

The Vicar's Letter

Dear Friends,

Lent begins very early this year, on Wednesday 6th of February.

It's sometimes helpful to take a familiar concept and try to think of it in a new way. Recently, as I was doing my customary New Year's clear-out of the house - going through the different piles of miscellaneous objects which just get 'dumped' in certain places - I found some long lost and much-missed items. Perhaps that's a parable which may help us into Lent – time for a clear-out of some of life's accretions, for a refocusing on what is important, with the promise and hope that we may re-discover hidden treasures which we thought we'd lost, or had even forgotten about.

What are you going to do about Lent, to make it a good 'spring-clean'? You'll find details of what's on offer at St Mark's to help you, elsewhere in this issue of *Seek*.

Among the 'helps' to understanding and using Lent, I'd like to introduce this year the practice of having in church a Lenten cross made of the trunks of two Christmas trees. As we look at them – still so obviously Christmas conifers, even though their branches have been shorn away – we will be reminded of the intimate unity of all parts of our Lord's story. And on Easter Day we shall see and help the cross to blossom, even as we rejoice that Jesus' resurrection is alive in our hearts and in the world.

I shall be inviting different people to speak very briefly at the beginning of each 10 am Sunday service in Lent about what the season means to them, and to leave a symbol of that meaning on or at the foot of the cross. This will be another way in which we can help each other to understand different aspects of this special time. I always find it refreshing and inspiring to hear voices from the congregation sharing insights.

I am keeping my letter short this month to leave room for the reproduction of two poems which were used at the Christmas carol service – one of them Malcolm Guite's sonnet *O Emmanuel*, which people have inquired about. It is the final one in a sequence of sonnets which Malcolm wrote last year inspired by the traditional 'Great O's', or Advent Antiphons. (Copies of the whole sequence are available from Malcolm.)

The other poem is *Child of the Snows*, by GK Chesterton, which was the text of a carol composed by James Lark, our Choir Director.

Although it may not seem very seasonal to print these two pieces in our magazine as Lent begins, the different seasons of our church's year are (as I said above) intimately entwined with each other. So I am sure you will enjoy the poems now and at any time.

Your friend and vicar,

Maggie Guite