

Plough Sunday Resources

Agricultural Festivals Pack



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

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Plough Sunday

The observance of Plough Sunday on the First Sunday of Epiphany goes back to Victorian times, but behind it there is a much older tradition associated with the first working day after the twelve days of Christmas, hence 'Plough Monday' in some places.

In days when work was scarce in winter the observance looked forward to the time of sowing with the promise of a harvest to come.

Back in medieval times the communal village plough was often stored in the parish church over the winter months where some churches kept a votive 'plough-light'. So, early in January, usually the Monday after Epiphany, the farmers would gather in church to get the plough out of hibernation. The farming year would begin with a special blessing of the plough and the ploughmen in church.

Afterwards the plough would be pulled through the village until it reached the local inn, where everyone would be fortified with food, ale and much dancing and merriment (hence the continued custom of Plough Monday Morris Dancing). Then with God's blessing, the support of the village and with good food and drink inside them, the ploughmen were ready to start the new agricultural year.

Farming practices have changed but the need to support farmers is as necessary now as in the past. Some Christian communities have reintroduced Plough Sunday in order to ask God for a blessing on human labour near the start of the calendar year. (See provision in *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*, 'The Agricultural Year'.) By celebrating Plough Sunday we hope all those who work on the land will sense God's blessing and our support.

Plough Sunday provides the opportunity to reflect on the work of our farmers and for the church community to pray for them. Some Plough Sunday services include the blessing of soil and seeds but the blessing of the plough and farm workers is the essential element of the celebration. There are many creative ways of achieving this in church or outdoors, for example in the churchyard, on the village green or on a farm. A vintage plough is an ideal size for providing the focus if the service is inside a church building. Farmers are usually willing to loan their largest tractor and plough for an outside blessing! A large modern plough standing in the churchyard instantly sets the scene and connects the celebration to current farming practice and technology.



Plough Sunday

Ideas for Worship

In a 2017 Plough Sunday service in Thaxted, a vintage plough was led into the church by a farmer and Morris Men. Local farming families brought soil from their land for blessing during the service. The Morris Men then led the Bishop and the congregation outside for the blessing of the plough and the people.

The following examples of liturgy are taken from various resources, including: *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*, 'The Agricultural Year.'

Blessing of the soil

A farmer says:

All the earth is yours Lord. We bring before you this rich and living soil that you may bless us and our land with abundance.

In the name of the creator of heaven and earth, we dedicate this living soil that it may be fruitful to God's glory. By the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may the land we till and tend bring forth good food in abundance.

Amen

Blessing of the seed

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
in your goodness you have given us this seed to sow.
In it we perceive the promise of life,
the wonders of your creative love.
By your blessing,
let this seed be for us a sign of your creative power,
that in sowing and watering,
tending and watching,
we may see the miracle of growth,
and in due course reap a rich harvest.
As this seed must die to give life,
reveal to us the saving power of your Son,
who died that we might live,
and plant in us the good seed of your word.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

By itself the earth produces:
first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain shall appear.



Plough Sunday

Liturgy of the plough

A farmer stands by the plough in church and says:

The plough is the foundation of our work and a symbol of our labour as we cultivate the fields.

All For the soil to be broken up and the seeds sown,
We must first cultivate the fields.

All For the green corn to grow and the ripe grain to be reaped ,
We must first cultivate the fields.

All For the bread to be baked and the people fed,
We must first cultivate the fields.

All For prosperity to come to our farms and families,
We must first cultivate the fields.

Blessing of the plough

All God speed the plough:
the plough and the ploughman,
the farm and the farmer.
God speed the plough:

All In fair weather and foul,
in rain and wind,
in frost and sunshine:
God speed the plough.

All By your blessing
Let this plough be a sign of all that you promise us.
Prosper the work of our hands,
And provide abundant crops for your people to share.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.



Blessing of the people

All May God the Creator bless your labour,
May God the Son walk with you day by day.
May God the Holy Spirit inspire you with creativity
as you care for the land.
May God the Three-in-One bless and keep you today and always.
Amen.

Plough Sunday

Additional Resources

Resources in this pack

Please find in this pack the following prepared resources for you to use.

