

Thoughts on Symbolism and Christianity on Easter Sunday in Ombersley

I've always been better at thinking in pictures than words, hence my love of symbolism. The greatest symbol for me as a Christian has always been the **empty cross; a sign of Jesus Christ having risen from the dead** after being so cruelly crucified despite being innocent; a sign of **good triumphing over evil** ... the ultimate truth of 'life after death'.

Early every Easter morning, in that hesitant light just before dawn, some of us meet in Ombersley churchyard, next to the remaining part of the old church, to witness the lighting of **a bonfire, made up of dry, old Christmas trees** donated by parishioners. Flames from the dead branches shoot up into the sky, crackling with gusto, - I use that word advisedly - highlighting an empty cross on a grave.



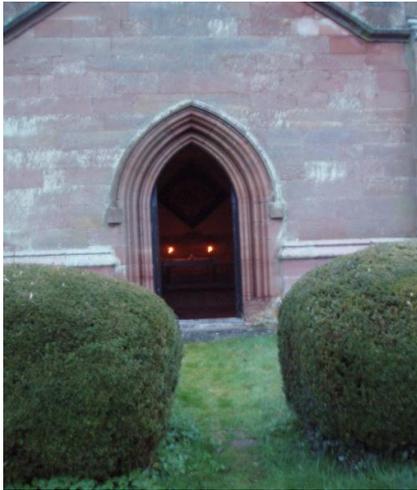
As these dead Christmas trees burn, they release **light and heat energy; Easter present springing out of Christmas past ... Life coming from death.**

The **flames** could be said to anticipate **Pentecost** when the **Holy Ghost** {from an old English word **gust** meaning *wind* or **gast** meaning *life / spirit / breath / soul* } came as **a mighty gust of wind and living tongues of flame sat upon each upon each of the disciples.**



Dawn ... and it rapidly becomes light as we stand around watching the fire burn fiercely, injecting warmth into our chill bones. In the background is our newer church, completed in 1829 with its magnificent **spire pointing towards the heavens** symbolising **the aspiration of reaching upwards towards God.**

Again, an **empty cross** on a grave in the foreground emphasises why we're all there so early on Easter morning.



After singing the Easter hymn
'Hail the day that sees him rise' ...
we are invited **into the sanctuary of
the old church through a small
doorway** by two lit candles inside, as
if being asked to **enter the tomb of
Jesus, the light of the world**, only to
find that he has already risen from
the dead ... **'Alleluia, he is risen
indeed'**

Once inside, we stand around in **a circle**,
which could be said to represent **eternal
life**, and reaffirm our baptismal vows
before being signed with **the sign of the
cross in water on our foreheads**, **water**
signifying **cleansing** and **the crossing
over from death to life**.

As prayers are being said I look through
the **small open doorway** --- **there is no
stone blocking the tomb** --- to see the **fire**
outside still **burning and releasing smoke**,
like incense **carrying our prayers onwards
and upwards to God our Father in heaven**.

We sing another hymn, rejoicing in the
resurrection: 'Ye choirs of new Jerusalem'
Your sweetest notes employ
The paschal victory to hymn
In strains of holy joy'

The **paschal candle** --- **Jesus, the light of the world** --- has been lit from the bonfire
of old Christmas trees. So, we follow the candle-bearer out of the darkness of the old church
into the light, as Jesus must have done coming out of his tomb nearly 2000 years ago, and
walk across to the main church to celebrate our first communion of Easter, receiving **bread
and wine** as **symbols of Christ's body and blood** ... **"Do this in remembrance of me."**

Furthermore, after the service, we enjoy **a wonderful Parish breakfast including a
fish dish**, rather **as Jesus did with his disciples at the Sea of Tiberius after his resurrection**.
It all seems such a truly wonderful way of linking the past with the present, the here and
now with the forever and ever. Amen

Happy Easter

Howard Robinson 4th April 2010

