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5 March 2010: Rev'd David Stickland, Parish Priest, St Mary's, Buriton

What extra are you doing in Lent?

We are now in that season of the year to which the church refers as Lent. Most of us will have noticed Shrove Tuesday, 16th February this year, with its fun with pancakes. Originally this was to use up the rich ingredients which would not be needed during the forthcoming fast.

Shrove Tuesday was followed by Ash Wednesday when some of us may have attended church and had ash made from burning last year's palm crosses marked on our foreheads in the form of a cross.

This marks the beginning of Lent and its emphasis on austerity. The question is often asked, "What are you giving up for Lent?" The expected response may be alcohol or chocolates or some other perceived form of excess or indulgence. My preferred question is, "What extra are you doing in Lent?" Lent is not only a time of giving up, but also a time of taking on. Prayers at this time do indeed talk of fasting and prayer but they also speak of acts of service.

As we look forward to the sadness of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Day my challenge is that we should use this time to reflect and pray but also to think about those additional acts of service which we can perform.