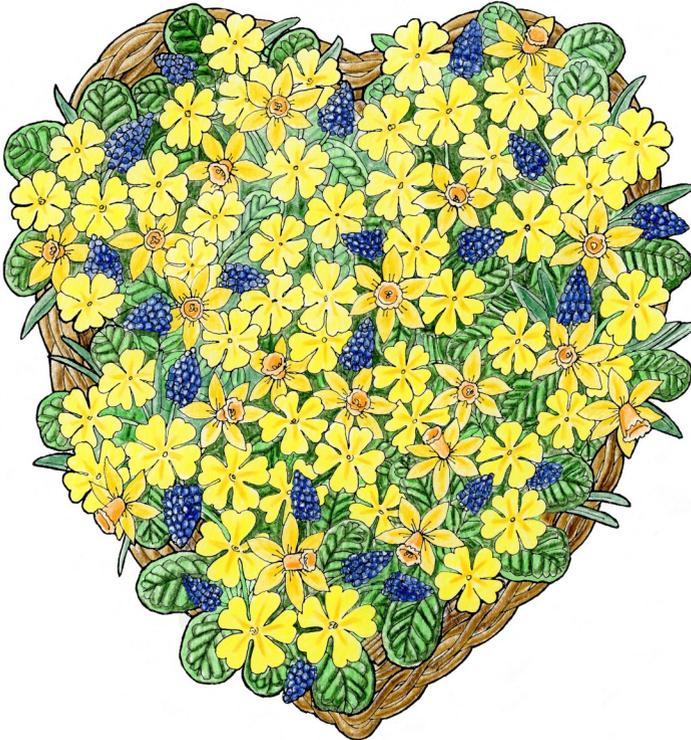


The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus

THANK YOU



www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

MARCH 2026

*Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share
God's love with words and actions*



Lamb's tails in the Spring breeze

Whilst most plants are pollinated by insects, plus other invertebrates and small mammals, quite a few rely on the wind to reproduce. A common way for trees to do this is to have catkins, hazel and silver birch both being good examples with easily visible long catkins often called lambs tails, but oak, beech, hornbeam, walnut, pine and other conifers do too. Catkins are actually long slim clusters of flowers which release large amounts of small, light pollen that can be blown a long way.

Most flowers contain both male and female parts within the one flower, but wind pollinated trees usually have separate male and female flowers. These may occur on the same tree as they do in hazel or oak or sometimes on different trees for example willow and poplar. The male flowers form in clusters making the catkin, whilst the female flowers stand upright individually. Flowers of wind pollinated plants have small petals if they have any at all and catkins tend to be pale yellow, no need for bright colours, large petals or scent to attract insects when it is the wind that is doing the work! Both the male catkins and female flowers can be seen on the edges of the tree canopy where the wind will catch them, shaking the catkin, releasing the pollen and carrying it away. The female flowers then catch the pollen as it is blown past, they usually stand upright on top of twigs and often have a sticky tip or 'stigma' as it's known, to catch the passing pollen. The female flowers are sometimes red, looking a little like a small sea anemone. Have a look on a hazel bush and see if you can see both the dangling catkins and also the small, red female flowers, sometimes on the same twig. Once pollinated the female flower will develop into the seed, be it an acorn, pine nut or a hazel nut.

Wind pollination works well for trees that flower early, when few insect pollinators may be about, for trees that are found in cold and windy spots too. Hazel, birch, willow and pines are trees that are early to arrive and grow on bare, rocky ground and are thought to have been amongst the trees that first colonised patches left bare by retreating glaciers after the last ice age. Wind pollination would have been an advantage in this.

Another important group of plants that are pollinated by wind are the grasses. Whilst they do not have catkins or separate male and female flowers, there are parallels to be drawn. Grass flowers tend to be green, yellow or pale brown rather than brightly coloured. They are produced at the top of a grass stem that usually stands vertical, bringing the flowers above other foliage and into the wind. They tend to be clustered, often in a spike rather like a vertical catkin and they produce a large amount of pollen which can be carried over distance. Many grasses open up when ready to release their pollen, looking like a miniature Christmas tree, so that all of the flowers will be caught in passing breezes. Some grasses do have strong colours, but this is due to the colour of the pollen not the flowers. Grasses may be at their most beautiful when releasing coloured pollen. One example of this is meadow foxtail, so named because the red pollen colours the flowering spike like a fox's tail.

Why not have a walk around your local churchyard, chapel yard or cemetery and see if you can see any signs of wind pollination taking place.

