

4th October 2020



A Shelter with Branches

Below is part of a poem called 'The Diary of a Church Mouse' by John Betjeman.

I wonder if you can work out what the mouse's favourite part of the year is and why?

To help you see in your head a picture of the mouse's church you need to know that cassocks are gowns worn by ministers, hassocks are cushions that people can kneel on to pray, a vicar is a minister and all these words can be used in churches that belong in the group of churches all over England called the Church of England.

A final note, baize is often a piece of cloth or covering, for a table, Whitsun is also known as Pentecost, a font is where water is put for a baby's christening and sometimes in churches there are carvings of eagles decorating the stand where the bible is read from. All the words give you a good picture of where the mouse liked to visit when he was in the church. Have fun imagining what the mouse got up to!

Here among long discarded cassocks,
Damp stools, and half-split open hassocks,
Here where the vicar never looks
I nibble through old service books.
Lean and alone I spend my days
Behind this Church of England baize,
I share my dark forgotten room
With two oil-lamps and half a broom.
The cleaner never bothers me,
So here I eat my frugal tea.
My bread is sawdust mixed with straw,
My jam is polish for the floor.
Christmas and Easter may be feasts
For congregations and for priests,
And so may Whitsun. All the same,



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They do not fill my meagre frame.
 For me the only feast at all
 Is Autumn's Harvest Festival,
 When I can satisfy my want
 With ears of corn around the font.
 I climb the eagle's brazen head
 To burrow through a loaf of bread
 I scramble up the pulpit stair
 And gnaw the marrows hanging there.
 It is enjoyable to taste
 These items ere they go to waste.



I think the mouse would really have liked to live in the times of the Old Testament.

Several thousand years ago the Jewish people celebrated three harvest festivals in one year and still continue to do so.

1. At the Passover Festival held each year to remember their journey, led by Moses, from Egypt to the land that God had promised them, the Jewish people also celebrate the first gathering in of the barley harvest. Passover occurs in late March or early April at the same time as Easter.

In Biblical times the first sheaf of the new harvest was brought to the Temple to be blessed. Barley was an important grain as it was able to withstand sometimes difficult growing conditions.

2. For the next seven weeks the different grains were all harvested along with the spring crops of other foods that were ready. The second harvest festival, called Shavuot, was then celebrated. It is held at the same time as Pentecost.

Two celebratory festivals already for a mouse!

3. The third festival date is moveable but usually takes place in early October. Its Jewish name is Sukkah [the plural is sukkot] which translated means temporary shelter, hut or booth. It is also called the feast of Tabernacles. A festival at this time of year is the one our mouse is really keen on.

It is a joyful weeklong festival when the Jewish people remember again the story of their time in the wilderness before they reached the Promised Land. They especially remember travelling through deserts and experiencing the hot sun and the cold nights, the wild animals and strong sandstorms. During this time they learned what it meant to have to rely on God for everything. God looked after them and gave them enough water and food to live on. In the wilderness they made rough temporary



shelters from whatever they could find.



The Festival of Sukkot is therefore one of great thanksgiving to God and for praying for harvests to have enough food to live on. The huts remind the Jewish people of the wilderness time and the fact that their homes were temporary and not very strong. The roofs of the shelters are made of branches which reflects what was available in the wilderness and there are spaces are left between the branches so you can see the sky and remember God's presence enveloping them. The huts or booths are decorated and there are special meals with harvest produce and activities to take part in.

In the link below there is an explanation about Sukkot from a Jewish children's library and a clip about how a family build a modern sukkah in a back yard.

<https://pilibrary.org/fbeyond-books/pjblog/september-2017/build-a-sukkah-with-your-family>

Harvest Festivals in Scotland often reflect all the wonderful produce grown here and throughout the world during the seasons to feed our global family. The festivals also remind us that everyone who is part of this family needs food and that we can share in making sure that those in need are fed.

Our prayer is a video inspired by St Francis of Assisi which links the season of creation to harvest time the title is " **A harvest to be shared by all**". The link comes from Cafod, the Catholic Aid agency, which is like Christian Aid

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge_4_vrwcB4

Why not

try making your own shelter or den either in part of a room in your house or outside. What especially are you going to make the roof out of? Will it be like a sukkah with holes so you can lie inside your den and see up and out through the roof?

Or why not

try making your own paper mouse

Follow the instructions in the link below. Pause the clip whenever you want to fetch some thing or a step is shown and you want to do it before you move on to the next part of the explanation. You can take your time!

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=JWexQR3uhpk>

And then...





Finally, why not use this page to doodle the most beautiful things in God's World.....