

The
Temple of
the LORD

Bible Notes
January – March
2026

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell

The lady who used to clean Orpington Church told me that, once when she was shaking out the mats, a small child was walking through the churchyard with her mother. “What is that building? she asked. Her mother replied that it was God’s house. The little girl posed a supplementary question, “Is that God’s wife shaking out the mats?”

God is no more confined in buildings made by human hands than He is married. Heaven cannot contain Him. The Heaven of heavens cannot contain God. He fills the universe. He fills Heaven. Everything which there is exists in Him.

We do think of temples and churches as places where we may meet God and so we may and do, but God is everywhere and we can encounter Him in any place. Sometimes He makes Himself known to us unexpectedly. Sometimes we find Him when we seek Him. There may be times when we do not feel His Presence, but He is always near.

The fulness of God dwells in Jesus. Today is the eighth day of Christmas when we celebrate His Incarnation, that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. He dwells among us and also within us.

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God;
the secret of the Lord is theirs,
their soul is Christ's abode.

Still to the lowly soul
he doth himself impart
and for his dwelling and his
throne
chooseth the pure in heart.

The Lord who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell in lowliness with men,
their pattern and their king.

Lord, we thy presence seek;
may ours this blessing be:
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple meet for thee.

ALMIGHTY God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 2nd

I Samuel 1 vv 1-3

At the time of this story there was no temple in Jerusalem. There was no human King of Israel. God was and is the King. All other kings and rulers were and are His viceroys, did they but know it.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and power infinite: Have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant *CHARLES*, our King and Governor, that he (knowing whose minister he is) may above all things seek thy honour and glory; and that we, and all his subjects (duly considering whose authority he hath) may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey him, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

People came together to worship at this shrine in Shiloh. It was the place of worship, but the faithful old priest Eli was no longer able to restrain his sons who scandalously abused their position for their own profit and failed in their duties to the people of God.

Endue thy Ministers with righteousness. And make thy chosen people joyful.

January 3rd

I Samuel 1 vv 4-8

The family of Elkanah worshipped yearly at the shrine. Polygamy is nowhere specifically forbidden in the Bible and seems to have been quite common in the early days, but it falls short of the ideal, God's purpose from the beginning, that a man should leave his parent's house and cleave to his wife in unconditional love, joined together in life long union by God Himself. *Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.*

In a number of Bible stories, there are women who are unable to have children and it is often a cause of sadness to them. In the modern world, there are couples who are unable to have children and some go to desperate lengths, using all the resources of modern medicine, in the attempt to have children of their own. Sometimes, as in this story, people are unkind to the childless or those who are unable to have children feel inadequate. We ought never to be unkind, nor to feel ourselves to be at fault for what we cannot do. We pray for what we would want to happen but with the caveat *Thy will be done* and we seek the grace to trust Him that He knows what He is doing.

January 4th (Sunday)

I Samuel 1 vv 9-11

Hannah promised that she would dedicate to God the son that she prayed for. I'm not entirely comfortable with bargaining with God. We ought always to pray *Thy will be done*. We ought always to seek to align our wills with His. There is nothing better than what God wills for us. But we are only human. We don't always know what God wills for us. It is not unreasonable to pray for what we might reasonably think to be what God would want for us – and to hope that it is! We do pray *in the power of the Spirit & in union with Christ*. Our prayers may be an aspect of God's purposes for the world and, in part, a means of bringing His purposes to effect.

In the prayerbook, the collect and readings for today are the same as they were for the Circumcision on 1st. We think about how Mary gave up her Son to God & the grief she must have suffered as well as the joy. In a sense, all mothers, all parents have to give up their sons and daughters. There comes a time when they can no longer protect them and they have to go out into the world to do all such good works as God has prepared for them to walk in, whether specifically in a religious context such as the ministry or in the wider world in an ordinary secular job and in caring for their own families.

January 5th

I Samuel 1 vv 12-18

As we shall see, things were pretty disorderly at the shrine at Shiloh. Eli was a good man, but his sons were corrupt themselves and a corrupting influence. So Eli might not have been surprised if someone were praying when drunk. Some pagans used alcohol and other drugs in the mistaken belief that it somehow heightened their perception. Nevertheless, God spoke through the chaos at the shrine and answered Hannah's prayer in such a way that it brought her peace.

O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen*.

January 6th (The Epiphany)

I Samuel 1 vv 19-23

Children were weaned much later in those days. There was no infant formula or pre-prepared baby foods. The child Samuel stayed with his mother until he was three. Samuel's family worshipped God.

The wise men came to worship the child Jesus. He is God the Son as well as the Son of Mary. That is something to get our heads round.

For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in Heaven above;
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 7th

I Samuel 1 vv 24-28

Hannah kept her vow to God. It must have been a tremendous wrench for her and for the child. It cannot have been easy for Elkanah. Hannah did have five more children and she continued to visit Samuel and to provide for him. It was a great honour, a great opportunity for Samuel to be brought up in the shrine by the priest, but even so. We probably don't think of how hard life is for some families, whether called upon to make sacrifices for a good purpose such as this, or rent apart by war, poverty, famine, disease or natural disaster. We need to be thankful for what we have and mindful of the needs of others in our prayers and in our charitable giving.

January 8th

I Samuel 2 vv 1-11

The song that Hannah sang when she installed Samuel at the shrine is very like the Magnificat, the hymn that Mary sang when she had conceived Jesus, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Mary's womb was the temple in which God dwelt. Samuel dwelt in the House of God. Both women sang of the faithfulness and truth of God, of His justice and mercy, good news for them, good news for the world. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

January 9th

I Samuel 2 vv 12-17

It is one of the temptations of power to serve oneself rather than to serve God or the people over whom one exercises sway. It is a temptation for clergy and for powerful people in the world. Maybe our prayers for the powerful should include a clause that they may have the grace to continue to see themselves as humble servants of God and of humanity

January 10th

I Samuel 2 vv 18-21

It is a privilege to serve God, not only actively in the world, but in a life of prayer and ministering in religious services. Some Christians, some clergy are activists in the world – caring for the sick and poor, preaching on street corners, organising things, sitting on committees, going into politics. This may well be their vocation. The results of their activism are obvious to the world and hopefully properly appreciated. Others, however, are called to a much less conspicuous way of serving God in prayer, in contemplation, in ministering in the sanctuary. For most of us, there are elements of both in our lives. We need to take time to pray. We need to worship, to serve in the sanctuary. We are also called to do God's work actively in the world as parents, workers in various professions and occupations, as volunteers, as good neighbours, as leaders or as members of the rank & file. A minority are called to a life of ministering in the sanctuary but I am sure that those of us who are called to be active in the world will not succeed unless there is some time in our lives for prayer, fellowship, God's Word & Sacraments.

January 11th (Epiphany 1)

Luke 2 vv 42-52

The Holy Family took their part in the worship prescribed by God for the people of Israel. Yearly, with millions of others, they ascended to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. When He was old enough, they took the boy Jesus. He remained in the Temple, talking to the religious teachers. He was in His Father's House, He was about His Father's business. The Greek can mean either. Jesus took time to worship & to pray: alone, in fellowship with others, and in the official houses of prayer. All the wonderful things He did were made possible by His unity with the Father & the Spirit – a unity of which all

Christians partake through His grace and into which we grow through prayer & worship.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

January 12th

John 2 vv 13-22

Jesus returned to the Temple for the Passover celebration when He was 30. Probably He had done so too in all the intervening years, but this time He cleanses the Temple. The Temple is a house of prayer for all nations and they have turned it into a den of thieves. Our church buildings are much less significant for our relationship with God than was the Jerusalem Temple, but how far is it appropriate to use them for purposes other than worship & prayer. As sacred spaces, they are a valuable resource for people seeking God. But often they are locked when there is no service going on. Concerts & exhibitions draw people into what might otherwise be empty buildings. Is it legitimate to charge for entry to a church or cathedral? I honestly don't know the answers to these questions, but my feeling is that there ought to be a least some sacred space which is reserved for those seeking simply to spend time with God.

However, the passage goes on to teach us that the true Temple, the place where the fulness of the Godhead dwells is in the Body of Jesus Christ. We do not need buildings made with human hands for our worship. We pray in Christ & He in us.

January 13th

Mark 15 vv 53-65

In Jerusalem for another Passover, Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and questioned by the chief priests. They could truly testify nothing against Him. He was like us in every respect except sin. They took His words about destroying and rebuilding the Temple and misunderstood them. Jesus would rise from the dead. *The same stone (Jesus) which the builders rejected: is become the headstone in the corner* (Psalm 118²²). There is new Temple – the Christian Church. Christians are the living stones in which God dwells.

January 14th

Matthew 28 vv 1-20

The Temple is raised on the third day. The Temple is built on the foundation of the apostles and grows when the Gospel is proclaimed and believed and men, women & children are baptised in the Name of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Pray for the mission of the Church at home and abroad. Be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is in you.

