

**Advance Notice:**

**'Truly this man was God's son': Exploring the Easter story told by Matthew.**

**3 studies, 90 minutes:**

**Saturday 21, 28 March and 4 April**

**Leigh Memorial Church,.**

**1. Remembering the Passion Narrative:**

How does Matthew tell the story of Jesus' betrayal, his trials, his death on the cross? What roles do Judas, Peter and Pilate play?

**2. The Empty Tomb:**

In what ways does the way in which Matthew tell the story of the empty tomb and appearances differ from the other gospel writers?

How does Matthew's Easter story compare with the Qu'ran's account of the 'death' of Jesus?

**3. Stumbling Blocks and Follies:**

The Easter events lie at the heart of the Christian faith. We explore different ways of understanding the 'message' of the cross and resurrection through the hymns we sing.

**Bibliophile #4**

Isaiah – 'The Fourth Servant Song'

Of all the servant songs to be found in the book of the prophet Isaiah, the fourth and final one has exercised the most influence on the Christian faith. It provides us with the vision of the suffering servant that so profoundly informed the way in which we understand the death of Jesus. It is a reading which deserves to lie at the heart of all Lenten reflection and the preparation for Holy Week. It is one of the finest expressions of poetry in the Bible worthy of learning off by heart as part of a spiritual devotion.

It is to be found at Isaiah 52:13-53: the 'servant' has been presented through these songs as in receipt of the Lord's Spirit; he is described as gentle, just, the victim of human reproach. It is undeserved. This fourth and final song describes the servant's humiliation and being brought low and how he will 'be exalted and lifted up ... very high'. The servant has been described as a light to the nations in the earlier songs; now he 'shall startle the nations' through his change in fortune.

"Who has believed what we have heard? ... he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing of his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity and as one from whom others hide their faces; he was despised and we held him of no account'. It was felt that the servant had actually been struck down by God.

The identity of the servant is much disputed. Was it Israel? Was it one of the prophets? The poet? Was it the coming messiah? The tendency for Christians has been to see the sufferings of Jesus in the light of this servant. This reading has fitted in well with a particular way of understanding the Easter message:

Isaiah writes that 'he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities'. He was afflicted but did not open his mouth: he was like a lamb led to the slaughter. "He was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people: His grave was with the wicked, the rich. The servant in Isaiah suffers for the sake of others; he intercedes for others – and eventually he is vindicated -he is raised 'very high'.