All the best, Harriet

Harriet Carty, *Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor*, harriet@cpga.org.uk,

How to hear God



When people first come to faith in Jesus, they often notice in a very striking way how fellow Christians faces shine. We come to realise that these people's faces are shining because they spend time with Jesus, hearing God speak. Like Moses, when he came down from the mountain after hearing God speak to him, their faces are 'radiant' (Exodus 34:29,35).

Jesus said that 'people do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). Just as we need physical food, so we also need spiritual food. Spiritual food comes from hearing the words of God.

When we try to force our own agenda or strive to do what we want to do, there is a sense of spiritual discomfort. Joyce Meyer uses the analogy of the discomfort that comes from wearing a pair of shoes that don't fit.

When we are living a life of worship and obedience and following God's way, he promises that we will be 'at ease' (Psalm 25 v.13, AMP). That does not mean that life will be easy. But when we start following God's plans for our lives, it is like finding a pair of shoes that fit comfortably.

Again and again in this psalm we are reminded of how God guides us. He 'instructs' (vv.8,12), he 'guides' (v.9a), he 'teaches' (v.9b), he 'confides' in his people (v.14). Amazingly, David explains that God's goodness leads him to want to teach even sinful people; 'therefore he instructs sinners in his ways' (v.8). Even though David's 'iniquity' is 'great', he knows that he can be forgiven and put right by God (v.11).

Thankfully, you do not need to be perfect in order to hear God's guidance but you do need an attitude of humility: 'He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way' (v.9). 'God-friendship is for God-worshippers; They are the ones he confides in' (v.14, MSG).

You can be sure that God will only ask you to do 'what is right' (v.9a). The test of whether the guidance comes from God is whether what you are being asked to do is 'loving and faithful' (v.10a). God will never ask you to do something that is unloving or unfaithful. 'All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful' (v.10a).

Also, in Mark 7 Jesus says that the word of God takes priority over all our traditions (v.8). There is nothing wrong with tradition. Traditions can be very important and valuable. However, tradition should never take precedence over the word of God. Jesus attacks the Pharisees for using tradition to avoid obeying the word of God: 'You get rid of God's command so you won't be inconvenienced in following the religious fashions' (v.9, MSG).

For example, supporting elderly parents can sometimes be inconvenient. It can be tempting to find excuses why we should not need to do so. The Pharisees said it was permissible not to support your parents financially if you had given the money as a gift to God (v.11). Jesus said that in doing this they were disobeying the command to 'Honour your father and mother' (v.10a). 'Thus', he says, 'you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down' (v.13).

The Pharisees honoured God by what they did outwardly (vv.1–5). It is relatively easy to do the right things or even say the right things. We can obey all the rules of the community and yet our hearts can be far away from God (vv.6–8).

God is not so concerned about the outward appearance but about the heart. Jesus says, ‘For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person’ (vv.21–23). These are the things that pollute our lives and spoil our relationship with God.

Jesus says, ‘listen to me’ (v.14). This is the key to life – listening to Jesus. He goes on to draw out what is in the heart of the Syro-Phoenician woman. As John Calvin put it, Jesus intends ‘not to extinguish the woman’s faith’ by his apparent coldness ‘but rather to whet her zeal and inflame her ardour’.

Jesus came for the Jews first, then the Gentiles (vv.27–29; see Isaiah 49:6; Romans 1:16). The greatness of the woman’s faith is shown by the fact that she not only recognised who he was and his heavenly power, but, as Calvin goes on to say, she ‘pursued her course steadily through formidable opposition’. She is a great example for us of un-cynical and persevering faith.

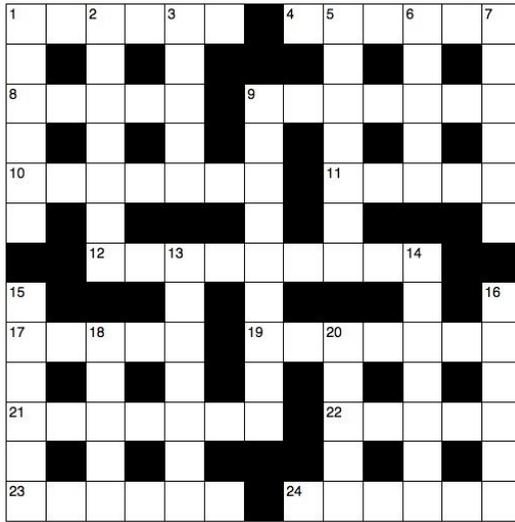
During the Lenten Season that we’re currently in, then, I pray that the prayer of all of our hearts will be: ‘Lord, thank you for the power of the word of God to challenge the attitudes of my heart. Cleanse my heart today, I pray, and give me a passionate, un-cynical and persevering faith. In Jesus’ life-giving Name, Amen’.

