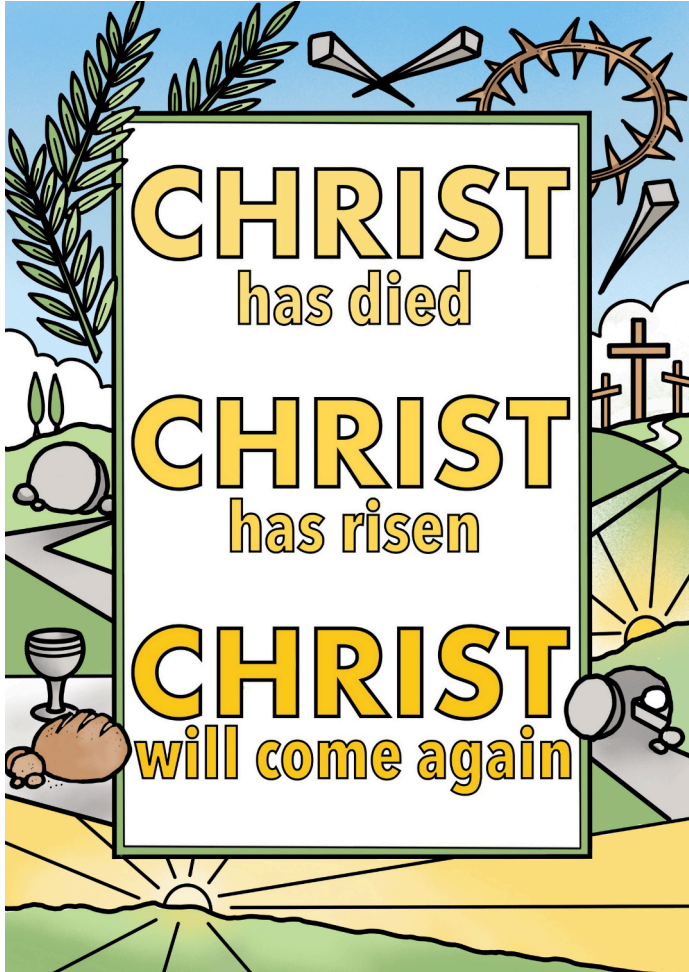




Highway



Number 391

March 2024

Free

<https://www.merthytydfilmministryarea.co.uk>

Dear Friends

Lent has not crept up on us. It has simply leapt, almost without notice. I know you have all heard this from me and will be utterly fed up with me saying it, but my 65th birthday is on Good Friday!! That's what comes of being born on Easter Sunday!! I blame my Mother. Always have.

A very early Easter this year means a very late one next year. I was commiserating with some teachers during the week as to how this movement of Easter really messes the school terms up. Early Easter equals a long summer term and all the contrary extrapolations the movement of the date causes.

Why and how is Easter calculated you may ask. The simplest statement is this; Easter Sunday is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox – the spring equinox (vernal equinox) being the day when light and dark are equal, 12hr day and 12 hr night. It is usually the 20th or 21st March. However, ecclesiastical rules kick in now because the church has set the vernal equinox as 21st March! This means, in practice, that the earliest date of Easter is 22nd March. This last happened in 1881 and will not happen again until 2285.

Phew, we missed it. Although the moon has a cycle of approximately 28 days the latest date for Easter, because it is fixed for a Sunday, is 25th April. Surprisingly that is going to happen in 2038, just 14 years away.

Many of the other Christian festivals rely on the date of Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity to name three. So, knowing the date of Easter is important for structuring the year. Perhaps these variations can help us in structuring our year as well. From Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, with only a break on Mothering / Refreshment Sunday is a time for fasting and prayer. We then get a celebration and the Sundays after Easter. Rather than leaping too far ahead perhaps that is enough at present for our spiritual focus. From now until Good Friday our spiritual focus can be on repentance. From Easter Day until Pentecost we could focus on the question, what does Christ's death and resurrection actually mean to me in my daily life? We should have provided ourselves with plenty to focus on as we had been considering our sin for the previous 6 weeks of Lent.

I pray we all have a tough Lent and a joyous Easter.

Mark

Good Friday Walk of Witness

11:30 AM

Then an Hour at the Cross

Starting at
B&Q
Cyfarthfa



Lent & Easter At Christ Church, Cyfarthfa

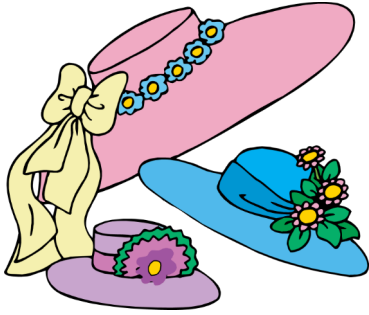
10th March at 11am - Mothering Sunday Family Service

24th March at 11am - Service of Palms

Good Friday 29th March begins at 11:30am with the
Walk of Witness at B&Q carpark.