January 15th

I Samuel 2 vv 22-26

Unworthy ministers of religion have done a great deal of damage down through the ages. There was the selfishness & greed of Hophni & Phinehas and their failure to maintain a proper reverence before God at the shrine & their neglect of their duty to care pastorally for the people who came to worship. It was the chief priests who brought Jesus to Pilate and demanded His Crucifixion. It was the priests who tried to prevent the apostles from proclaiming the Gospel. There is the scandalous behaviour of the Borgias popes. Only too often, senior people in the Church have put wealth & power before serving God & His people. We've had the Inquisition & the persecution of Christians by others who claim to serve the same Lord.

In our own generation there have been the abuse scandals. It is likely that such things have always gone on. Power corrupts. Religion makes it worse. It makes the abuser even more powerful. It adds to the sense of betrayal which the abused feels. Religion provides a justification for confidentiality, which can be merely a fancy word for secrecy, denying justice to the victim and protecting the reputation of the perpetrator. Very belatedly, the Church has acknowledged the importance of transparency and accountability. It is my belief that powerful people acting in conditions of secrecy should be regarded with suspicion. There may be good reasons for confidentiality & secrecy, but also there may not. Secrecy might just be a cloak for the abuse of power. Even the intelligence services do not operate totally without parliamentary scrutiny.

We shall look tomorrow at some of the other consequences of abuse, but our primary focus must always be on those who have been abused.

January 16th

I Samuel 2 vv 27-36

Obviously the abusers have damaged themselves as well as their victims. There is justice. Unless they repent, they will be punished – probably both in this world and the next. And so will be the inquisitors & the persecutors. So will those who have enriched themselves at the expense of defrauding, robbing & oppressing the poor. So will those who have put their careers and their positions in the world before their responsibilities as ministers of religion. Luke 12: ⁴⁷*And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* ⁴⁸*But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* Bishops & clergy who transgress are more guilty than others who do not know the Scriptures & the power of the Word.

These unworthy ministers have also damaged the reputation of the Church. And those bishops & other people in high places who tried to cover up the sins of their fellow bishops & clergy have made things worse. They have added to the torments of the abused. They have dragged the Church's reputation down into the dirt. This has made it harder for authentic Christian voices to make themselves heard in a world which desperately needs the Gospel of Jesus.

But God has raised up a faithful priest and it is in Him that ministers and all Christians may find forgiveness for their sins, grace to enter the divine Presence and the gifts of the Holy Spirit with which to fulfil our Christian calling in the world.

January 17th

I Samuel 3 v1

In those days, God's Word had been neglected & the time had come when it was largely unknown. It feels like that today. I do pray that God will send us preachers & prophets who will show us the way in these dark day. I should have written, that will show us the Way Who is the Light of the World, the Word of God made flesh.

January 18th (Epiphany 2)

I Samuel 3 vv 2-6

If a child woke up in the night and woke you up to tell you that he had heard a voice calling his name, probably, like Eli, you would have sent him back to bed. A child waking up in the night a bit disturbed & discombobulated is a very ordinary thing. But God acted through this very ordinary phenomenon to commission Samuel as His spokesman. It would be foolish to set aside our common sense and see a dramatic supernatural intervention in every ordinary event. Most children in Samuel's place would just be having a harmless dream. But it would also be a mistake to close our minds to the possibility that God is speaking to us unexpectedly in our every day lives.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

January 19th

I Samuel 3 vv 7-10

1 Hushed was the evening
hymn,
the temple courts were dark;
the lamp was burning dim
before the sacred ark;
when suddenly a Voice Divine
rang through the silence of the
shrine.

2 The old man, meek and mild,
the priest of Israel, slept;
his watch the Temple child,
the little Levite, kept;
and what from Eli's sense was
sealed
the Lord to Hannah's son
revealed.

3 Oh! give me Samuel's ear,
the open ear, O Lord,
alive and quick to hear

each whisper of thy word;
like him to answer at thy call,
and to obey thee first of all.

4 Oh! give me Samuel's heart,
a lowly heart, that waits
where in thy house thou art,
or watches at thy gates;
By day and night, a heart that
still
moves at the breathing of thy
will.

5 Oh! give me Samuel's mind,
a sweet un murmuring faith,
obedient and resigned
to thee in life and death;
that I may read with child-like
eyes
truths that are hidden from the
wise.

January 20th

I Samuel 3 vv 11-14

God's Word on this occasion was a very heavy burden for a young child. The *proper channels* for the Word were the priests – Eli and his sons, as when Eli assured Hannah that she would bear a child – but these *proper channels* were blocked by sin – the young men's iniquitous behaviour and Eli's failure to discipline them. God can and does speak to us in many ways – by no means confined to the official spokesmen of the Church. We should all read the Bible & pray for wisdom ourselves and weigh the words of bishops & other ministers of religion in the light of what the Holy Spirit shows us through Scripture and the consistent teaching of the Church throughout the ages.

January 21st

I Samuel 3 vv 15-20

It's not surprising that the boy was unwilling to pass on what God had commissioned him to say. Eli may have been weak in the matter of disciplining his sons, but he was wise enough to understand that the message had to be delivered and to accept God's Will for himself & his family – uncongenial as it was. As Christians individually and as the Church corporately, we may have to accept some judgments that we don't much like and proclaim God's Word even when it will be unpopular and even perhaps get us into trouble. The Church has always to be open to being reformed. The Church has always both to live by and to preach *all the counsel of God*.

January 22nd

Ezekiel 34 vv 1-16

Centuries after Samuel, centuries before Christ, millennia before our own time, God commissions Ezekiel with the same message. Those who have been entrusted with wealth & power, whether in the Church or in the state, have abused their position. Instead of caring for & serving the people God has put them in charge of, they have sought their own interests, neglected their duties of care & exploited the poor & vulnerable, bringing disaster on the nation and on organised religion. God will Himself therefore judge the clergy, kings, politicians, governors, generals, admirals, judges – all the "top" people who have failed in their duty and God Himself will be the Shepherd of His people, to give them fresh water, to feed them, to bind up their wounds and to bring law & order in place of oppression, anarchy & chaos.

January 23rd

Ezekiel 34 vv 17-22

The sheep are no angels. The Church fails to give a moral lead based in a firm faith. Insufficient care is given to education. Families are insufficiently supported by the state & the community at large and are even undermined by secular ideas about sex & gender. Parliament and government are compromised and consequently weakened. Police forces and the courts are undermanned and under resourced. Morale is low. The result is a diminution of law and order and too high levels of crime & chaos on the streets. When the “top” people let us down, too many people lower down in the pile lose their way and resort to destructive life styles – anti-social behaviour, robbery, violence, sexual immorality. The sheep have been failed by their shepherds. God will be the Shepherd Who brings order, healing and peace. He will bring justice and mercy, which means that unrepentant sinners must come under His judgment. It is the task of the Church to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God (both by word and by deed), preparing for the return of Jesus by calling sinners to repentance and showing the way to redemption through faith in Jesus Christ.

January 24th

Ezekiel 34 vv 23-31

The Good Shepherd is the Messiah, the Son of David. The Good Shepherd is the Son of God, God the Son. The Good Shepherd is Jesus. Pastors in the Church, priests, ministers, must be modelled on Him. Filled with His Spirit, their calling is to follow His example and to care for the people of God. One would hope that those whom the Prayerbook calls *all Christian Kings, Princes & Governors* would also be modelled on Jesus. That raises the question of whether we think all rulers and people in authority should be Christians. In principle, Christians ought to be better people than others, but they aren’t always. Anyway, power corrupts. It wouldn’t be fair if non-Christians were excluded from parliament and senior positions in general (as they were in this country until the nineteenth century). Non-believers & people of other faiths could feel oppressed and excluded living in a Christian theocracy. Would you vote for a competent atheist or a *nice but dim* Christian? If, on the other hand, we don’t think that our nation would be better governed by Christians and on Christian principles, then what is it that God has entrusted us with to share with everybody else? PTO.
Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who by thy holy Apostle hast taught us to make prayers, and supplications, and to give thanks for all men; We humbly beseech thee most mercifully to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy Divine Majesty; beseeching thee to inspire continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord: And grant, that all they who do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity, and godly love. We beseech thee also to save and defend all Christian Kings, Princes, and Governours; and specially thy Servant *CHARLES* our King; that under him we may be godly and quietly governed: And grant unto his whole Council, and to all that are put in authority under him, that they may truly and impartially administer justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion, and virtue. Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all Bishops and Curates, that they may both by their life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments. And to all thy people give thy heavenly grace; and especially to this congregation here present; that, with meek heart and due reverence, they may hear, and receive thy holy Word; truly serving thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life. And we most humbly beseech thee, of thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succour all those who, in this transitory life, are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. And we also bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom. Grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

25th January (Conversion of St Paul)

I Corinthians 3 vv 1-23

The Corinthian Christians had been arguing over who was the most prestigious leader. Paul points out that all faithful ministers are servants of God and servants of the people of God. Our purpose is not our own prestige, but to build up the people of God – increasing the numbers of the Church by proclaiming the Gospel to those who do not yet believe, working together with the believers so that we all grow to be more like Jesus.