With love and prayers for this Lenten Season,

Rev’d Gayle

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gayle', written in a cursive style.

March



Crossword

Across

- 1 Arouse (Song of Songs 2:7) (6)
- 4 Extinguish (Isaiah 1:31) (6)
- 8 ““They — — ,” you will say, “but I’m not hurt!”” (Proverbs 23:35) (3,2)
- 9 Unhappiness (Nehemiah 2:2) (7)
- 10 Jewish (7)
- 11 Dirge (anag.) (5)
- 12 ‘A truthful witness gives honest — , but a false witness tells lies’ (Proverbs 12:17) (9)
- 17 Paul quoted from the second one in his address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:33) (5)
- 19 ‘Do not use your freedom to — the sinful nature’ (Galatians 5:13) (7)
- 21 ‘As you can see, he has done nothing to — death’ (Luke 23:15) (7)
- 22 Name applied by Isaiah to Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:1) (5)
- 23 ‘All the people — — one man, saying, “None of us will go home”’ (Judges 20:8) (4,2)
- 24 Lazarus, who was carried by angels to Abraham’s side when he died, was one (Luke 16:20) (6)

Down

- 1 Appalled (Job 26:11) (6)
- 2 ‘In an — to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea’ (Acts 27:30) (7)
- 3 Expel (Acts 18:16) (5)
- 5 ‘But I have a baptism to — , and how distressed I am until it is completed!’ (Luke 12:50) (7)
- 6 ‘Of the increase of his government and peace there will be — — ’ (Isaiah 9:7) (2,3)
- 7 Hurry (Psalm 119:60) (6)
- 9 ‘For I desire mercy, not — , and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6) (9)
- 13 One of its towns was Sychar, where Jesus met a woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:5) (7)
- 14 Shouting (Acts 7:57) (7)
- 15 Arachnid (Isaiah 59:5) (6)
- 16 One of Paul’s first converts in Philippi was Lydia, a — in purple cloth (Acts 16:14) (6)
- 18 Donkeys (5)
- 20 Raked (anag.) (5)

Why we should be like donkeys

Are you a pet-lover? Many people own a dog, a cat or a budgie, but most of us don't own a donkey! Yet in Bible times, donkeys were essential to daily life. They did everything from helping to grind corn, to ploughing, to carrying people, to transporting their belongings. Despite their small frame, donkeys are surprisingly tough. They are content with poor fodder like thistles and can travel an average of 20 miles a day.

There are two occasions in the Christian calendar where donkeys walk into the picture. At Christmas, Mary travelled the 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey. And although a donkey doesn't get a specific mention in the manger story, that same one that transported her was probably there at the birth; where else would it have been?

On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus deliberately chose this animal rather than a horse. Why? In Bible times, the horse was associated with war, conquest and worldly might. But the donkey was a symbol of peace and humility. Jesus used this animal to show that He had come with the dignity of the King of peace. His entry into the Holy City also fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy concerning the Messiah.

Donkeys are hardworking and undemanding. They wait for their master to put them to the work he has chosen for them. And, remarkably, each one bears the mark of the Cross on their backs!

2				3	4	1	
	1		8				5
		6		9			
5						6	
	2	4		7		8	3
	6						2
				8		6	
6					4		2
	4	1	9				8

So Doku

Nobody's said they don't like it, so here's another.

Enjoy.

Solution elsewhere!

On how to run a Church Council meeting

The Rectory
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

Clearly, the sight of your vicar running out of the room halfway through your last church council meeting, saying he should have stayed as a traffic warden, where he was universally liked, has unnerved you. It would have unnerved me too, since a universally popular traffic warden is an exceptional creature.

But perhaps it is necessary to give you some advice for the day when you do have to chair your first church council meeting.

