

Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent.

Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the church season of Lent. This is the period of preparation leading to the remembrance of Easter. Traditionally is period for being sorrowful for our sins, the way we have lived by doing things that we know would displease God and also by not doing things we know would please him. Christians have traditionally seen Ash Wednesday as a significant day. From as early as the 8th century Christians were marking Ash Wednesday by having ashes made from burning the Palm Crosses from the previous year, marked on their foreheads. This is a sign of repentance for sins. The act echoes the tradition in the middle east of throwing ashes over the head to signify repentance to God. There are a number of references to the use of ashes to signify repentance in the Bible, for example Job chapter 42, verses 3-6, Numbers 19, 9 and 17. There is also references to the use of ashes in repentance in Matthew chapter 11. verse 21, Luke 10. 13 and Hebrews 9. 13. There will be a special celebration of Holy Communion at Ingatestone Parish Church on the evening of Ash Wednesday at 8 p.m. Here the imposition of ashes will be available for anyone who desires it. Anyone may also come to the service who does not wish to have the ashes, but acknowledge their need for repentance. In recent years the number coming to this service has increased.

Lent Booklets.

Lent is also a time for traditionally taking seriously our need for preparation before we celebrate Easter. One way to do this is through Bible reading and reflection. Ingatestone and Fryerning Churches Together produced our first booklet of daily Bible readings for Lent in 1993. It is a great credit to our local churches that such a booklet is produced. I know of no other ecumenical group of churches that produce such a booklet. These are available in all the churches. It is very powerful to realise that hundreds of people in our villages are all reading the same Biblical passage each day and reflecting upon the words and how they apply to their own lives. This also helps with personal devotion and feeding items for daily prayer.

Lent course.

Churches around the country run courses during Lent to encourage people to reflect on the experience of faith and to grow in understanding. We have run courses here for many years. This year we are producing our own course based on the last week in the life of Jesus. These will be held on Tuesday evenings at the URC at 8 p.m., starting on 23rd of February. We have seen attendance of around 30 people at these sessions, and it would be good to see more this year. I recall one young mother from the Catholic Church telling me last year that she always really looked forward to the course each Lent.