

The last time I wrote a piece for this paper, we were looking forward to celebrating Christmas and enduring long nights and short days. Now we are looking forward to spring with its longer days and shorter darkness. And the beautiful flowers, the return of the birds, crops poking through the soil. It is a time of new life.

In the Christian calendar, we are entering the season of Lent. It is that period of 40 days which comes before Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday, and is used as a period of reflection and preparation before the celebration of Easter. It can be seen as a period of 'doom and gloom', but for many Christians, it is an opportunity to reflect on the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert before beginning his earthly ministry and the temptations that he suffered and overcame.

Traditionally people give up things for Lent so that they can share in the deprivation that Jesus suffered in the desert. But you don't have to give up things for Lent you could take something on. Such as reading a book of Lent reflections, or looking at beginning to pray regularly or even increasing your prayer time slightly. If that is not for you, how about making a commitment to visit someone who is lonely, or remembering to thank God every day throughout Lent for his goodness to us. Purple is the colour that we normally use for Lent and Advent. It is a colour of mourning and repentance. You could put a purple throw on your chair, or light a purple coloured candle every day, to remind you that we are in Lent. And, of course, there are special services in church during Lent to remind us of Jesus's suffering and to lead us to the promise of Easter. Look out for the cards that will be sent round soon with all the information you need about dates, times and venues.

The fourth Sunday in Lent is always Mothering Sunday, another traditional celebration. For many people this is a day of joy when we are able to remember our mothers especially and to give thanks to God for them. However, for many others it can be a particularly difficult and sad day, and I pray that we will always remember this and be sensitive to these situations.

As we once again enter a time of Lent and reflection, I hope we can all take time to consider again Jesus's time in the desert and to remember that although we too may spend time in the desert, unsure of the future or what path we should take, struggling to make decisions, that Jesus is only ever a prayer away and that he will not leave you to struggle alone.

I pray you will all have a good Lent.
Rev Glynis Beckett