- 1. Consider every agenda issue carefully beforehand and decide what you would like to do. Then, at the meeting, consult widely, listen to every opinion, weigh all the arguments, and then do precisely what you had decided before the meeting ever took place.*
- 2. Never, ever, let council members discuss hymns, which avoids getting blood on the carpets.*
- 3. Arrange the seating in rows, all facing the front, so that everyone must respond directly to you. The last thing you want is for council members to be able to discuss matters freely with one another.*

4. *Start smoking a pipe. At those times when you are faced with an issue when you really are unsure of how to respond, taking out your pipe, dismantling it, searching for a pipe cleaner, squinting down the stem to see if it is clean, mopping out the goo in the bowl, searching for your tobacco pouch, filling the pipe, tamping it down, asking if you can borrow matches and attempting to light it several times over, will give you more than sufficient time to formulate a reply. Once you have perfected the routine, the silence will have been so protracted, that most of the committee will have long forgotten what the question was anyway.*

5. *If someone is talking too long, consult your diary, noisily and obsessively, about next month's appointments, or write a note to a committee member who is at the back of the room and get it passed to him. The speaker should soon get the message.*

These are the simpler techniques of committee management. The advanced procedures must wait until you are strong enough to bear them.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

So Doku solution

2	9	8	7	5	3	4	1	6
3	1	7	8	4	6	2	9	5
4	5	6	2	9	1	7	8	3
5	7	9	3	2	8	1	6	4
1	2	4	6	7	5	8	3	9
8	6	3	4	1	9	5	7	2
9	3	2	5	8	7	6	4	1
6	8	5	1	3	4	9	2	7
7	4	1	9	6	2	3	5	8

How to handle temptation

'Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me.' (Luke 9: 23)

These words of Jesus are spoken at a turning point in the gospel. Jesus challenged the disciples about His identity and their commitment to Him: *'who do the crowds say I am?'* (Luke 9:18). It is at this point that He *'resolutely set out for Jerusalem'* (9:51). On our journey through Lent, as we look to the events of Good Friday and Easter, what are our priorities as Jesus' disciples?

To deny ourselves: this means to saying *No* to ourselves and *Yes* to God, as we humbly submit our will to His. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane *'not My will but Yours be done.'* (Luke 22:42). It means putting Jesus first in everything: our work, family, ambitions, possessions, marriage, finance and future. We will not be guided by self-interest, but by allowing God to show us how to live in His way.

To take up our cross: this reminds us that the disciple is not immune from suffering, as we follow Jesus along the way of the cross. Just as He carried His cross to Golgotha, we cannot avoid experiencing suffering in a fallen world. Every day we are to live in way that demonstrates to everyone that we have died to ourselves, our selfish ways and ambitions, and seek to live for God. It means breaking old selfish habits and ways of thinking, as we allow God to renew us by His Spirit.

Perhaps that is something we should learn—to wait for Jesus our Master, to be always obedient to Him, to serve Him with all our hearts, and to bear the mark of His grace in our lives.

In all of this we cannot lose, because like Jesus, it is only through death that we find God's new life. *'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.'* (Jim Elliot).

Believe in God and you'll believe in miracles, believe in His Son, and you'll experience one. - Anon

Peaceful mind in Lent

Lent is a time of prayer and inward reflection, when we take stock of where we are with God...with this in mind, the following may be helpful.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” *Matthew 11: 28-30.*

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” *John 16:33*

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” *James 1:12*

Two donkeys

Two donkeys were walking the streets of Jerusalem. One said: “Just a few days ago I came down that hill carrying Jesus, and the people were all singing and shouting and throwing down their cloaks and palms for me to walk on. But today they don’t even recognise me.”

The other donkey replied: “That is how it is, my friend. Without Jesus, none of us amounts to much.”

*God's faithfulness always surpasses our
unfaithfulness. - Anon*

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday - the fourth Sunday of Lent- offers families an opportunity to honour the women who have nurtured them. Lots of different streams and traditions have come together to make today's Mothering Sunday the special day that it is.

In the Middle Ages it was an occasion for everyone to visit their 'mother' church - the place where they had been baptised. Later, an opportunity for those who worked away from home to visit their mothers became added to the mix of reasons to make it a special day.

Today we honour all women who have in one way or another been special to us, and in church this is usually signalled by small bunches of flowers for every woman present.

Treating mums and grans to Sunday lunch, chocolates and flowers is also part of the present mix. And will there be a simnel cake to be seen - a tradition from ages past - with its rich layers of marzipan, and eleven balls of marzipan on top, reminders of the 11 disciples who remained faithful to Jesus?

Not everyone has enjoyed a wonderful or enduring relationship with their mum, so lest we get carried away on a wave of love and sentimentality, there is usually space in the Mothering Sunday church service to reflect on and pray for those whose relationships with their mother were not all they might have been.

Also, there are the families blighted by the lack of, or death of a child; families remembering a mum who died tragically young; women who never had a child but would have dearly loved the opportunity; all these and more are a recognition of the imperfections of human love, human life.

These imperfections can be brought in prayer to the God who mothers us. In the Old Testament, Isaiah speaks of God comforting His people like a mother hen. In the New Testament, both Matthew and Luke bear witness to Jesus expressing His desire to gather His people as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. Yes, God has strong maternal qualities which He invites us to discover and enjoy!