O GOD, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

26th January

John 10 vv 1-16

The Good Shepherd is Jesus. He is our example and our inspiration. His love is such that He lays down His life for the sheep, for you and for me. He calls us to follow Him. Where He is, there will His servant be, whether on the Cross or in that place which He has prepared for us in His Father's House. He knows us by name. By His grace, we hear His voice. He will lead His people from all the nations of the earth to be one flock in one fold – *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; but Christ is all, and in all* (Colossians 3¹¹).

27th January

I Peter 2 vv 11-25

St Peter spells out something of what it means to be the sheep of the Good Shepherd living in the world as it is. Our lives, the life of the Church, ought to commend what we believe to the people among whom we live. Neither individual Christians nor the Church as an institution should behave in such a way as to damage the reputation of our Lord. We do have to be good citizens of the world, respecting its rulers and our fellow citizens, playing our part in society (thereby acting as light, salt & yeast). We are free in the service of Him Whose service is perfect freedom, but that is a freedom from sin and fear, not a freedom to scandalise the world by behaving in a manner which will bring discredit on our religion. Faithfulness to Christ may mean putting up with being unfairly treated, suffering for Him & with Him, but it's in Him that we find our peace. In verse 25 in the King James Bible, Jesus is described as the *Shepherd & Bishop of our souls*. The word translated *Bishop* (ἐπίσκοπος, episcopus) originally meant something like overseer and Jesus didn't live in a big house near a cathedral and have a seat in the House of Lords, but our bishops are episcopi and Jesus is the model for their episcopacy. Actually, all Christians are priests (I Peter 2⁹) and Jesus is the model for our priesthood.

28th January

Revelation 21 vv 1-8

The Good Shepherd leads us to that place which He has prepared for us in His Father's House.

Not in that poor lowly stable
With the oxen standing by
We shall see him, but in heaven

Sat at God's right hand on high
When like stars, his children crowned
All in white shall wait around

29th January

I Samuel 4 vv 1-9

At the time I'm preparing these notes, there has been a highly successful campaign to decorate public spaces with union jacks & flags of St George. For many people, this is an expression of patriotism. Some see themselves as defending Christian values. Other people regard this display as anti-immigrant and a misuse of an alleged Christian identity in order to define ourselves against other people rather than to love them as our neighbours. My feeling is that, for a lot of people flying these flags, it is an assertion of our identity not so much against immigrants as against the elite in our own country who all too often give the impression of despising the rest of us.

In today's reading, the Israelites thought that God would give them the victory over the Philistines if they carried with them the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's Presence. But it didn't work out like that. The fact that the Ark was on the battlefield just made the enemy more determined.

If we display the union jack (the crosses of Sts George, Andrew & Patrick), carry crosses and other Christian symbols and claim to be Christians defending Christian values, then we have to do so in union with Christ & in the power of the Holy Spirit. Any sham or faked religion, any claim to faith not rooted in love and hope, will make things worse rather than better.

30th January

I Samuel 4 vv 10-22

Making a show of religion, bearing a symbol of faith without faith on the part of the bearers, is worse than useless. Carrying the Ark of the Covenant onto the battlefield when the people of Israel were not sincerely seeking God proved disastrous. I long for the people of this country to know the truth of the Gospel. I firmly believe that this country would be better governed if its government were based on Christian values. I'm unsettled by obviously aggressive people using Christianity almost as weapon against immigrants or people of other faiths and cultures. But I'm also unsettled by bishops and other establishment figures identifying with modern (secular) British values rather than with the teaching of the Bible & Christian tradition.

31st January

Jeremiah 7 vv 1-16

Hundreds of years after the time of Samuel, the Jews were confronted by the threat of the Babylonian empire's expansion. Complacently, they believed that, whatever happened to the other nations which were being gobbled up by Babylon, they would be safe because they had the Temple of the LORD. The prophet Jeremiah disabused them of this stupidity. Having God's Temple in your capital city didn't guarantee God's favour. If they wanted to have God on their side, they needed to be on God's side – keeping His Commandments. If they didn't, the Temple at Jerusalem would suffer the same fate as the Shrine at Shiloh – which is in fact what happened.

We live in a troubled world today, but we may also be tempted to complacency. The wars going on in the world are a long way away from us. We live in a democracy & don't have to fear oppression or anarchy. We don't suffer from earthquakes or natural disasters in the way that much of the rest of the world does. We are rich and powerful enough to ride out food shortages & to deal with epidemics. We shall not be affected by the climate crisis as badly as poorer countries. We have all the benefits of Western civilisation.

We're too complacent. We do need to repent of our disregard of God's Commandments. The privileges we have bring with them responsibilities – the responsibility of gratitude to God, the responsibility to use the good things He has given us for the benefit of all.

1st February (Septuagesima)

I Samuel 5 vv 1-12

The Philistines didn't worship the LORD. They mocked Him. They believed that their victory was attributable to their gods & to their own courage & might. But they hadn't really won the battle. The Israelites have lost the battle because of their faithlessness towards the one true God. We need to repent of our sins & worship God in spirit & in truth. **O LORD**, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

2nd February (The Presentation of Christ in the Temple) Luke 2 vv 22-40

The life of Jesus fulfilled the Law which God had given to Moses. The Holy Family came to the Temple on the 40th day of His life on earth for His Mother to be purified & for Himself to be presented to the LORD – the first born son. Simeon & Hannah were granted the grace to see what a special baby Jesus was. He is a light for all nations, the glory of Israel. It is He to Whom we look for our redemption – to be set free from sin & the fear of death. He will pay a high price for us, the highest price possible. He will lay down His life for us. A sword will pierce Mary's soul. *In this place is one greater than the Temple. God desires mercy, not sacrifice.* (Cf Matthew 12^{6&7}).

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

3rd February

I Samuel 7 vv 3-12

In order to be delivered from the Philistines what the Israelites had to do was not to bring the Ark of the Covenant onto the battlefield – a symbol of the God to Whom they only paid lip service. What was needed was true repentance – to turn to God and to turn away from idolatry and the sins which follow from it. The brotherhood of man is rooted in the Fatherhood of God. If we do not worship, or if we worship false gods, the bonds that bind us fray. The human family can only flourish so long as we acknowledge our divine Parent. Love for our neighbour flows from love for God. Social cohesion consists in a common understanding of the Way, the Truth & the Life.

4th February

II Samuel 6 vv 1-11

The Philistines had found that the Ark was too dangerous to keep. So they had sent it away back to the Land of Israel where it was kept in the house of Abinadab for 20 years, where it appears that some worship took place. When David had become King and established Jerusalem as his capital, he desired to bring up the Ark to what was to become the Holy City. The Ark was placed on a new cart for the same reason that Jesus rode into Jerusalem *on a colt whereon no man ever yet sat*. There was worship & celebration, all kinds of music. What happened to Uzzah we find hard to understand. But God is not mocked then or now.

5th February

II Samuel 6 vv 12-23

David was displeased & afraid because of what had happened to Uzzah. He left the Ark at the house of Obed-edom. But they found that, properly respected, the symbol of God's Presence was a blessing. So they tried again to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, this time successfully. The Ark was treated with reverence & awe. There was a tremendous sense of celebration. There were sacrifices. Everybody was given food & wine.

David danced before the LORD. His wife Michal, the daughter of David's predecessor as King of Israel, thought that this dancing was beneath the dignity of a king. King David insisted that this exuberant exhibition was the appropriate way to express his joy, thankfulness & praise because God had been so very good to him. So dancing as an act of worship is acceptable (though personally I hope that it never becomes compulsory).

6th February

Exodus 24 vv 1-8

Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me. Amen. This is what Jesus did at His Last Supper & commanded us to continue to do in Holy Communion. His is the Blood of the New Testament or Covenant. Today's reading is about the blood of the old covenant. The children of Israel had been set free from slavery on that first Passover. They had escaped Pharaoh's army by crossing the Red Sea whose waters parted for them. They had come to Mt Sinai. They made a covenant with God. Rather, God made a covenant with them. He would be their God. They would be His people. They would be holy as He is holy. They would be a royal priesthood to the LORD, a holy nation. This was a covenant for this world. He priests were sinful human beings as we all are. Sacrifices would be offered day by day, year by year. In Christ, believers are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. This holy nation includes Jews & Gentiles. Our high priest is without sin. His sacrifice of Himself is perfect and eternally effective. There is no need for any other sacrifice or any other high priest.

