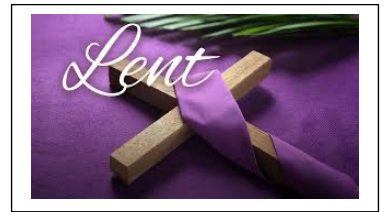


United Parish of
Chinnor,
Aston Rowant,
Crowell
Sydenham



Pastoral Letter February 2026

Joan writes,

In February our Church Year moves us from a celebration of Epiphany into the season of Lent. Epiphany is a season of invitation when the identity of Jesus is made manifest. It began with the visit of the Magi revealing the anointed of God to the whole world. In the weeks before Lent it continues with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan; Jesus's first sign in John's Gospel, changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana and concluding with the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus before the closest of his disciples, *"This is my son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him"*. In these weeks we seek the revelation of God in Jesus so that we may know, love and follow him.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent with the invitation to receive ashes on our foreheads as a sign of public penance, *"remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and follow Christ"*. We are reminded of the need for self denial and self discipline as we prepare to follow Jesus on the path of self sacrificing love. Lent is a time for self appraisal – not self abasement – nor self advertisement. We are not called to wallow in self loathing nor to seek escapism in spurious excuses as we look at the wilderness places in our own hearts and lives. Rather, it calls for a healthy realism about ourselves. We face up to and accept responsibility for our mistakes and shortcomings. We recognise our complicity in injustices from which we profit, our silence when at times we could have spoken out.

Lent is not a call to retreat from the realities of everyday life. The time Jesus spent in the wilderness was far from quiet and serene. It was a period of challenge and temptation. Rather it is a time to see the world with a new awareness, through the eyes of God. We begin to ask where the food we take for granted comes from, and to think of those who produced it, so we begin to see how our choices can make a difference to the lives of others.

Our lives can become so busy that we lose sight of the blessed refreshment which comes from simply sitting still. Lent affords plenty of opportunity to pause, take stock of our lives including our sins, to deal with some of the distractions that come to the life of prayer, to enter into Christ's sufferings so that we arrive at Easter better able to enter its joys.

A Prayer from the IONA Worship Book.

Living God, we confess our faults and admit our frailty; we own our own brokenness and recognise the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others, and the life of the world. By your abundant grace forgive us, renew us in mind and in spirit, and enable us to grow in love. Move among us and give us life; with the spirit of freedom sustain us that our worship may be joyful and our witness faithful: in the name of Jesus Christ we pray,. Amen.

An Invocation for Lent. (Kate McIlhagga)

Into the dark world
a snowdrop comes,
a blessing of hope and peace
carrying within it a green heart:
symbol of God's renewing love.
Come to inhabit our darkness, Lord Christ,
for dark and light are alike to you.
May nature's white candles of hope
remind us of your birth
and lighten our journey
through Lent and beyond.