- Material for talk/activity with children for use in church group or primary school
- Youth Work Session

Additional resources can be found at:

Plough Monday and associated traditions are still practised, largely in the East of England, although many have been moved from Plough Monday to the nearest Sunday. For more information contact info@ploughmonday.co.uk

Other resources for worship for Plough Sunday can be found at Germinate, the website of the Arthur Rank Centre. This is an ecumenical Christian charity which seeks to serve the spiritual and practical needs of the rural community. <http://www.germinate.net>

Liturgical resources can be found in *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*, 'The Agricultural Year' or downloaded from the Church of England website <https://www.churchofengland.org>

The Iona community under their publishing house Wild Goose have published a series of liturgical resources which can be purchased, some of which are available as E-books at www.ionabooks.com

'Winter' by Ruth Burgess includes resources for November, December and January.



Primary School Visit

Preparation: *This session will work best if you have the opportunity to link in with a local farmer who could bring their plough along and share about the importance of ploughing. There is also an opportunity within this session to bless the tools the children use for gardening at home. So in preparation for this session the school could invite each child to bring in a garden tool such as a small trowel or small garden fork.*

For this session you will need: *A local farmer with a plough, small gardening tools, photos of Plough Sunday (Download this at: <https://goo.gl/J8zyY8>)*

Note: *This session will mostly be delivered outside although in extreme weather some elements could be delivered indoors.*

Introduction: Introduce yourself to the children and which church you've come from (you could ask them if they've ever visited the church and what for as part of this). Also use this as a time to introduce the local farmer who has joined you today.

Explain that in the church there are lots of special days throughout the year and see if the children can name any. (They'll probably come up with Christmas and Easter). Explain that there are some that link into farming such as Plough Sunday which you'll be exploring with them today.

The Plough – Ask the farmer to talk about the plough they have with them (it might be a vintage plough or a modern plough). Give the children time to walk around it and look at it. Make sure relevant safety instructions are given prior to this.

You could also do this section as an interview and ask the farmer questions such as:

- *How has ploughing changed throughout time?*
- *What is the purpose of ploughing?*
- *How long do you spend ploughing your fields?*

You can also give the children a chance to ask any questions they may have.

Explanation of Plough Sunday

Show the children the photo of Bishop Roger (Bishop of Colchester) on the plough and ask them what they think he's doing? (You may also need to explain what a Bishop is.)

Explain to the children that Bishop Roger is blessing the plough as part of Plough Sunday. A blessing is a special kind of prayer where we ask for God's favour and protection on something. On Plough Sunday we ask God to look after the tools used as we start to grow new crops and those people involved in growing them.



Primary School Visit

Ask the children if they know of any local farmers who work on the land?
Also ask if they grow anything at home and who helps them with that?

Explain that we're going to do a short service to show them what happens as part of a Plough Sunday service. We're going to bless the plough and the gardening tools that they've brought from home.

Blessing The Plough (Liturgy)

Taken from Germinate - <https://goo.gl/FCYpRG>

There is a time for working and a time for resting,
a time for ploughing and a time for sowing
a time for dressing and a time for harvesting.
There is a time for lambing and a time for culling
a time for the byre, a time for the field, a time for the market
And a time for God... indeed all times are His.

All: Our delight is in the name of the Lord.

Farmer: This plough symbolises all the machines on our farms and all the tools of the gardener. For the soil to be broken up and the seed sown, we must first plough the fields. For the green corn to grow and the ripe grain to be reaped, we must first plough the fields. For the bread to be baked and the people fed, we must first plough the fields. For prosperity to come to our farms and families, we must first plough the fields. Will you bless this plough to our use and in so doing, ask God's blessing on our cultivation of the soil?

Leader: I will gladly do this.

Ask the children to hold out their gardening tools.

God speed the plough and the ploughman, the farm and the farmer.

God speed the plough.

God speed the plough, on hillside and in valley; on land which is rich, and on land which is poor; in countries beyond the seas, and in our own land.

God speed the plough.

God speed the plough, in fair weather and in foul, in success and disappointment, in rain and wind, in frost and sunshine;

God speed the plough.

Bless, O God, the ploughs and tractors, the drills and cultivators, the harvesters and spades, the forks, the hoes and all the tools used in your work. And as you cultivate the soil and do your daily work, may your hearts and minds be open to the cultivation of holiness. In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

God speed the plough
God speed the plough.



Primary School Visit

Activity

For this activity the children will be involved in 'ploughing' an area of their school...this is great if the school already has a gardening area, if not talk to the school and see if one can be set up. *(If this isn't at all possible then maybe an area of the churchyard could be used.)*

Invite the children to use their gardening tools to 'plough' a small area explaining that at other times of the year this area will be used to plant something and then that will be harvested later on too (see other sessions in this resource).

Closing: As you bring your session to a close ask the children to recap what Plough Sunday is about and explain that just as on Plough Sunday a blessing is asked upon the plough, the fields and their workers we have blessed the children's tools, them as they've ploughed the area of their school and their school garden.

