

## Laetare Sunday

Laetare Sunday is the popular name for the Fourth Sunday in Lent. The name comes from the first word of the Introit or entrance antiphon of Mass for that day: in Latin, the entrance antiphon (Isaiah 66:10-11) begins "*Laetare, Jerusalem*" ("Rejoice, Jerusalem").

Since there are six Sundays in Lent, Laetare Sunday falls just past the midpoint of Lent. For that reason, Laetare Sunday has traditionally been viewed as a day of celebration, on which the austerity of Lent is briefly lessened; the organ is played, flowers are allowed on the sanctuary, the purple vestments of Lent are set aside and, as on Gaudete Sunday in Advent, rose ones are worn instead.

Centuries ago it was considered important for people to return to their home or 'mother' church once a year. So each year in the middle of Lent, everyone would visit their 'mother' church - the main church or cathedral of the area.

Inevitably the return to the 'mother' church became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away returned home. Traditionally, it was a day when children, mainly daughters, who had gone to work as domestic servants were given a day off to visit their mother and family. As they walked along the country lanes, children would pick wild flowers or violets to take to church or give to their mother as a small gift. Laetare Sunday is therefore also known as Mothering Sunday and the custom grew of children giving their mothers small gifts or flowers.