE:
IN HUMBLE HOPE AND FEAR MAY WE PLACE AT HIS FEET
ALL THAT WE HAVE AND ALL THAT WE ARE, INSIDE AND OUT
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

We cannot go around Holy Week. We may do very well in avoiding its message for many years, but at some point in all our lives we will know it for ourselves. We put ourselves through this experience year by year not to punish ourselves or to make us feel bad. We walk where Jesus walked because it reassures us that nothing we go through will be outside of God's love. It connects us inside and out to God and to each other as we remember just how much we are loved by the one who created us from dust.



Prayers for Lent and Holy Week



Most merciful God,
 who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
 delivered and saved the world:
 grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
 we may triumph in the power of his victory;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.



**Faithful God,
 Look upon your people,
 For whose sake
 our Saviour Jesus Christ
 Accepted betrayal, rejection
 And death upon the cross;
 Who now in glory
 pleads for us,
 For ever and ever.
 Amen.**

What's in the bag?

- **Paper Cross**

These are fragile and colourful, perhaps not what you would expect. I hope that this will help you think about what the cross means to you.



- **Lent Cards**

On one side are some thoughts to help you decide how to keep Lent, and on the other is the Lord's Prayer. We will be using the Lord's Prayer as a focus in our Holy Week worship.

- **Index Cards**

On one of these you could write your intentions for how you will keep Lent. The other you might like to use to write a prayer or verse of scripture that will accompany you through the season. You might like to keep a Lent journal too!

- **Small Icon of the Trinity**

This copy of Rublev's famous icon is a helpful focus for prayer. The perspective cleverly draws the viewer into the scene inviting them into the life of the Trinity.

- **A Candle**

You can use this as you wish, but you may like to keep it for Maundy Thursday in Holy Week and light it to keep watch with Jesus as he asked his friends to watch with him the night before he died.