Have you discovered the mothering, nurturing, maternal qualities which God offers to all people? It's lovelier than flowers, more long-lasting than simnel cake, better than a visit from family, and it's free to everyone who wants it - it could be yours!

Can you tell truth from fake news?

The enemies of Christianity have one aim: to make it impossible to be a Christian.

They pass laws and spread rumours; they close down churches and create an atmosphere of fear and hatred. They do everything in their power to starve the church of oxygen, to scorch the earth so badly that the seeds of faith simply cannot grow.

There's only one problem with this approach. IT NEVER WORKS.

They silence the sermons, but Christians still tell others about Jesus. They close the churches, but Christians still find places to meet. They ban the Bible, so Christians memorise the Scripture instead. They threaten believers with violence, yet Christians refuse to renounce their faith. They abuse anti-conversion laws, create a climate of fear. They put pastors in prison and drive Christians out of their homes and communities. They do all they can to make the faith impossible and yet still Christians persevere.

Against the odds, in refugee camps and prison cells, in houses and apartments, faith finds a way. Christianity has a habit of growing anywhere. Tiny as a mustard seed, silent as yeast. Because with man things might be impossible, but with God it's a different story entirely.

The World Watch List

Every year, Open Doors publishes the World Watch List—an extensive, authoritative guide to the countries where Christians face the greatest persecution. What makes the list special is that it draws directly from the on-the-ground experience of persecuted Christians.

This year's World Watch List resources focus on our inspiring theme: impossible faith. With these free resources, supporters can encounter a world where in spite of the opposition, faith finds a way. Of course, the persecution is real and often intense. Our persecuted church family are hard pressed on every side. Every day, they face unimaginable hardship and pay an unbelievable price. But they have not been defeated. And with your prayers and support, they can continue: present, growing, resilient, alive.

So join us this year. Step into a world of inspiring stories, incredible courage and, above all, impossible faith. This year, through support and prayer, you can be part of God's impossible plan.

Edited extract from an article produced by Open Doors.

Readings for March

Sunday 1st March

10am	A sent out people	Matthew 10 v 1-20
6.15pm	The cost of discipleship	Numbers 21 v 4-9 Luke 14 v 25-35

Sunday 8th March

10am	Loving our uncomfortable neighbours	Romans 12 v 9-21	Matthew 5 v 38-48
6.15pm	Zeal for the Lord's house	Psalm 40	John 2 v 13-25

Sunday 15th March (Mothering Sunday)

10am	God's nurturing love	Exodus 2 v 1-10	John 19 v 25b-27
6.15pm	The promise of eternal life	Psalm 46	John 14 v 1-6

Sunday 22nd March

10am	Goal setting	Deuteronomy 4 v 1-14	John 15 v 1-11
6.15pm	Living by the truth	Micah 7	John 3 v 14-21

Sunday 29th March (Palm Sunday)

10am	The paradox of the king	Psalm 118 v 1-2, 19-29	Matthew 21 v 1-11
6.15pm		Zechariah 9 v 9-13	Mark 11 v 1-11

Earth Hour 2026 – a time to turn off your lights

The Earth Hour 2026 takes place on Saturday 28th March, when at 8.30pm in their local time millions of people worldwide will turn off their non-essential lights for one hour.

Organised by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the 20th anniversary of this global initiative will aim to raise awareness of the earth's climate crisis, and to encourage environmental action through sustainable, actionable lifestyle changes.

The first Earth Hour was held in Sydney, Australia, on 31st March 2007, and has since become a global movement. The 2025/26 theme is 'Giving an Hour for Earth' is encouraging people to adapt sustainable habits in their daily lives.

Prayer for March 2026

Lord, in these weeks leading up to Easter, many of us spend time reflecting on what Jesus has done for us and how he can help us live our lives.

But we live in a harsh, confusing world, where traditional values are upended and we can hardly believe some of the things we hear from powerful world leaders. Truth seems to be lost in the darkness.

Lord, your word tells us that, ***whoever lives by the truth comes into the light.***

Jesus says he is ***the Truth***. He also says he is the ***Light of the world.***

Help us to hold fast to these facts. Help us to remember that Jesus said that in this world we will have trouble – so we shouldn't be surprised – but that he has overcome the world – so we should be encouraged.

Whatever is going on in the troubled world around us - we can live by the real Truth - and in the real Light – Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who will never leave us or forsake us.

Thank you so much.

In Jesus name. Amen.

By Daphne Kitching



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Liz Corbett 01543 370162

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