7th February

Exodus 24 vv 9-11

No man hath seen God at any time.

Yet it says that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu & the 70 elders did see God. So what was going on? In Exodus 33²⁰ God says to Moses, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. Why not? Would we be overwhelmed by fear or awe? Is it that anything which is not holy cannot exist in the Presence of the thrice holy God? Love is sometimes described as all consuming. Is that literally true of the God Who is Love? I don't know. I do know that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. I do know that God's Presence is awesome. I do know that an acknowledgement of sin, repentance and the need to be cleansed are the appropriate way into the divine Presence. Hopefully, we approach God in this spirit when we come to Church.

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Exodus 33 goes on to say that Moses should be hidden in a cleft in the rock when God passes by. Then Moses will be permitted to see God's *back parts*. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu & the 70 elders presumably enjoyed a limited vision of God, as perhaps we do sometimes in prayer or when receiving the Sacrament, when we experience the beauty of holiness however it may be displayed: in public worship, in private prayer, in nature, in people. The verse quoted at the top (John 1¹⁸) goes on: *the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* It is in Jesus that we see God. In fact it has often been suggested that OT characters like Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu & the 70 elders who saw God in fact saw Jesus.

8th February (Sexagesima)

Exodus 24 vv 12-18

Moses went on to receive a deeper experience of God than in yesterday's reading. He received God's Law & a vision of Heaven on which the Tabernacle & the Temple would be modelled.

O LORD God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

9th February

Exodus 25 vv 1-9

The tabernacle or tent will be the place of worship. It will be carried with the Israelites on their travels and pitched wherever they themselves make camp. The tabernacle and its furnishings are made from the free will offerings of the people. The skills of the craftsmen who do the work are the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. The tabernacle is constructed on the model which God showed to Moses in heaven. It will represent the dwelling place of God.

1) Our church buildings as houses of God. Built of precious materials, decorated with gold & jewels & fine works of art paid for out of the offerings of the people. The skills of craftsmen, musicians, labourers, cleaners inspired by the Holy Spirit.

2) The Church is the people, living stones. Their offerings ought to be spent on the care of the poor and the sick. The gifts of the Spirit are spiritual gifts. I Corinthians 12⁸⁻¹⁰: ⁸For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; ¹⁰to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

You can make a case for both those two visions of what the Church ought to be. If I were forced to choose one or the other, I'd have to choose number 2, but number 1 does inspire me as it does a lot of people to worship. I believe that we have the resources to do both – to construct splendid buildings to the glory of God & offer the best we have in art, music, etc. in our worship, and to recognise that we are living stones in the Temple of the Holy Spirit, using our resources to care for the poor and the sick, and receiving spiritual gifts to use in God's service.

10th February

Exodus 25 vv 10-22

This is the Ark of the Covenant which will dwell in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. It is the place where God will commune with Moses and, after Moses' death, with the high priest. In

Christ the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. In Him we all have access to the Father. It is He Who reveals to us the truth of God. It is through Him alone that we have forgiveness of our sins. Christ is sufficient for us.

11th February

II Samuel 7 vv 1-3

We're back to the time of King David when he has brought the Ark of the Covenant to his capital city Jerusalem. David is well established in the kingdom. He dwells in a fine palace. It seems to him to be wrong that he should live in a palace while the Ark, symbolising the Presence of God, dwells in a tent. He decides to build a Temple – a dwelling-place for God. The Hebrew word for Temple is the same as the word for palace.

Sometimes, church buildings are neglected, dirty, allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Members of the congregation may try to excuse this on the grounds that the Church is really the people. So it doesn't matter about keeping the building nice. But they themselves live in comfortable, well maintained homes. There is an inconsistency there. Sure, God doesn't need a building to dwell in, we don't need a building to worship in, but, if we do use a building for worship, it ought to be worthy of the purpose.

12th February

II Samuel 7 vv 4-11

Initially, the prophet Nathan agreed with David. God ought to have a temple to dwell in. But then God speaks to Nathan and Nathan has to pass on God's Word to David. The Tabernacle has never been inadequate. God has never demanded a house of cedar. In fact, it has been a good thing that the Tabernacle has been with the Israelites in their wanderings. God had said, however, that He would fix a place for worship. On the other hand, God cannot be contained in any temple human beings might build. Besides, David had been a man of war. He may have fought holy wars, but it was inappropriate that a man with blood on his hands should build the holy house. Instead of David building a house for God, God promises, God will build a house for David, a family, a household. The Son of David shall reign forever.

13th February

II Samuel 7 vv 12-17

The man who will build the Temple will be David's son Solomon. The name Solomon means man of peace. David's descendants will be kings in Jerusalem. They will be punished when they turn away from God, but God will never forsake them. The Son of David will reign for ever. He is the Prince of Peace. In Him will dwell the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Luke 2: ¹*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.* ²*(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)* ³*And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.* ⁴*And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)*

14th February

I Chronicles 29 vv 1-19

David was enthusiastic about the building of the Temple and, although he was not to build it himself, he threw himself into making the preparations for his son Solomon to perform the work. King David himself gave willingly of all the precious materials which would be required to construct this magnificent building in accordance with the pattern of heaven which God had revealed to Moses on Mt Sinai and so did all the people who had gold & silver & precious stones at their disposal. David prays that God's people will always be willing to offer their very best to God. He acknowledges that all the good gifts we have received come from God and it is His own which we return to Him in joyful service.

15th February (Quinquagesima)

Ephesians 4 vv 1-6

The Temple of the LORD is the Body of Christ – His Body which became flesh & dwelt among us, His Body which ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. The Church, too, is His Body, of which all Christians are members, living stones, each with our part to play. The unity of this Body consists in the love of God, His love for us, our love for Him & for one another.

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee; Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

16th February

Ephesians 4 vv 7-14

When Jesus ascended into Heaven, he had, on the Cross, conquered all the powers of the Evil One, who had held us captive to sin & the fear of death. Seated at the right hand of God, the Risen Saviour bestows on His people the gifts of the Holy Spirit – different gifts in accordance with our different callings. St Paul lists some of the high offices in the Church here, but everyone of the baptized has his or her place in God's scheme of things. We each have our calling. The Holy Spirit supplies us with the gifts we need in order to fulfil it. The purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit in us is that each of us should grow like Christ, that the Church as His Body should grow more like Him and that the Church should grow in number as the Lord adds to the Church such as should be saved & they are baptized in His Name. This prayer to be used after receiving Holy Communion puts it all very well.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee , O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

17th February

Ephesians 4 vv 15&16

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation,
by water and the word:
from heaven he came and
sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought
her,
and for her life he died.

Yet she on earth hath union
with God, the Three in one,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

18th February (Ash Wednesday)

I Chronicles 21 vv 1-17

This is a very difficult story, but also a very significant one. You can find it told (slightly differently) in II Samuel 24 as well. You & I might struggle over the meaning but it is part of all holy Scripture which God has caused to be written for our learning. Something had gone very wrong in Israel. God was angry. David was tempted (by God or Satan) to carry out a census of the people. Nothing happens outside the Providence of God. Even bad things contribute to the fulfilment of His purposes. The extreme example would be Satan entering Judas (Luke 22³) so that he betrayed Jesus, the failure of the other apostles to stand with their Lord, the improper and unjust legal proceedings before the high priests & Pontius Pilate, the lies of the witnesses, the mockery and ill treatment by the guards and others, the flogging & crucifixion of the only truly innocent human being Who has ever lived, which effected the salvation of the world – including the forgiveness of the sinners who participated in these atrocities if & when they came to repentance.

I think that the reason why taking the census was wrong was because David was thereby asserting that the Israelites were his vassals, to be disposed of as he saw fit – soldiers, taxpayers, people who could be dragooned into working on the king's projects. In fact, the Israelites were God's servants, not King David's. They were free men and women in the service of God Whose service is perfect freedom.

I should say that this is true, or ought to be true, for all people in all nations. We don't belong to the government. The government is answerable to God & to us. We necessarily assign powers to the government; our freedom is thus restricted. Otherwise, law & order would be impossible in this imperfect world. However, we don't forget or let them forget that they rule us on our behalf not for their own benefit.

We probably agree with David in v17. It was David who had sinned. Why were all the Israelites punished? It doesn't seem fair, but whole nations do suffer today for the folly & wickedness of their rulers – wars & oppression, the mismanagement of resources leading to famine & pestilence, gross inequity, astonishing incompetence, cronyism. At

least David at last saw sense & cast himself & the people on God's mercy.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

19th February

I Chronicles 21 vv 18-30

Threshing floors were thought of as in some sense sacred. The Jebusites were the people who already lived in Jerusalem when David conquered the city & made it the capital of his kingdom. It must have been quite an experience for Ornan and his sons. They were engaged in their ordinary farm work and there stood a tremendous angel. And then the King came and wanted to buy their threshing floor. He insisted that he pay the proper price and there the Temple of the LORD would be built – which is why this mysterious story is so significant.

