



Plants for Reflection: Rock Rose

The **Cistaceae** are a small family of plants (**rock rose**) known for their beautiful shrubs. They produce large numbers of flowers and blossom. Different species are found widely across the Mediterranean area including the Middle East and Europe. Winifred Walker, in her study *All the Plants of the Bible* (Harper, 1957), identifies that Myrrh is produced from the Rock Rose.

Bible Passage: Matthew 2:11 (NRSV*)

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold to represent Kingship, frankincense for deity and myrrh used in embalming representing death. Strange presents for a new baby.

The aroma of myrrh can be described as woody, warm, aromatic, pungent and slightly medicinal. In biblical times, myrrh incense was burned in places of worship to help purify the air and prevent the spread of contagious diseases. It was often used in combination with frankincense.

In the Old Testament book of Esther (chapter two, verse 12) we read that the beautiful Queen used myrrh as a purification oil, for six months in preparation for meeting the King. Still used in embalming today, myrrh is also used as a flavouring component in food and drinks. In manufacturing, it is used as a fragrance in incense and as a fixative in cosmetics.

Reflection: Healing

Many people are familiar with the New Testament story of Christ healing the ten men with leprosy. In those days leprosy sufferers were shunned and treated with fear and suspicion.

This is still the case today in many countries where leprosy is a common skin disease. Sufferers can be banned from their homes, lose their jobs, and are often ostracised from the rest of society. This leads to a sense of fear and denial which results in people not seeking treatment early enough.

* New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, © 1989, 1995, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

The staff at The Leprosy Mission (TLM) not only treat the disease with all the latest drugs, but at the Research Laboratory in Anandaban, Nepal, they are carrying out pioneering research to try to eradicate this devastating disease for ever. Jesus Christ not only healed the lepers, but he treated them with love and compassion.

Today the staff of TLM continue to minister to leprosy sufferers with that same love and compassion, as they strive to heal them of their physical disabilities but also to tell them of the love of Christ for each and every one of them.

Prayer

God, our loving Heavenly Father,
We pray for your peace and blessing on all people affected by leprosy.
Thank you, Lord, for the work of The Leprosy Mission.
Bless the staff as they seek to find a way to end this devastating disease.
Bless the work of the research team working in Nepal striving to find an early diagnostic test to enable patients to be treated immediately before leprosy disables their limbs and changes their lives forever.
Inspired by the ministry of Jesus Christ we pray that through this research the disease of leprosy can be overcome for ever.

Amen.

What we do: The Leprosy Mission

Here at Garstang United Reformed Church we support the work of TLM in fundraising and prayer. TLM works mainly in India, Africa, and Nepal. The dedicated staff show the love of Christ by treating patients with all forms of leprosy and giving them hope for the future by training them for jobs so they can earn their own living. In Anandaban, Nepal, scientists in the research laboratory work tirelessly trying to find the means to eradicate leprosy forever and bring out new drug therapies for those patients already suffering.

Each year at this church, we hold a special service, usually on the first Sunday in February, when we invite a representative from TLM to come and update us on the work done to combat and treat leprosy in the previous year and to give a presentation on the plans and targets for the coming year.

Every year we are told of the enormous challenges faced by the staff in the hospitals and the difference their dedication is making to those who suffer from leprosy, and to their families. As supporters of TLM we receive a quarterly Newsletter and Prayer Guide which pinpoints those in particular need of prayer and support.