

ST. MARK'S GILLINGHAM

Lent Bible Feast - March-April 2017

With national statistics telling us that only one Christian in seven reads the Bible outside of church services, we want our focus at St. Mark's during Lent to be on reading, meditating & studying the Bible.

The story told by the Bible is, first and foremost, the story of God: God's words, God's acts, God's motives, God's emotions, God's manner, God's purpose. Human beings also play a significant role, but God - often subtly and sometimes openly - is the major actor.

God promises to speak to us, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. This is what makes the Bible like no other book. Not just because it has been banned in more countries than any other; nor because it has been translated into more languages than any other. And not because of its extraordinary origins, having been penned on three different continents over hundreds of years, by a huge range of people in a vast array of situations: from prisoners to poets, politicians to prophets, tax collectors to fishermen, philosophers to revolutionaries, kings to shepherds and shepherds who became kings! No, what *really* makes the Bible unique is that each of these people were inspired to write the very words of God himself. God has spoken through the Bible to millions of people down the centuries and continues to do so today.

Unfortunately, the most treasured book on the bookshelf is too often just that - on our bookshelf. Whether it is because we are too busy, too self-reliant, too bored or too scared to hear God speak, a recent Bible Society survey confirms only one in seven Christians in the UK read the Bible outside of church services. This is a waste of the most precious resource. The irony is that there are still people around the world who would do anything to be able to hold and read a Bible in their own language.

The Bible is sometimes described as a record of humanity's search for God. This may be true in a sense, but it is far more true to say that the Bible tells of God's search for us. God pursues us, tracks us, claims us, calls us. I wonder sometimes why God wants us so badly. With our stubborn, stiff-necked, self-absorbed nature, why does God persist? The reason is buried deep in God's being, having to do with the fundamental quality that is God's essence: love. God will not desert us to our own devices because God loves us. As much as a shepherd who searches every crevice and ravine seeking his lost sheep or a woman who turns her house upside down to recover a lost coin, God loves us. "The good news of the gospel," the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr used to say, "is that we have found at the centre of the universe a heart of love!" The Bible is the story of God's seeking, searching, forgiving, claiming, redeeming love, and of the way God has woven that love through a community's life.

So as a church community as we embark on this adventure, why don't you commit to feast on God's word for forty days. Who knows, this might become a lifetime habit! As you commit, to read God's word this Lent make this your prayer:

Heavenly Father,

who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant us that we may in wisdom hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the wonderful hope of eternal life, which you have given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

March 1	Genesis 1-2	The Creation Account
March 2	Genesis 3	The Beginning of Sin
March 3	Genesis 15	God's Covenant with Abraham
March 4	Genesis 21	Abraham's Faith
March 5	Psalms 119. 1-24	The Psalm
March 6	Exodus 3-4	God calls Moses
March 7	Exodus 20	The Ten Commandments
March 8	Joshua 1	Conquering the Promised Land
March 9	1 Samuel 16-17	David & Goliath
March 10	1 Kings 3	Throne of David & Solomon's Wisdom
March 11	1 Kings 18	The Prophet Elijah
March 12	Psalms 119. 25-48	The Psalm
March 13	2 Kings 25	The Siege of Jerusalem
March 14	Daniel 2-3	Daniel & Israel in Babylon
March 15	Ezra 3	Rebuilding the Temple
March 16	Isaiah 9, 53 & 61	Isaiah's Prophecy
March 17	Luke 1-2	The Birth of Jesus
March 18	John 1	Who Jesus Is
March 19	Psalms 119. 49-72	The Psalm
March 20	Matthew 5-7	Jesus Begins His Ministry
March 21	Luke 4	The Core of Jesus' Teaching
March 22	John 3	God's Love for the World
March 23	John 5	Jesus' Miracles & Authority
March 24	John 11	Jesus' Power Over Death
March 25	John 15	The Christian Life
March 26	Psalms 119. 73-104	The Psalm
March 27	John 17	Jesus' High Priestly Prayer
March 28	Matthew 26-27	The Arrest & Crucifixion of Jesus
March 29	John 20	The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
March 30	Luke 24	The Ascension of Jesus Christ
March 31	Acts 2	The Coming of the Holy Spirit
April 1	Acts 9	The Conversion of Saul
April 2	Psalms 119. 105-136	The Psalm
April 3	Acts 16	The Gospel Spreads
April 4	Acts 26	Paul's Defence of the Christian Faith
April 5	Romans 3-6	Sin, Death, Faith, Alive in Christ
April 6	Romans 7-8	The Battle with Sin/Life in the Spirit
April ?	1 Corinthians 13	The Way of Love
April 8	1 Corinthians 15	The Power of Hope
April 9	Psalms 119. 137- 160	The Psalm
April 10	Ephesians 4-6	Living Biblically
April 11	Philippians 1-2	Christ's Example
April 12	Colossians 3:1-17	Putting on the New Self
April 13	1 Timothy 5	Instructions for the Church
April 14	James 1	Pure Religion
April 15	Revelation 21-22	The New Heavens & New Earth
April 16	Psalms 119. 161- 176	The Psalm