20th February

I Chronicles 22 vv 1-19

David acquired the site for the Temple, engaged the craftsmen and collected together the materials which would be required. He then commissioned his son Solomon, a man of peace, to build the Temple and instructed the princes in the kingdom to support Solomon. More important, however, than engaging the workmen and providing the materials, was that Solomon should trust God and keep His Commandments. That's equally true for any of us in any enterprise we may undertake.

21st February

II Chronicles 1 vv 1-12

Solomon was sufficiently wise that he realised that what he needed in order to be a successful king was wisdom. He asked God for wisdom & God was pleased to grant his prayer. James 1⁵: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*⁶ *But let him ask in faith.* The power & wisdom of God is Christ. To be wise is to be filled with His Holy Spirit Who will make us more like Jesus, people entirely motivated by God's love.

22nd February (Lent 1)

II Chronicles 1 vv 13-17

It is often remarked that war stimulates technological advance. The Second World War saw a huge effort to improve aircraft & weapons design, radar & radio and to develop antibiotics. The aggressor seeking to conquer and the opposition fighting for survival have a huge incentive to make every effort to get ahead. But think of the loss of life brought about by war, the destruction of industry, infrastructure and people's homes, the diversion of labour from agriculture and peaceful manufacture. Not war, but peace is the condition for real progress. Not a complacent or apathetic peace which is relaxed about the status quo, but an ambitious peace to build a better society. The peace of Solomon's reign made possible the prosperity which enabled the construction of the Temple. Between 1939 & 1945 this country fought tooth and nail against the forces of Nazi evil. After the war, there was a tremendous impulse to build a better world: the NHS, an effective welfare state, educational opportunities for all, decent homes. *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up swords against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* (Isaiah 2⁴). Sticking my neck out, could it be that the western world is unable to the very real challenges we are facing (but which are much less than the challenges we faced fighting Hitler) because we became complacent and are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices which peace & prosperity require? If so, is that at least in a part a result of the decline of religion?

O LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

23rd February

II Chronicles 2 vv 1-10

Think about the amount of work and the wealth that went into building the Temple and the great mediaeval cathedrals. Would it have been better to devote all this effort and all these resources to feeding & housing the poor? The world would certainly be poorer without magnificent & beautiful architecture, art & music. The construction of these buildings provided work. In building them, humanity acquired new knowledge & skills. They have inspired many to worship.

24th February (St Matthias)

II Chronicles 2 vv 11-18

Lebanon is a very beautiful country with great natural resources. In biblical times, it was famed for its wealth, its craftsmen & its maritime trade. Solomon was at peace with Tyre and entered into a very fruitful relationship which assisted greatly in the construction of the Temple. Later on in the bible story, we find Tyre condemned for its arrogance and opposition to the one true God. In our own day, we have seen Lebanon devastated by conflict, the rivalry of the different factions which make up the country, tension with its neighbour Israel, and oppressed by Syria and Iran. Lebanon is a tragic demonstration of how a potentially prosperous country can be ruined by conflict. Pray for the peace of Lebanon. Church & state throughout the world need wise governance in the face of all the evil poised to divide & impoverish us. **ALMIGHTY** God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

25th February

Psalms 45 vv 1-18

Occasionally, when I was curate in Ramsgate, I found myself taking choir practice. I used to tell the children that it was important to convey the meaning of what they were singing and that they could only do this if they understood the words themselves. In the Prayer Book, this psalm begins, My heart is inditing of a good matter. They naturally asked me what this meant and I admit that I struggled a bit to tell them. I think the psalmist means that he cannot help himself. His heart is so full of praise that he just has to sing about it. The first ten verses are about the glory of the King of Israel. The remainder are about the daughter of the King of Tyre whom he is marrying. She is to forget her old life, to leave her father & mother & to cleave to her husband. In the New Testament, this psalm is referred to Jesus. He is the true King, the truly glorious One. He is indeed God (v7). As the obedient Son of God, He is honoured by His Father. The Church is the Bride of Christ. As Christians, our calling is to leave behind our old life and to cleave to Christ.

26th February

II Chronicles 5 vv 1-14

So the magnificent house was finished, a palace for the King of Kings & Lord of Lords. The Ark, which symbolised God's Presence with His people was brought into the Holy of Holies. The Ark contained only the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written – the Covenant that He would be their God and that they would be His people, that God's people would be holy because God is holy. There was no image of God because any image would fall short of the Truth and therefore be a lie. Only Jesus is the true image of God – the Way, the Truth & the Life. The people gave of their best in worship, in the construction of the building, by all those sacrifices, the meat of which would have made a feast for the priests and people, in the splendid vestments of the Levites & priests and in the music. The Presence of God was so overwhelming that even those deemed to be closest to God, the priests, could not stand before Him. The way into God's Presence is open to all through Jesus, but His is an awesome Presence and we should never lose sight of that fact.

1. Love divine, all loves
excelling, Joy of Heav'n to
Earth come down, Fix in us thy
humble dwelling, All thy
faithful mercies crown; Jesus,
thou art all compassion, Pure,
unbounded love thou art; Visit
us with thy salvation, Enter
ev'ry trembling heart.

2. Breathe, O breathe thy
loving Spirit Into ev'ry troubled
breast; Let us all in thee
inherit, Let us find thy
promised rest; Take away our
love of sinning; Alpha and
Omega be; End of faith as its
beginning, Set our hearts at
liberty.

3. Come, Almighty to deliver;
Let us all thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always
blessing, Serve thee as thy host
above, Pray, and praise thee
without ceasing, Glory in thy
perfect love.

4. Finish, then, thy new
creation; Pure and spotless let
us be; Let us see thy great
salvation Perfectly restored in
thee; Changed from glory into
glory Till in Heav'n we take our
place, Till we cast our crowns
before thee, Lost in wonder,
love, and praise!

27th February

II Chronicles 6 vv 1-11

The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken.

I don't very often read these words from the Second Book of Chronicles. I don't know if you do, but they are exciting. Solomon himself and all those people – those who provided the materials, those who worked them, those who organised everything, those who took care of the needs of the workers, all the ministers of the sanctuary – all those people played their part in building this House of God & in its dedication. But the overarching & underlying truth is that The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken. The life and work of God's Church, the life & work of individual Christians, is in the Hands of God. We may have our own schemes & plans. They may appear to us to be very good schemes, but we shall never get anywhere with them unless they are in accordance with God's plans. The right way round is first to seek God's Will for our Church or for our own personal enterprises and then we shall find that He supplies the means to make them happen. Prayer is the first prerequisite of any planning. Psalm 127: *EXCEPT the Lord build the house : their labour is but lost that build it. 2. Except the Lord keep the city : the watchman waketh but in vain. 3. It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness : for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*

28th February

II Chronicles 6 vv 12-21

The Promises of God were partially fulfilled when the Son of David, Solomon, built the Temple. Solomon Himself acknowledges that nothing can contain God, how much less this house which I have built. Solomon would reign on David's throne (as would many of his descendants). People would turn to the Temple in order to encounter God, to worship, to pray. The Promises of God are wholly fulfilled in Jesus. He is the eternal Son of David Who reigns for ever. It is in Jesus that we encounter God. In Him we worship. In Him we pray. In Jesus, God did indeed dwell with men on the earth. As His Holy Spirit He dwells among us today.

1. Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son! Hail
in the time appointed, his reign
on earth begun! He comes to

break oppression, to set the
captive free; to take away
transgression, and rule in
equity.

2. He comes with succour speedy to those who suffer wrong; to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong; to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light, whose souls, condemned and dying, are precious in his sight.

3. He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth; love, joy, and hope, like flowers, spring in his path to

birth. 1st March (Lent 2 Before him on the mountains, shall peace, the herald, go, and righteousness, in fountains, from hill to valley flow.

4. To him shall prayer unceasing and daily vows ascend; his kingdom still increasing, a kingdom without end. The tide of time shall never his covenant remove; his name shall stand forever; that name to us is love.

1st March (Lent 2)

II Chronicles 6 vv 22&23

We turn to God for justice. If we have been wronged, we bring our grievance to God. We look to God for justice in the world as we think of the innocent who suffer oppression, poverty or disease. We look to God for mercy, for forgiveness for our failure to love as He would have us love Him & one another.

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2nd March

II Chronicles 6 vv 24&25

Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

We hesitate perhaps to pray for victory, but, if we are confident that we are fighting in a just cause, it makes sense to ask God's blessing on our arms. If, on the other hand, we are not fighting in a just cause, we should not be fighting at all. War is always bad. It is a product of human sin. Sin is something of which we must repent. We have faith in God that justice and mercy ultimately triumph. We know that Jesus overcame the power of sin through self-sacrificial love. He is our example. In this wicked world, I fear that we cannot avoid the possibility of war. If it happens, we seek strength in God. But it will not always be so. *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their*

spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up swords against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2⁴).