Arrive at Christ Church at 12 Noon for the
“An Hour at the Cross” service
followed by a Hot Cross Bun social.

31st March at 11am - Easter Service



Easter Bonnet Afternoon Tea

at St David's Church

Friday 5 April, 2pm to 4pm

Tickets cost £6 and are available
from Dorothy and Lynda

Come and join us wearing your Easter Bonnet.

“Friends of St David's Church”

Please note subscriptions for
“Friends of St David's Church” are now due.

You can pay £15.00 cash/cheque to Dorothy/
Lynda, or use our card reader in church. Please
can you use a yellow gift aid envelope so we can
claim the tax back.

Please help us to continue to look after St David's
church.

Thank you
Lynda Price



HOLY WEEK AT ST DAVID'S AND ST TYDFIL'S

Palm Sunday Procession & Passion Narrative
St. David's 9.30am – St. Tydfil's 11am.

Monday in Holy Week: St. David's 7pm

Tuesday in Holy Week: St. Tydfil's 7pm

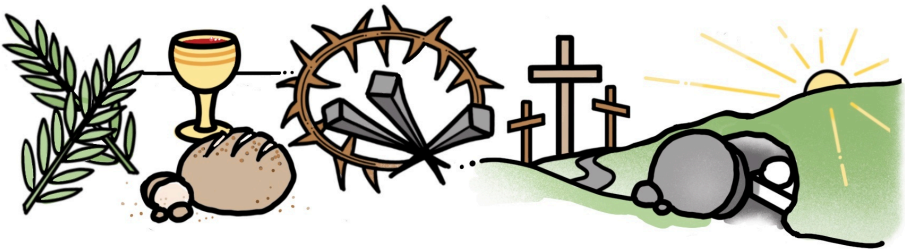
Wednesday in Holy Week: St. David's 10.30am

Maundy Thursday: All Saints, Dowlais, Ministry Area Agape Meal.

Good Friday:

St. Tydfil's 10am Stations of the Cross
St. David's 2pm The Last Hour.

Easter Day: St. David's 9.30am – St. Tydfil's 11am



EASTER SERVICES IN MERTHYR VALE & TROEDYRHIW

St. Mary's Merthyr Vale

Wednesday in Holy Week 10.15am Holy Communion

Easter Sunday 9.30 am Holy Communion

St. John's Troedyrhiw

Good Friday 2.00-3.00pm Holy Hour

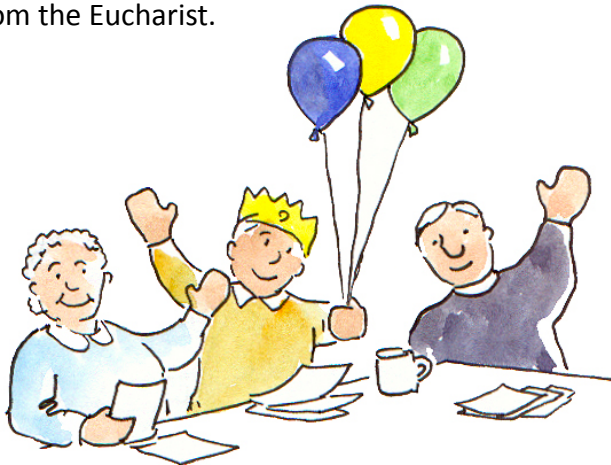
Easter Sunday 11.00am Holy Communion

What is the Agape Feast?

If you were to ask a Christian today what a Christian meeting was like in the days of the apostles, you would probably get different answers – preaching, singing, worship, praise, a celebration of the Eucharist? It was probably all these things, But we may not realise that it centred around a meal. The early Christians referred to this meal as the agape – the love feast.

For the origin of the love feast, we need to look no further than the Last Supper. “As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body’” (Matt. 26:26). So the very first Eucharist was instituted in the context of a meal. This continued to be the normal setting in which Christians met together for fellowship and worship. Acts 2:46 tells us: “Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” It seems this was more than communion; it was also a meal at which not only bread and wine, but all kinds of food was eaten, a meal which had the double purpose of satisfying hunger and thirst and giving expression to the sense of Christian brotherhood.

At the end of this feast, bread and wine were taken according to the Lord’s command at the Last Supper, and after thanksgiving to God were eaten and drunk in remembrance of Christ, and as a special means of communion with the Lord Himself and through Him with one another. During the second and third centuries, the agape was eventually separated from the Eucharist.



