

# Sacred and secular

## Bringing a Christian voice to secular festivals

On a recent visit to the Holy Land I discovered Gospel stories, not just written on pages in ink, but embedded into the landscape and architecture. The churches and sacred sites of Jerusalem and Galilee, in particular, each tell the visitor something about Jesus' life and teaching. This contested and troubled place is a geographical Bible.

Of course, Christian discipleship is not something that belongs in archaeology or bibliography. It is to be carried in our hearts and made visible in our lives. The tradition of using a calendar to mark out our time is a way of doing this. In marking out time, the Christian Church has helped its children to shape their lives by the Gospel, and the unfolding truth of salvation found in Scripture. So, by celebrating Christmas we identify ourselves with Jesus as God made flesh; in Lent we identify ourselves with Jesus' struggle; in Holy Week we do so with Jesus' suffering; and at Easter we see ourselves afresh as a resurrection community. And we can think about Ascensiontide, and Pentecost, and Trinity, and All Saints, and many other commemoration days in this light too. Somehow, in rich celebration of these seasons, we can place ourselves much more vividly into the story, and see ourselves alongside Mary and Joseph and Peter and others. Worship on a Sunday also is a way Christians identify themselves with the resurrection every week. Sunday is the day of resurrection – the old 'Sabbath' was Saturday.

But for many in our society the moorings between the Gospel and the festivals have been lost, even when the festival is still remembered. Father Christmas and the Easter Bunny make more powerful connections than the Son of God. Still, secularity does not drown out the desire of people to mark out time, and in it to find meaning. These times remain vital ways for people of faith to cement their walk with Jesus, much like regular prayer or weekly communion identifies us with his way.

Of course, marking out time is not limited to holy days. What about New Year, Valentine's Day, Mothering Sunday and Father's Day? Or those days that may have an ecclesiastical root but are laced with the heavyweight national meanings: patron saints'

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days (celebrated often for more patriotic than religious reasons), VE and VJ Day, Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday? The deep meanings associated with these days are often just as confused, for many people, as they are with Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter.

Christian teachers open the eyes of faith in people by making sense of the religious calendar. They can also do so by making sense of what here we may call the secular calendar. We are well used to doing the former, and perhaps also with the days of the secular calendar whose roots are ecclesiastical; but what about the others? For human beings, created in the image of God, it would be surprising if there were not some correspondence between the themes that belong to the secular realm and those that belong to the sacred.

As we travel through 2016, we will be highlighting such times when the sacred can be woven into the secular. Two opportunities fall in the month this edition covers: New Year and Valentine's Day. These are not immediately and completely children's themes, but here there is a real resonance with the experience of life that all households will share something of. And the light of faith offers hope to what otherwise might seem unreachable or unreal.

### Our journey through the secular year

#### New Year

Our human condition forces us to confront beginnings and endings, births and deaths. These are full of hope and fear for us. Christmas is only just being wrapped up when New Year comes hot on its heels. And at Christmas, families may have been more aware than ever of somebody who was no longer with them around this year's table, parted now by death. Is this a better time for remembrance or commemoration of the departed than All Saints' Day, falling on 1 November? The latter makes good sense for those immersed in the religious calendar, but perhaps many people around us can make better sense of loss as they say goodbye to an old year and face the new with heightened resolve and fresh commitment. This may well be a timely moment, a real opportunity, to reflect and pray with thanks and sorrow after all that has been, and then to ask how God would have us be in the future.