3rd March

II Chronicles 6 vv 26&27

The Bible (and the Prayer Book) regard the world and what happens in it as under the Providence of God. Everything is in His Hands. He is a just God and, if we walk in His ways, things work out. Obey the Maker's instructions. God answers prayer. He is with us every step of the way. He has a plan for each of our lives. We can take everything to Him in prayer. He blesses us. He may chastise us. If we sin, when we repent, we are forgiven. Whether things go well or badly, there is an explanation – a scientific explanation & a theological explanation. The universe operates under the Providence of a rational Mind, infinitely greater than ours, but not alien to us. He is our Heavenly Father. We are made in His image. Science makes sense. Faith makes sense. Reason is of God.

Many people, including many Christians, don't see the world that way. They don't believe that God *makes every flower that opens, each little bird that sings*. They do not consider that *the winds and waves obey him, by him the birds are fed*. Therefore, logically, there is no reason to pray for rain or for fair weather. The weather systems act independently of God. There is no reason to thank God because *much more to us his children he gives our daily bread*. So religion becomes irrelevant to everyday life. We do not know God intimately. He is not intimately involved with the lives of the nine billion people who live on this planet.

I am sure that such Christians are wrong. God is intimately involved. Jesus says, (Matthew 10) ²⁹ *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.* ³⁰ *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* ³¹ *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* Our lives, everything, is in the Hands of God. It makes sense to pray about everything.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

4th March

II Chronicles 6 vv 28-31

How might our sins contribute to hardship – drought & dearth, disease, conflict? Rebellion against God generally brings disorder into the Universe. Creation brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness. Our rebellion against God lets back in the darkness and the chaos. God Himself supplies the remedy Jesus Who is the Light of the World and the Word (Logos). In imitation of Him, inspired by His Spirit, Christians too are called to be lights of the world, We are called (Romans 12¹) *that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (logikos) sacrifice unto God.*

Specifically, conflict is obviously the result of sin. Poverty may result from mismanagement of resources, greed on the part of the powerful, ignorance of how best to grow good, manufacture the things we need and deliver them to where they are needed. Disease may be the result of a failure to provide clean water & adequate food, failure to take proper hygienic precautions, etc.. Climate change might be the result of an irresponsible and selfish abuse on our part of the world's resources.

O LORD and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end.
Amen.

This prayer may be said after receiving Holy Communion. When we receive Christ, we are at one with Him & join Him in offering our lives with His as a *reasonable, holy & lively sacrifice* to God.

5th March

II Chronicles 6 vv 32&33

Gentiles too may pray to God in the Temple & God will hear. This is a partial fulfilment of God's Promises. In the further revelation of the New Testament, Jesus is the Temple, the High Priest & the Sacrifice. Everybody anywhere in the world, Jew & Gentile alike, may pray to God in Jesus Christ.

6th March

II Chronicles 6 vv 34-40

God is with His people if they fight in a just cause. God is with us in everything. We seek, by His grace, to align our wills with God's Will so that what we do is pleasing to Him. In pleasing God, we are blessed. Solomon has some understanding of the exile which will come many years after Solomon's time as a result of the Israelites' consistent rebellion against God. His prayer is that, when the people return to God, He will return to them and restore them to the Holy Land. This is what happens in fact. The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar destroys the Temple & much of the Holy City. He takes the leading citizens into captivity in Babylon. After seventy years, the Persian King Cyrus supports their return.

7th March

II Chronicles 6 vv 41&42

Endue thy Ministers with righteousness.

And make thy chosen people joyful.

These familiar words from prayerbook Mattins and Evensong have their origin in Solomon's Prayer. In the Old Testament, priests mediated between the people & God. They offered the sacrifices. They taught & interpreted the Law. They proclaimed blessings and curses. In the New Testament, Jesus is the high priest. He is our only mediator and advocate. He offers Himself as the sacrifice. He teaches the Way of God by Word & example. He pours out upon us the blessing of the Holy Spirit. He is our merciful Judge, In a sense, all Christians are priests. We all have access to the Father through Him. We offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice. We proclaim & teach the Word of God. We are called to be a blessing to others. The Christian Church does have ministers, priests, who are called to sustain all Christians. We need your prayers.

8th March (Lent 3)

Revelation 21 vv 9-21

The Temple which Solomon built was destroyed by the Babylonians. As we shall see, a new Temple was built by the returning exiles from Babylon. King Herod (the one who murdered the Holy Innocents) effectively rebuilt this Temple though the worship was uninterrupted. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans during the Jewish Revolt in AD70. But what of the future, the final consummation? The Bride of the Lamb of God is the Church. The earthly Jerusalem is replaced by the Holy City in Heaven. Human words, even inspired words, are insufficient to convey its magnificence & beauty, but here, in Revelation, we are given a foretaste of what is to come for us. Dare I say, too, that the life of the Church on earth is a foretaste of life in that Holy City? As yet imperfectly, we know the love of God, we are in fellowship one with another, we see something of the glory, our prayers and praises are joined with those of heaven. *Therefore with angels & archangels...*

Blessed city, heavenly Salem,
vision dear of peace and love,
who of living stones art builded
in the height of heaven above,
and, with angel hosts encircled,
as a bride dost earthward
move;

From celestial realms
descending,
bridal glory round thee shed,
meet for him whose love
espoused thee,
to thy Lord shalt thou be led;
all thy streets and all thy
bulwarks
of pure gold are fashioned.

Bright thy gates of pearl are
shining;
they are open evermore;
and by virtue of his merits
thither faithful souls do soar,
who for Christ's dear Name in
this world

pain and tribulation bore.

Many a blow and biting
sculpture
polished well those stones
elect,
in their places now compacted
by the heavenly Architect,
who therewith hath willed for
ever
that his palace should be
decked.

Laud and honour to the Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three, and ever One,
consubstantial, coeternal,
while unending ages run.

Christ is made the sure
foundation,
Christ the head and
cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord, and

precious,
binding all the Church in one,
holy Zion's help for ever,
and her confidence alone.

To this temple, where we call
thee,
come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
with thy wonted loving-
kindness
hear thy servants as they pray;
and thy fullest benediction
shed within its walls always.

Here vouchsafe to all thy

servants
what they ask of thee to gain,
what they gain from thee for
ever
with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in thy glory
evermore with thee to reign.

Laud and honour to the Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three, and ever One,
consubstantial, co-eternal,
while unending ages run

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy
humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be
our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

9th March

Revelation 21 vv 22-27

The Holy City needs no temple, no house made by human hands where
men and women may come to meet God. God Himself, the Lamb of
God are present in the Holy City, present in the Church, present in the
hearts of all believers. God is our light & our salvation. The Holy City
is for people of all nations. All are welcome to become its citizens
through faith in Jesus Christ and Baptism in the threefold Name. We
bring with us the offering of ourselves, our souls & bodies, all that we
have, all that we are, the glory of the nations. *All things come of thee &
of thine own have we given thee.*

10th March

Revelation 22 vv 1-7

We are eternally citizens of the Holy City because our names are
written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We bear His Name. He is our
Light. Eternal life is His gift to all who draw near to Him. From the
Holy City, the Throne of Grace, from the stricken side of the Lamb
flows the River of Life – the Holy Spirit, Who brings health and healing
to the nations.

11th March

Philippians 3 vv 1-10

Can it really be that it is that straightforward, that we are saved by grace through faith? Don't we have to do something to deserve God's love? Go through certain rites? Observe certain rules? Be reasonably good people? Won't other people judge us because we don't share their hang ups about religion? Actually, it is that simple. We are saved by grace through faith. We are saved; we are set free from sin, the world and the devil in order that we may lead lives which are pleasing to God. We do not keep God's commandments in order to make God love us and thereby to earn a place in heaven. It is the other way round. God loves us as we are. He has set us free. He has saved us. He has made us citizens of heaven. It is because of what God has made us – His children – that we obey His commandments. Paul (before he met Christ) had everything going for him. He was a very religious man. But it came to him that none of that signified anything. All that mattered was to know Christ & the power of His Resurrection, to be crucified with Christ & to rise again with Him.

12th March

Philippians 3 vv 11-21

We are then, by God's grace, already citizens of heaven. But in a sense we are exiles. We no longer belong to the world in which we live. We're not in heaven yet, but it's where we are heading. But here on earth our calling is to live as citizens of heaven, to walk worthily of our vocation, to show to the world what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

On the radio this morning a man said that he'd been asked in prison what he was afraid of. I didn't know how I would answer that question. For many people, the ultimate fear is death, but it ought not to be so if we have faith in Christ Who will change us in death so that we shall be like Him in glory.

FORASMUCH as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear *brother* here departed, we therefore commit *his* body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.