AGAPE

FEAST



**YOU ARE INVITED TO THIS SPECIAL MEAL
IN ALL SAINTS CHURCH,
ON MAUNDY THURSDAY,
MARCH 28TH AT 6PM.**

LIKE THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WE WILL COMBINE
WORSHIP WITH A MEAL, COMMEMORATING OUR
LORD'S LAST SUPPER WITH HIS FRIENDS.

OUR SERVICE WILL TAKE PLACE AROUND THE TABLE,
PUNCTUATED BY A THREE COURSE MEAL, INCLUDING,
OF COURSE, BREAD AND WINE!

EACH CHURCH IS ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE FOOD,
AND THERE WILL BE NO CHARGE.

**PLEASE SIGN UP AT THE BACK OF CHURCH
IF YOU CAN JOIN US.**

MERTHYR TYDFIL MINISTRY AREA—WORSHIPPING TOGETHER.

Genesis Bible Study – part 2.

Last month we re-read the Creation story contained in Genesis 1 and we thought a lot about what this story tells us about the attributes of God. This month we are continuing with Genesis 1 and we are thinking first about God's actions.

God's Actions

The key word describing God's actions in Genesis chapter 1 is "created," and it is used in connection with "the heavens and the earth" (v. 1), "great sea creatures" (v. 21), and "humans" (v. 27). If we take the first occurrence to mean God's action in bringing the universe into being, the second as a statement relating to the beginning of animal life, and the third to introduce human existence we can see the word is reserved to describe divine actions of the greatest significance. He is responsible for originating all things material, all that is animate, and that which is uniquely human. Having been introduced to the "heavens and the earth" in verse 1 we promptly focus our attention on the earth which is described as "without form" and "void"; and darkness was on the face of the deep" (v. 2). While the universe is profoundly significant, the focus of Genesis is upon earth with particular reference to the inhabitants thereof and God's dealings with them through His chosen people.

There are two words that describe the creative activity of God, "progression" and "power." The Hebrew words *to-hu*, *wa-bo-hu*, used in the expression "without form and void," are so striking that it was apparently used to rivet the readers' attention on the condition of creation in its initial stages. That God created '*ex nihilo*' (a Latin term beloved of theologians meaning "out of nothing", and also

thoroughly enjoyed by me), while not explicitly stated, is continually implied throughout Scripture, as in Paul's statement about God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17, NRSV). Apparently, creation progressed from a state of "nothingness" through a state of "formlessness" and "emptiness" to a condition where the "formlessness" gave way to "form" and the "emptiness" surrendered to "fullness."

The six days of creation (see vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31) are presented in such a way as to suggest a careful literary structure. On day 1 "light" is formed. On day 4 "two great lights the stars also." On day 2 "God made the firmament and divided the waters." On day 5 these were filled with "great sea creatures and every winged bird." On day 3 "Earth" is formed along with vegetation. On day 6 "God created man in His own image; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth.'" *To-hu* is finding "form," as outlined in the first three days, and *bo-hu* is finding fulfilment in the fourth through the sixth days. The God of creation is at work.

Considerable debate has centred around the days of creation. Are they to be understood as literal days of twenty-four hours set in a literal week, or is there some other explanation of them?

There was a time when reverent students of God's Word were sure that they could tell us when God created the world and even set a date for the creation of man. Archbishop Ussher of Armagh calculated 4004 BC as the date of creation and John Lightfoot, the Cambridge scholar, went further and narrowed it down to the week of October 18–24, 4004 BC and Adam's creation at 9am, forty-fifth meridian

time, October 23, 4004 BC! These conclusions sound quaint and naive to our ears, but we should bear in mind that these men, writing in the early seventeenth century, had no knowledge of the findings of modern geology and cosmology.

Therein lies the problem. The natural scientist talks convincingly in terms of millions of years and evolutionary eras while the Bible believer looks at the six days and wonders what on earth to do. Bernard Ramm has looked into various theories and suggested ways in which these matters can be harmonised in his book, "The Christian View of Science and Scripture". While it will not make everyone happy, it can serve to make many wiser! It is not at all unreasonable to believe that "day" (Hebrew, *yôm*), which can be translated quite legitimately as "period," refers not to literal days but to eras and ages in which God's progressive work was being accomplished. Some who find this interpretation unacceptable suggest that periods of time were concluded with literal days in which the process of creation was fulfilled. Others suggest that Genesis is teaching that God revealed His creative activity in six days rather than performed the creation in such a period.

This leads to another matter relating to the days which requires our attention. Do the "days" describe a series of creative acts in chronological order or did the writer concern himself more with a literary structure? This question has arisen because of practical concerns such as "Could there be light on the first day when the sun and moon were not created till the fourth day?" In the same vein, "Could the vegetation of the third day have

survived before the sunlight arrived on the fourth day?" and "How could there be 'the evening and the morning' of the first three days without the benefit of the sun?" These considerations have led some to believe that the writer's intent was not so much a detailed chronology of creation as a logical explanation using pictorial language leading up to the final creative act—the arrival of Man on the scene.

