



## *St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd*

### The Collect for Septuagesima (*Book of Common Prayer*)

*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.*

*“Septuagesima - seventy days  
To Easter’s primrose tide of praise;  
The Gesimas – Septua, Sexa, Quinc  
Mean Lent is near, which makes you think.”*

So opens John Betjeman’s poem ‘Septuagesima’. Really there are only sixty-three days between Septuagesima (which means ‘seventieth’) and Easter Day. It is a question of working backwards: Lent lasts for forty days (if you do not count the Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day; the Sunday before Ash Wednesday is Quinquagesima, notionally the ‘fiftieth’ day before Easter; then the Sunday before that, Sexagesima (‘sixtieth’); and, one week before that – today – Septuagesima. The ‘Gesimas’ (excised in post-1960s western liturgies) form a period that eases us into the penitential season of Lent. They were first established in Rome in the sixth century when the city’s fortunes were at a low ebb owing to invasions, plagues and droughts.

It would appear that Cranmer and the Reformers who translated this Sarum collect (for the same day) from Latin into English valued this pre-Lent season: they included the collect’s Trinitarian conclusion, and this ending only occurs in the English collects of the Prayer Book on special occasions, such as Christmas Day, Easter Day or Whit Sunday.

The themes of Lent, and its preparatory season in the Gesimas, were clearly important to the Reformers, and two key ones are reflected in this collect. One is acknowledging our flawed human nature and the reality of sin: “we, who are justly punished for our offences” highlights this. The other, counteracting, theme is that of God’s loving, saving grace, by which we “may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness”. We pray the collect “for the glory of thy Name”, his “Name” being, as throughout Scripture, shorthand for the nature and being of God.

It is fortunate that the phrase “we, who are justly punished for our offences” is not followed by the words “by you” (that is, by God). For we sense that God’s ‘Name’, his loving nature revealed in the Gospel, sits uncomfortably with some of the Old Testament stories, such as the punishing trials and plagues visited on Pharaoh and the Egyptians in Exodus 7. But we do need to avoid overlooking the reality of “our offences”: sin exists, in that there is something warped within human nature that can make us (as individuals or collectively) mar our lives and the lives of others. But though this collect alerts us to the reality of sin, it also reminds us of its remedy, God’s saving goodness. That the goodness of God has the last word prompts us in this sombre pre-Lent period to extol *“Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.”*

*James Graham, February 2026*