13th March

I Samuel 5 vv 1-9

When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, they thought that their victory over the Israelites demonstrated that their god, Dagon (a fish deity because the Philistines were a sea people) was more powerful than the LORD. They had humiliated Israel & they intended to humiliate Israel's God. They had bitten off more than they could chew. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

14th March

I Samuel 6 vv 1-12

The Philistines realised that they could not keep the Ark, but they had to treat it with respect. So they took counsel. Their offerings symbolised the plagues they had suffered as a sort of prayer to ask God to relieve them. The point about the cart being pulled by cows whose calves were kept at home is that cows wouldn't normally leave their calves. The fact that the cows did leave their calves and head straight for Israelite territory indicated that what the Philistines had endured was not just bad luck, but a consequence of disrespecting the LORD.

15th March (Lent 4)

Daniel 5 vv 1-9

Hundreds of years later, King Nebuchadnezzar had disrespected God by demolishing the Temple & taking the sacred vessels to Babylon. His son Belshazzar did even worse. He mocked God by drinking from these holy cups at a riotous feast in which the false gods of the pagans were honoured. There would be consequences! On this Mothering Sunday, we note that it was Belshazzar's mother who put him right – though in this case too late. We pray for mothers & fathers as they care for their children and try to bring them up in the right way.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

16th March

Daniel 5 vv 10-17

Belshazzar sought the advice of the holy man too late. He'd disregarded what had happened to his father. He was arrogant & foolish. Power & wealth bring their own temptations. Those who have them need to remember that their calling is to serve God & their people and

to use what has been entrusted to them in that service, not for their own selfish ends. The coronation of our monarchs takes place in a service of Holy Communion and the new king or queen is given a copy of the Bible.

17th March

Daniel 5 vv 17-31

So Belshazzar's reign and Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty came to an abrupt end. The Medes and the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire. Ultimately, there is judgment, even for the most mighty.

18th March

Ezra 1 vv 1-11

The Babylonians were conquered by the Medes and the Medes were superseded by the Persians. The destinies of the nations, as the destinies of individual people, are in the hands of God. Ultimately, justice and mercy will prevail. We work with God when we pray. If you think about it, to pray *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven*, covers everything which we might sensibly ask for. We can't think of anything better than God's Will, whether for our lives as individuals and the people we know and love, or for our nation, or for the world in general. It is good, however, to spell out to God what is in our hearts, what we hope for. Of course, He knows our thoughts before we even know them ourselves, but it is good for us ourselves to put our prayers into words. Doing so helps us to think straight and it opens the way for thanksgiving when God hears our prayers and acts in our lives.

Cyrus had a general policy of allowing the various peoples displaced by the Assyrians & Babylonians to return to their homes. Persian religion was more enlightened than the beliefs of the Assyrians & Babylonians. The LORD had actually chosen Cyrus to be His servant in the operation to bring the Jews home to Jerusalem and to re-establish the Temple. Isaiah 44²⁸: *That (The LORD) saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, we are taught by thy Holy Word, that the hearts of Kings are in thy rule and governance, and that thou dost dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to thy godly wisdom: We

humbly beseech thee so to dispose and govern the heart of *CHARLES* thy Servant, our King and Governor, that, in all his thoughts, words, and works, he may ever seek thy honour and glory, and study to preserve thy people committed to his charge, in wealth, peace, and godliness: Grant this, O merciful Father, for thy dear Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

19th March

Ezra 3 vv 1-7

The returning exiles brought back with them the sacred vessels and the treasures and the offerings of the people and offered sacrifice in preparation for building the Temple. The Feast of the Tabernacles comes in the Autumn and it is when the Children of Israel put up booths or tents and dwell (or at least eat) in them for seven days. It is Harvest Festival. It commemorates the 40 years wandering in the Wilderness. It is associated with the proclamation of God's holy Law. Water is poured out – life-giving water, which symbolises the gift of the Holy Spirit.

20th March

Ezekiel 47 vv 1-12

When I first cycled from Petra in Jordan (biblical Edom) over the mountains and alongside the Dead Sea until we crossed the Allenby Bridge into Israel and headed south down to En Gedi and Masada, we had it easy. Initially, the roads were rough. The desert was harsh. The Dead Sea was lifeless. But we were in a group. We were taken care of by people who knew what they were doing. Water & other essentials were carried on trucks for us. Our accommodation was arranged. Another smaller group had a much tougher time. They hiked in the Judaeian Desert, carrying all their own stuff. They experienced more of what the desert is really like. And what makes all the difference? Pure, clear, life-giving water. In Ezekiel's vision, a stream of pure water flows out from the Temple & brings life to the desert. The fruit of the trees is for food. The leaves are medicinal. The Dead Sea is brought to life & swarming with fish like the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. Only the salt marshes remain. We need salt. John 7: *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

March 21st

Ezra 4 vv 1-6

The returning exiles met opposition in their task of rebuilding the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The particular opponents in this passage are the descendants of Gentile nations brought to the Holy Land by Assyrian conquerors just as the Jews had been exiled to Babylon. The imperial policy of both Assyria and Babylon was to weaken the nations they had conquered by the forced relocation of their populations. The religion of these displaced people in Israel was a mixture of their ancestral pagan religions and the faith of the LORD. It was (and is) vitally important that we follow the LORD wholeheartedly.

There were also claims that, when the city wall was rebuilt, the Jews would rebel against their Persian overlords, but that was not the intention.

So two thoughts from today's reading. The first is that we do encounter opposition when we are seeking to do God's work. We have to remain faithful & trust Him, My second thought is how difficult it is to maintain a single-minded devotion to God, resisting the blandishments of the world to make life easier by compromise, while acting on our understanding that God so loved the world & would want us to bring everybody into His Church.

City of God, how broad and far
outspread thy walls sublime!
The true thy chartered freemen
are
of every age and clime.

One holy Church, one army
strong;
one steadfast, high intent;
one working band, one harvest
song,
one King omnipotent.

How purely hath thy speech
come down
from man's primeval youth!
How grandly hath thine empire

grown
of freedom, love and truth!

How gleam thy watch fires
through the night
with never fainting ray!
How rise thy towers, serene
and bright,
to meet the dawning day!

In vain the surge's angry
shock,
in vain the drifting sands;
unharm'd upon the eternal
Rock
the eternal City stands.

22nd March (Lent 5, Passion Sunday)

Ezra 5 vv 1&2

Zerubbabel is the prince of the royal house, a descendant of King David. Jeshua (or Joshua = Jesus) is the high priest. Together, they reinstate the sacrifices and build the Temple. They are supported and encouraged by the prophets Haggai & Zechariah. Prophet, priest & king each inspired by the Holy Spirit to do the good works God has prepared for him to walk in, working together with all the people of God to build God's House. Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism fulfils these roles. He fulfils every aspect of God's work. We in Christ & Christ in us, our calling is to play our part in God's work in the world today in accordance with the gifts which God has given us. I Corinthians 12^{11-13a}: *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.*

O Jesus, shepherd, guardian, friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore, both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

23rd March

Zechariah 4 vv 1-14

Anointing oil, seven lamps, the seven eyes of God which view the whole earth, the Holy Spirit. Zerubbabel and Jeshua as royal prince and high priest are anointed. The oil signifies the coming of the Holy Spirit on them to cleanse them, sanctify them and enable them to the task which God has assigned them. Jesus is both King & Priest. His followers constitute a royal priesthood. Often holy oil is used in Baptism & Confirmation signifying our anointing with the Holy Spirit. What is actually necessary for the Sacrament of Baptism is water administered in the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. The key action in Confirmation (as in Ordination) is the laying on of hand(s) with prayer, again signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The added symbolism of candles given, received and shared makes obvious sense in these contexts. Christ is our Light. He fills us with His Light. We shine with His Light. We share His Light with other people in the Church & in the world. Like love, the more you share light, the more there is. This prayer traditionally used at Confirmations is based on Isaiah's prophecy (Chapter 11) of the coming of the Messiah, which we often read at Christmas.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by Water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins: Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and for ever. Amen.

24th March

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

In his vision, John is taken up into heaven and is privileged to behold something of the glory of God & of the heavenly host. V5 speaks of seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God. There are seven aspects of the Spirit in the Confirmation prayer and Isaiah 11 on which it is based. John experiences something of what Zechariah saw. Moses had that vision of Heaven which inspired the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle & the Temple.

COME, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,

*And lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.*

Thy blessed unction from above,
*Is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight.*

Anoint and cheer our soiled face

With the abundance of thy grace.

Keep far our foes, give peace at home;

Where thou art guide, no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,

*And thee, of both, to be but One;
That, through the ages all along,*

*This may be our endless song:
Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

The above hymn is used at ordinations and sometimes at confirmations, but could be used at any time.