You may like to say a short blessing to close, alongside thanking the farmer.

Additional Resources

Many schools will already have a school garden and others will be willing to find an area suitable for your ploughing activity.

If this is an initiative the school wishes to promote further then you could direct them to the 'Let's Talk Farming' resource – <http://www.letstalkfarming.co.uk> or the Royal Horticultural Society's 'School Gardening' Resource – <http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening>

The photo required for this session and additional PowerPoint containing the liturgy can be downloaded from:
<https://goo.gl/J8zyY8>



Children taking part in 'ploughing' their school ground

Youth Group Session

Session Aims

- To explore the meaning behind Plough Sunday
- To think about the world of work and asking God to bless those who work

Key Passages: Matthew 25:14-30, Proverbs 12:11

Equipment: Laptop/Projector/Speakers, photo of 'blessing the Plough' Parable of the Talents video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbPKhYBaWRg>, tray of soil, some small hand-held garden forks.

Ice Breaker: As it is the start of a new year invite the young people to each say something that they hope will happen this year/a new year's resolution (as leaders be prepared to share your own too!).

Opening Activity: Show the young people the photo of Bishop Roger on the plough and the clergy around it (don't explain what the photo is).

Ask the young people to look at the photo and discuss:

- Who is in this picture?
- What do you think is happening in this photo?

Explain: Explain to the group that in this picture Bishop Roger and various clergy are blessing the plough (do the young people know what the word 'blessing' means?). Explain that today is Plough Sunday and that in many rural churches this activity is happening.

Ask the young people: Why do you think we have Plough Sunday?

Explain: Explain to the group that just as many of them started back at school this week, traditionally Plough Monday was when farmers went back to work. To start this new farming season ploughs and farm workers received blessings in churches on the Sunday before.

Read: As a group read Proverbs 12:11 together and ask the young people what they think of the passage and what it tells us.

Story: Read the following story to your group and then explore the questions that follow it.

The Man and The Flood

Once there was a man who was caught in a flood. The waters rose up so high that he had to sit on the roof of his house for safety.

The man sat on his roof and began to pray for God to save him from this situation.

In a few moments a woman in a boat rowed by and asked the man if he'd like a ride to safety. The man replied 'No, I've prayed and God will save me.' The woman moved on and the man prayed again.



Youth Group Session

A little while later a person came by on a raft and asked the man if he wanted help. Once again the man said 'No, I've prayed and God will save me.' The person moved on and the man continued to pray.

A little while later a helicopter came by with a line dropped down. The pilot shouted to the man 'Grab hold so we can fly you to safety.' Again the man refused help and so the helicopter moved on.

Sadly the man drowned when the waters got even higher. In heaven he turned to God and said 'Why didn't you save me?.' God replied, 'I sent a boat, a raft and a helicopter, what more did you want?.'

Discussion Questions

- 1 – What's your initial reaction to the story?
- 2 – What did the man do wrong?
- 3 – What would you have done in that situation?

Explain to the group that whilst the man praying was a great thing to do he also needed to put some work in and realise that God wasn't going to zap him out of the situation but that he needed to put some effort in.

Plough Sunday is about remembering that all good things come from God and that God provides the right conditions for us to grow crops but that we also have to put some work in using the gifts God has given us.

Bible Story: Watch the YouTube video of The Parable of the Talents:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbPKhYBaWRg>

Discussion

- 1 – What stands out to you from this passage?
- 2 – Which of the 3 men do you relate to the most? Why?
- 3 – What is God saying to us through this passage?

Explain: Explain to the group that Jesus tells this parable to remind us that we each have gifts and abilities and that rather than burying them we should use them.

Prayer Activity

Explain to the group that whilst churches are praying for the ploughs and workers (perhaps your group will see this after the service) we are also going to pray for each other and the work we do at school and in our various clubs.

Invite the group to 'plough' the soil with the small hand-held forks and as they run it through the soil think about the areas of work in their lives that they'd like God's help with (maybe they have mock exams coming up or big pieces of coursework).

Once they've done this invite them to do the same but think about those who will be working on the fields nearby to provide food for us to eat. If the young people know the names of any farmers invite them to name them.

You may like to pray to round off these prayers.



Acknowledgements

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Material from *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* included here is copyright The Archbishops' Council 2006 and is used with permission.

Common Worship: Times and Seasons is published by Church House Publishing and available via www.chpublishing.co.uk and is also available on the Church of England website www.churchofengland.org

Other liturgical material is adapted from resources found on www.germinate.net

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