### Our journey through the secular year

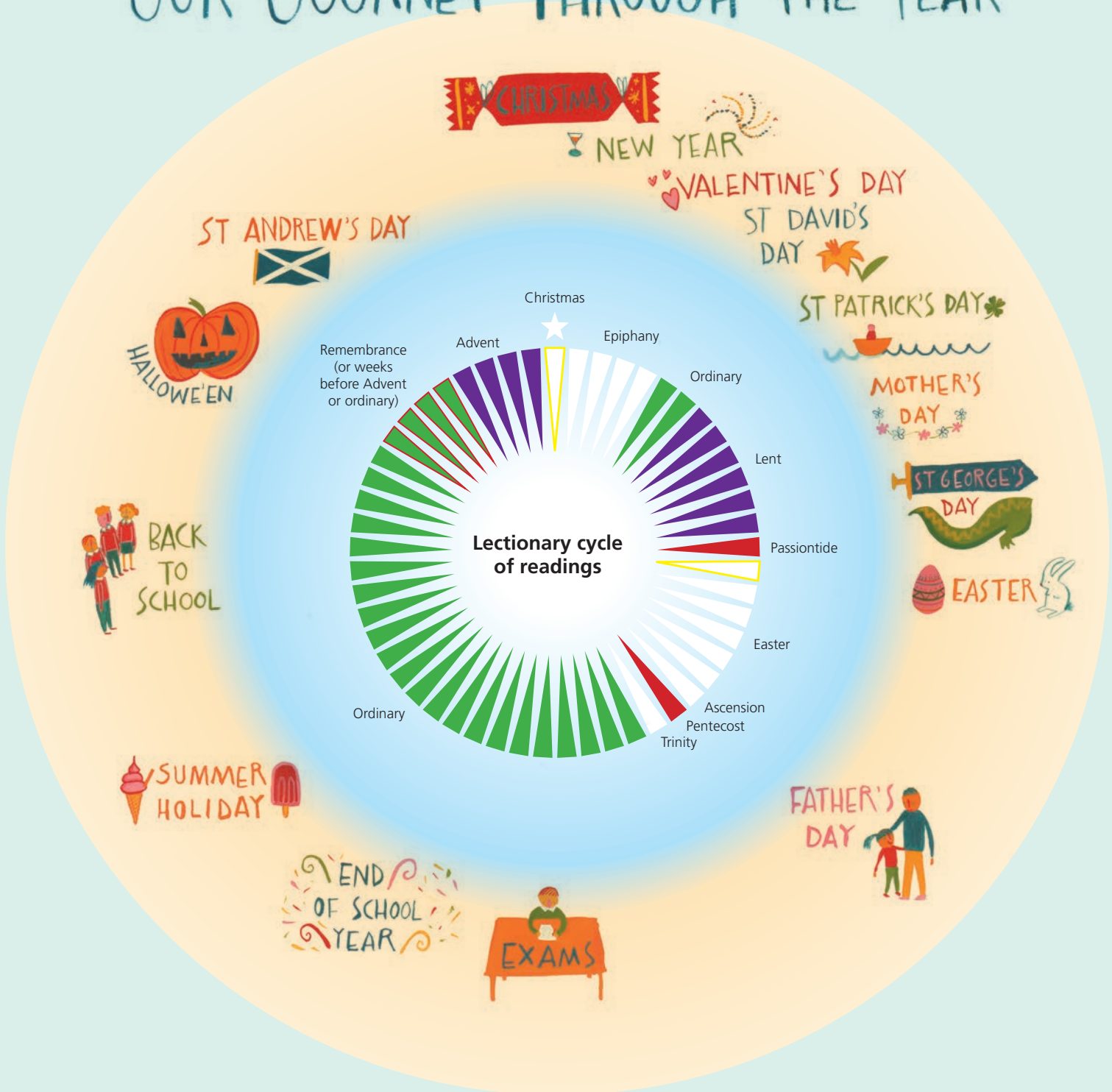
#### Valentine's Day • 14 February

A day when romantic love comes to the forefront, often doing so in frothy and misty-eyed ways. Maybe this is a lovely time for couples married in your church over the past year to come back and remember again their declarations of lifelong love made there. And love tells us something about God, although romance isn't the whole story. Love can hold us in another's arms, but love also took Jesus to the cross. Is this also a moment when the Christian faith story helps us make sense of the cost as well as the warm glow of love, and reassures us that God's love knows pain, too?

Short reflections like these will appear throughout the year alongside the regular features on the seasons of the church year, to help point up opportunities you could consider when planning services and events within your community. The principle is stepping away from a religious comfort zone, bringing a Christian voice to the festivals, celebrations and commemorations that take place outside of our churches, and helping to make sense of our human condition, our joys and fears, by the connectedness of heaven and earth.

*The Ven. Dr Tim Stratford is Archdeacon of Leicester, and a member of the Church of England Liturgical Commission.*

# OUR JOURNEY THROUGH THE YEAR



## Rhythms and patterns of the year

We shape our lives through the sacred and secular calendars, using them to mark out time and find meaning in the rhythms and patterns of the year. How can we bring a Christian voice to the festivals, celebrations and commemorations that take place outside our churches? Weaving the sacred into the secular can help to make sense of our human condition, our joys and fears.

During 2016 we will be highlighting the secular seasons and celebrations through short reflections and we will also be offering new all-age services and other new materials. Look out for them in **ROOTS Adult & All Age** and **ROOTS Children & Young People** resources, [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com).