

## Culham / REEP Easter Calendar 2003

<http://www.reep.org/resources/easter03/>

### THE CROSS

#### SUN AND MOON

Some pictures show a sun and moon at the top of the cross. This was because there was an eclipse when Jesus died.

#### MARY AND JOHN

Many people watched the crucifixion, but two people especially are always shown in paintings of the event - one is Mary, the mother of Jesus, the other is John, one of his disciples.

#### SKULL

Sometimes a skull is shown at the foot of the cross. This is because Jesus was crucified at a place called Golgotha, which means '*The Place of the Skull*'.

#### GOOD AND BAD THIEVES

Two other people were crucified with Jesus – two thieves. One of them mocked Jesus, the other was sorry for him.

#### INRI

These letters stand for **I**esus **N**azarenus **R**ex **I**udaeorum. This is Latin for '*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*'.

#### SIDE WOUND

Jesus died quite quickly. His death was hastened by a Roman soldier who struck him in the side with a spear.

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### EXTRA INFORMATION

#### SUN AND MOON

All the Gospels agree that the sky grew dark at the point of Jesus' death. Matthew reports all sorts of other strange events: "*The earth shook and the rocks split.*" (Matthew 27:51). For most Christians, such events showed that Jesus' death and resurrection were significant for the whole of creation, not just for human beings.

#### MARY AND JOHN

Why are Mary and John always shown? As Jesus was dying he said "*Dear woman, here is your son*" and to the disciple (who is thought to be John – but not the same John that wrote the Gospel) "*Here is your mother*". From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27).

What must it have been like for Mary to watch the death of her son? Many Christians have meditated on this. How specially terrible the event was seen through Mary's eyes. A long Latin poem called '*Stabat Mater*' has been much used in Roman Catholic worship. It begins:

*Stabat Mater dolorosa  
Iuxta crucem lacrimosa  
Dum pendebat filius.*

Can you translate this?! It means '*At the cross stood the sad mother, weeping, close to Jesus at the last*'.

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### SKULL

Today there is a church built on what is believed to be the site of Golgotha. A rocky mound marks what is claimed to be the exact spot of the crucifixion. In the Middle Ages, some people thought Jesus was crucified on the very spot where Adam, the first human being was buried!

Did you also know ... that some people thought that the cross was carved from wood grown from an apple pip from the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. They believed that this pip had been placed in Adam's mouth when his body was buried! The Bible doesn't mention any of this.

### GOOD AND BAD THIEVES

One of the robbers said '*Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!*' The other said '*We are punished justly, we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*'. Jesus said: '*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*' (Luke 23:39-43).

In the early church these two thieves were given names. The 'bad' thief was called Gestas and the 'good' thief was called Dysmas. All sorts of stories were made up about them. Gestas is generally described a nasty murderer, but Dysmas is depicted as a sort of Robin Hood figure, who robbed from the rich to give to the poor!

### INRI

Pontius Pilate ordered this sign to be nailed to the cross. The message was also written in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke) and Greek – see John 19:19. The Chief Priest wanted him to write '*This man claimed to be King of the Jews*' but Pilate said '*What I have written, I have written*'. Probably Pilate did this not to mock Jesus, but to mock the Jewish leaders, as if he was implying '*Look what a wretch is the king of these people*'. For Christians, of course, the phrase is literally true – Jesus is the King of all humankind! You will often see INRI written in churches.

### SIDE WOUND

People who were crucified could take days to die, especially if they were not nailed to the cross.

In the early church the name of the centurion who stuck the spear into Jesus was said to be Longinus. The spear which he used appears in the tales of King Arthur. Many knights set out to find it, but only one, Persifal, who is the purest of King Arthur's knights, actually manages to find it! None of this is in the Bible. The Bible does say, however, that at the moment Jesus died '*the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom*' (Mark 15:38). This curtain was to stop non-Jews seeing the place in the Temple where God was said to be. So the tearing of the curtain symbolized the Christian belief that through Jesus all people – Jews and Gentiles – now had access to God's presence.