

Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

Since the last edition of Turvey News, here at the Abbey we've been celebrating the seasons of Lent and Eastertide, the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you visited our chapel anytime between Ash Wednesday and Holy Saturday, you would have seen that the wall-hanging at the front of the chapel had been replaced by a simple wooden cross. Lent is a season of preparation for Easter, the liturgical colour is purple, we don't sing 'alleluia'. If you had joined us for the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, you would have seen that cross given a very special place in the service, along with scripture readings and prayers.

The late afternoon of Holy Saturday sees a quite staggering transformation take place in our chapel, it's not quite Easter Sunday, but we need to be ready to celebrate the greatest day in the Christian year. The bareness of Holy Saturday, symbolising that strange time of waiting between the death and resurrection of Jesus, gives way to the 'all stops out' celebration of Easter Sunday. Flower arrangements come out of their cool hiding places, candles appear, the stand for the Paschal (Easter) candle is put in its Eastertide place in the centre of the chapel. The wooden cross goes back to the storage attic, where it presides over another side of human life until the next Ash Wednesday, its place is taken by a wall-hanging depicting the Risen Christ. Slowly the Abbey falls silent, we await our Easter Vigil and Mass, before daybreak on Sunday morning, 4.30 am to be precise.

For several decades now I have crept downstairs early and out into the cool damp silence to light a little bonfire in the car park—drivers have been warned in advance to park elsewhere! There's always a tense moment when the kindling wood is happily burning away, and nothing else seems to have caught, but then a crackling sound, and success.

We process with the unlit Paschal candle to the bonfire. There is a short ceremony during which the fire is blessed and the candle lighted: Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and the Omega, all time belongs to him and all ages, to him be glory and power through every age for ever. Amen.

We process to the chapel singing 'Christ our Light', and the Vigil service begins. It's surprising how many times we have all been able to light small candles at the bonfire and process to the chapel with them. This year it was too windy, so we lit them inside the chapel. A couple of years it has rained, I've lit the fire in a tin bath, dragged it to the chapel door for the candle lighting ceremony, then dragged it away again. The noise it makes on the pavers is unforgettable.

Our new Paschal candle stands tall, surrounded by all our little candles. A spotlight on the lectern for the readers, and eight scripture readings trace our story from Genesis to the Gospel of the Resurrection of Jesus—we have a little wall-hanging to illustrate each reading, we leave them up in the chapel during the week after Easter Sunday. We renew our Baptismal promises, all by the light of the candles, and then conclude with our celebration of the Mass of Easter Sunday. By now it is getting light and the birds are singing, Easter is here! Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Sr Benedict