On one thing we can agree and that is that there is no complete agreement! But this fact should not be allowed to obscure the much more significant fact that reverent biblical scholarship and honest careful science can continue to lead us into an increasingly integrated and harmonious understanding of divine creation. The progressive

"...reverent biblical scholarship and honest careful science can continue to lead us into an increasingly integrated and harmonious understanding of divine creation."

creation which is shown moving from formlessness through form to fullness is also expressed in the progressively significant development of created things—mineral, vegetable, animal, and

on to the pinnacle of creation: humankind.

As we have seen, while the creation of the universe is of great importance to Genesis, there is a concentration on Earth and similarly, while all aspects of creation are significant, the focus is clearly on humanity. Genesis in a very real sense is the story of God's dealings with man and woman on earth. God is speaking to humanity about humanity. What is He saying? The answer: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion.' So God created man male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:26–28). God is saying to man and woman that each is made in the

divine image. This does not mean that God has the form of a man or woman but that each is in some fashion a reflection of God. Man and woman do not have their origin and, therefore, discover their identity in the animal, vegetable, or mineral departments, even though they have affinities with each of them. Humanity's origin and identity are in God. Attempts have been made to suggest that men and women are made in God's image in the sense that they have capabilities foreign to the rest of creation, and therefore those unique aspects constitute the divine image. But the reflection of the divine is seen not in some separate sections of man and woman but in man and woman as a complete entity. This is expressed, and taken a step further, in the statement that it was "human, male and female" who constituted the divine image.

There was a time when the image of God was thought to reside in the male while the female was something else of an inferior nature. This is clearly contrary to Scripture in that it is humanity in maleness and femaleness that constitutes the divine image. This has led some commentators to conclude that male and female relationships of fellowship and love are a reflection of the Trinitarian relationship while others suggest that it requires both male and female characteristics to adequately portray the multi-faceted aspects of the divine nature.

We are all familiar with the biblical revelation of God as Father and we rejoice in the resultant sense of security and firmness, care and provision which this analogy provides—unless of course we have been unfortunate enough to be abused by a father who did nothing to portray the divine image.

But to grasp adequately the intricacies of the divine nature as mirrored in humanity, we must not overlook the feminine aspects. For example, when the Lord Jesus reminded His people that He had longed to gather them to Him like a hen gathering her chickens (Matt. 23:37), He was using a feminine picture to describe His tender, loving care for them. Sometimes when things get tough it is more comforting to think of God functioning like a hen gathering chickens than as an imperious cockerel strutting and preening while uttering ear-shattering cock-a-doodle-dos.

In much the same vein Zephaniah promised,

*The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.
Zephaniah 3:17*

It would take little imagination to see this as a beautiful picture of God caring for His children in a way reminiscent of a mother in the nursery quietly, soothingly singing a distraught child to sleep.

Final section on creation next month.



St TYDFIL'S CHURCH, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY 11.00am Holy Eucharist
6.00pm Healing Service (1st Sunday in the month only)

St DAVID'S CHURCH, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY 9.30am Holy Eucharist
WEDNESDAY 10.30am Holy Eucharist

CHRIST CHURCH, Georgetown, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY 11.00am Holy Eucharist

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, Dowlais

SUNDAY 11.00am Holy Eucharist

CHRISTCHURCH, Pant

SUNDAY 10.00am Holy Eucharist
WEDNESDAY 10.30am Holy Eucharist

ONLINE

SUNDAY 11.00am Dowlais & Pant Facebook and YouTube Service

St JOHN'S Troedryhiw

SUNDAY 11.00am Holy Communion

St MARY'S, Merthyr Vale

SUNDAY 9.30am Holy Communion
WEDNESDAY 10.15am Holy Communion

All services may be changed or added to especially on Saints' Days.

Please see the Ministry Area website for details

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk>



MINISTRY AREA OFFICE

01685 388805

(10.00–13.00, Mon, Tue & Thur)

The office e mail address is:- TBA

The readings for next Sunday and church news sheets can be seen and downloaded from the St David's and St Tydfil's pages of the Ministry Area website at

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk/st-dauids-church>

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk/st-tydfils-church>



QR Code for the
Ministry Area Website

Next issue

Please let me have anything for April 2024
by Sunday 31 March 2024 (Easter Day). Preferably earlier.

Next issue is due out 7 April 2024

Please e-mail your articles to
kenlewis.merthyrtydfil.church@gmail.com

All named articles are the work of that person. Publication does not imply agreement with the opinions expressed. Ken Lewis, Editor.