

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

---

## FORTY DAYS

---

19TH FEBRUARY 2021

As I sit down to write this beacon I feel replete having just polished off this years substantial helping of pancakes. I expect that I am not alone in this, although I know that by the time you hear this Beacon we will already be 3 days into the lent period.

I wonder what you had on your pancakes this year? Did you stick with the traditional lemon and sugar, or maybe syrup or jam, maybe something savoury like cheese or Brussels Pate? I had lemon and sugar but I also tried something different, Biscoff spread, it certainly was different, a bit too sticky really so I'll probably give that one a miss next year.

Of course pancake Tuesday and Lent are one of the most recognisable parts of the churches annual calendar. Living in a country that has a Christian heritage means that most people are aware of the meaning of Lent, or at least I think they are, perhaps the younger generation is starting to forget the what Lent is all about and just concentrate on a sweet treat that comes around once a year.

Generally speaking, Evangelical churches such as ours don't celebrate Lent as such, we only participate in it in much the same way as any non-Christian would. So what is lent and where did it come from?

Well the first thing to note is that it does have a basis in scripture. The original idea was that Christians had to prepare themselves for Easter by fasting and confessing their sins. The period chosen for this was to be 40 days which represented the 40 days that Jesus fasted for whilst in the wilderness. The Bible doesn't tell us what time of year Jesus was in the wilderness but as John tells us about all three of Jesus trips to Jerusalem for Passover we do know that it definitely wasn't immediately before Passover and Passover was celebrated on the same day that we now celebrate Good Friday.

So where did the name Lent come from? Well, as with all things linguistic we can trace it back to an Old English word "lencten" which over time became shortened to "lent". The Old English language came from a northern Dutch

dialect and they still use the word "lente" today which means "spring" as in the season. So "lent" simply means "spring". This is amazingly accurate this year as the change from the very cold weather to the milder spring weather happened the day before pancake Tuesday.

So why do we eat pancakes? Well this comes from the fact that Lent was a period of fasting. Flour, Milk and Eggs were amongst the items that were given up and it is no coincidence that pancake batter is made from these three ingredients. Now the mathematically minded amongst you will already have worked out that from Ash Wednesday to Easter Saturday is actually 46 day and not 40. This is because the fast was not to be observed on Sundays and there are 6 of those in the 46 day period so there would only be 40 days actual fasting. During the fast it was customary to eat only one simple meal, in the evening, each day.

So when did all this come about and why? Well it is widely thought that it was first codified at the Council of Nicea in the year 325AD. This meeting was important in setting down many of the rules about the ways the church would be run and was definitely the meeting at which the date for Easter was set so it is likely that they discussed the idea of lent even if it wasn't actually formalised. Now the reason for this annual event, along with other parts of the church calendar, is because people needed a much more visual way of understanding the bible. You see most people couldn't read the bible for themselves and the idea that people had specific times for reminding themselves that they were sinners and needed Gods forgiveness seemed like a good thing to do. So then, what about the real name for pancake Tuesday - "Shrove Tuesday". The word "Shrove" is the past tense of the verb "Shrive" which means to be absolved, or put more simply "forgiven". It is still a common practice in the Catholic Church to go to confession on Shrove Tuesday.

The practice of having an annual calendar of events is not one that the church invented, it was, in fact, invented by God himself. When the Israelites were heading for the promised land God gave Moses a whole load of instructions. Generally referred to as "The Law", or "Torah" in Hebrew, these covered most aspects of life and behaviour and are now to be found in our Bibles as the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Contained within these were the instructions for festivals such as Passover, Harvest and Shelters. The purpose of all these, and indeed the whole of the Law, was one thing only; to remember the Lord our God. God knows what we are like, He knows that we are inclined to go our own way, to get involved in our own affairs and to forget the good things that God has done in our lives and the lives of those around us. Such festivals concentrated on listening to the Law being read aloud by the priests and on practising hospitality, making sure that those who had the least were looked after.

In the days of Moses God was expecting the Israelites to remember that He had brought them out of Egypt. It was this rescue of His people from the Egyptian slave masters that they were to remember. Today it is Jesus who we are remembering. The Apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to friend Timothy "Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach"

We are fortunate that we have the opportunity to celebrate this as often we like, in particular, when we share in the communion service on a Sunday. The instruction that Jesus gave us was recorded by the Gospel writer Luke. At the Passover meal Jesus took a loaf of bread and said "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me"

So we can see that in the days before Jesus we were to remember Gods deeds in rescuing His people, but after Jesus we are to remember Him.

Whether we choose to observe lent in any particular way is not important. It is OK to give something up, or to fast whenever we want, or it is also OK not to observe lent at all.

What is important is that we remember that our sins are forgiven, and our future after death is secure if we believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and that He died and rose again.

We would do well to remember this every day and not just for the 40 days of lent.



---

**STEVE ADSHEAD**



*Coach House Church*

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn