



**St Mark's Church, Reigate**

March 2024

### **Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton**

Dear Friends,

As I write this month the days are finally getting longer, and the spring bulbs are beginning to bring much needed colour into the grey days of winter. We have barely celebrated Candlemas and put away the Christmas decorations, before turning from crib to cross and thoughts of Easter.

In the year 325, at the Council of Nicea, they established that Easter would be held on the first Sunday after the first Full Moon occurring after the vernal equinox and this year it is on 31 March. The date of Easter therefore sets the date for the forty days of Lent of which we are nearly halfway through.

Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days after his Baptism, and so the season of Lent is used by Christians for the same reason. In the early church, the baptism of new Christians took place at Easter. They also had a practice of welcoming back on Maundy Thursday, those who were baptised but had committed serious sins. Lent was used as the final season of intense preparation for those preparing for baptism or being welcomed back into the church. Those to be reconciled into the church at Easter, would gather on the Wednesday before the first Sunday of Lent, to receive ashes on their heads – a sign of penitence – that they wore, (without washing!) until Holy Thursday, and dressed in sackcloth! Over the years, this practice has been developed, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Pope recommended that ashes be distributed to anyone that sought them. The astute amongst you will work out that there are more than 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. The same Council that set the date for Easter also forbade fasting, kneeling and other acts of sorrow and penance on Sundays, even in Lent ... and so Sundays aren't counted within the days of Lent.

The season of Lent should be taken seriously and although we are nearly halfway through it is never too late to begin a Lenten practice. This is an opportunity to find something that helps you to draw closer to God, to connect with God, to connect with others. For some, this may be traditional fasting, or giving something up. Others may choose to take something up, perhaps reading the bible, or praying, maybe a commitment to visit someone that you wouldn't normally see. Maybe it's a season to remember different ways that we can care for the Environment, or to support a community initiative like the Foodbank. Whatever you decide to do or not do, I pray that it will be a useful season for you, as you think about your relationship with God and prepare for Easter.