25th March (The Annunciation)

Revelation 5 vv 1-14

Jesus in Heaven, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God, the One Who fulfils all prophecies, all God's promises, the Incarnation of the Word of God. He Who is eternally worshipped. The highest place that Heaven affords is His by right. And He gave it all up and won back the right by His death and makes us to be kings and priests with Him, through His merits, through His merits alone. Today, we ponder the mystery that the Jesus we worship, God the Son, was conceived in the Virgin's womb by the Holy Ghost and made flesh.

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

26th March

Haggai 1 vv 1-6

While the Jews were exiles in Babylon, they longed to return to their own land and to reconstruct the Temple & the Holy City. In God's Providence, the time came. Cyrus set them free and blessed them on their way. There was huge rejoicing when the sacrifices began again and the building work commenced. But the initial enthusiasm wore off. They were no longer so thankful for what God had done for them.

Rebuilding the Temple was no longer their priority. They put making themselves comfortable before getting on with God's work. And do you know what? They were never satisfied. They never had enough. Do we see any parallels here? So thankful for what God has done for us, so committed to living a Christian life. Then the love going off the boil, if not quite cold. Putting looking after ourselves and our worldly needs before God. Yet never satisfied, never having enough.

It is a thing most wonderful,
almost too wonderful to be,
that God's own Son should
come from heaven,
and die to save a child like me.

he chose a poor and humble
lot,
and wept, and toiled, and
mourned, and died,
for love of those who loved him
not.

And yet I know that it is true:

I cannot tell how he would love
a child so weak and full of sin;
his love must be most
wonderful,
if he could die my love to win.

I sometimes think about the
cross,
and shut my eyes, and try to
see
the cruel nails and crown of
thorns
and Jesus crucified for me.

But even could I see him die,
I could but see a little part
of that great love, which, like a

fire,
is always burning in his heart.

It is most wonderful to know
his love for me so free and
sure;
but 'tis more wonderful to see
my love for him so faint and
poor.

And yet I want to love thee,
Lord;
O light the flame within my
heart,
and I will love thee more and
more,
until I see thee as thou art.

27th March

Haggai 1 vv 7-15

There is a great deal of dissatisfaction about today. We are dissatisfied with the way the country is run. We are far from alone, there is dissatisfaction with politics across Europe & the US. Some people fear that innovations such as Artificial Intelligence will lead to job losses. We are told that the way out of our economic problems is growth, yet we fear that too much growth will contribute to environmental catastrophe. We are dissatisfied with the Church, perhaps dissatisfied with the Church of England in particular. Why this malaise? The problem is that our focus is on the wrong things. We put the material first: home, job, social status, holidays, leisure activities, possessions, experiences we can brag about. Faith is just one interest among many, for those who like that sort of thing! But God is everything or God is nothing. If we acknowledge God at all, then God is the focus of our lives and everything else that we do or think or say depends on our relationship with Him. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you* (Matthew 6³³). If there were no God, there would be no hope. God is and in Him there is hope. We only receive the fulness of His blessing, however, when we yield ourselves fully to Him.

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true

religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 28th

Haggai 2 vv 1-9

70 years since Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple and took the leading citizens into exile in Babylon. Most of those who had come home from Babylon to rebuild the Temple & re-establish its worship had not even been born when those calamitous events had taken place. But a few very old people did remember the original Temple in its glory and, as yet, the rebuild was disappointing.

Some of us remember better days for the Church of England. Not so long ago, most people in this country at least claimed to be Christians. They were baptized and married in Church. Christian clergy officiated at most funerals. We had Christian names, not forenames. Sunday was a special day. Religious Education was Bible stories. Assembly was Christian worship. In the 1950s, about half of children went to Sunday School. People, even government, took notice of the Church. Far more people attended public worship. Every community had its own church & minister who lived among the people he served. Even those who didn't go to Church much knew the prayers & hymns. To younger people, the England of my youth would be a foreign country.

But that doesn't mean that there are not people in the Church today working to rebuild. We hear about a silent revival, young adults joining churches, seeking God. We older folk may sometimes be too quick to disparage instead of to celebrate and encourage. We may well view the *good old days* through rose-tinted spectacles. If the Church was really what she ought to have been around 1960, how come she declined so rapidly? On the other hand, enthusiasts for Church growth may be too quick to disregard & discard the good things we inherit from the past. Some may be so discouraged that they only manage decline rather than proclaiming the eternal Word Who is relevant in every epoch of human history. As in the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple, if we devote ourselves whole-heartedly to God's Work, faithfully following His Commandments, we shall prevail & build a new Church even better than we had before.

March 29th (Palm Sunday)

Ride on! ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna
cry;

O Saviour meek, pursue thy
road
with palms and scattered
garments strowed.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
O Christ, thy triumphs now
begin
o'er captive death and
conquered sin.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!
The angel-squadrons of the sky
look down with sad and

Luke 19 vv 28-48

wondering eyes
to see the approaching
sacrifice.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!
Thy last and fiercest strife is
nigh;
the Father on his sapphire
throne
expects his own anointed Son.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
bow thy meek head to mortal
pain,
then take, O God, thy power,
and reign.

In fulfilment of prophecy (Zechariah 9⁹), the King rides into Jerusalem, the true High Priest, the *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*, the One in Whom the Fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, the Lord comes suddenly to His Temple as a refiner and a purifier (Malachi 3). He prophesies that the House of God made with human hands will be destroyed because the people failed to receive Him. But He has come to die for the sins of the world and all may come to God in Him.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always

blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without
ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

March 30th

I Peter 2 vv 1-10

*The same stone which the builders rejected: is become the head-stone
in the corner.*

Vast crowds were on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Their offering of a lamb would be sacrificed in the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus and His apostles were among the throng of pilgrims keeping God's commandment to observe the Passover. God had set His people free. The angel of death passed over the homes anointed with the Blood of the Lamb. Baptised in the Red Sea, they would enter into a covenant with God. The LORD would be their God; they would be His people, a royal priesthood.

On the way to Jerusalem, they would have been singing the Passover psalms, one of which is Ps 118 from which the verse at the start of this meditation is taken. Jesus is the Stone Whom the builders (the religious leaders of the day) rejected. He has become the head-stone in the corner, the key on which the whole holy edifice depends for its structural integrity.

All this prefigures God's plan for the whole human race. Set free from sin and the fear of death by faith in Jesus Christ, washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb, baptized with water & the Holy Spirit, nourished by the manna of Holy Communion, in remembrance of what God did for us in Christ, as we share in the Blood of the New Covenant, we are affirmed as the people of God, a royal priesthood. The Fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ. He is the Temple. He dwells in us & we in Him. We too then are temples of the Holy Spirit. Together, the Christian Church is the Temple of God, a royal priesthood which exists to *shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

Christ is our cornerstone,
on him alone we build;
with his true saints alone
the courts of heaven are filled;
on his great love
our hopes we place
of present grace
and joys above.

O then with hymns of praise
these hallowed courts shall
ring;
our voices we will raise
the Three in One to sing;
and thus proclaim
in joyful song,
both loud and long,
that glorious name.

March 31st

Isaiah 6 vv 1-8

Jesus spent a lot of time in the Temple during Holy Week. His disciples were very impressed. (Mark 13): *One of his disciples saith unto him, Master see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto , Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be one stone left on another, that shall not be thrown down.* They didn't realise that One greater than the Temple was there. They did not yet understand that the Temple of His Body would be destroyed and that it would be raised up again in three days.

Today's reading take place hundreds of years before the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah is in the Temple which Solomon built and he is granted a wonderful vision of God. Ponder for a moment the splendour and the glory. In the Presence of the thrice holy God, we are aware of our unworthiness to be there. Yet God is merciful. He cleanses us of our sins. I think the 1662 Communion service gets the order right here.

Priest. Lift up your hearts.

Answer. We lift them up unto the Lord.

Priest. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

Answer. It is meet and right so to do.

Then shall the Priest turn to the Lord's Table, and say,

IT is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy

Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.

T**HEREFORE** with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. *Amen.*

WE do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. *Amen.*

Having been granted this wonderful vision and been made clean, consecrated, by God, Isaiah responds to God's call, *Here am I; send me.*

This is the response which it is natural for us to make when we have received Holy Communion.

O LORD and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end.
Amen.

Bright the vision that delighted
once the sight of Judah's seer;
sweet the countless tongues
united
to entrance the prophet's ear.

Round the Lord in glory seated
cherubim and seraphim
filled his temple, and repeated
each to each the alternate
hymn:

'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'

Heaven is still with glory
ringing,
earth takes up the angels' cry,

'Holy, holy, holy,' singing,
'Lord of hosts, the Lord most
high.'

With his seraph train before
him,
with his holy Church below,
thus unite we to adore him,
bid we thus our anthem flow:

'Lord, thy glory fills the heaven;
earth is with its fullness stored;
unto thee be glory given,
holy, holy, holy, Lord.'