

Tale from the Garden!

If your garden needs a midwinter pick-me-up, white forsythia (or *Abeliophyllum Distichum*) is a great choice! A relative of the well-known yellow *Forsythia*, this unusual deciduous shrub produces a stunning winter flower display just as the days start to lengthen to spring. It has a delicious fragrance that some people say reminds them of almonds or marzipan. Plant it somewhere sheltered so the wind won't disperse the scent.

This superb shrub produces pretty star-shaped white flowers with flushes of pink on bare stems with a centre filled with gold stamens. After it has flowered the glossy green leaves will appear. You can cut the stems and use indoors for an unusual display. The foliage is also rather interesting as the leaves turn from green to purple in the autumn. Left to its own devices, the shrub is quite floppy and straggly, so its best trained flat against a wall. It can reach 8ft by 8ft, although you can easily prune it to fit the available space. Its season of glory runs from now (depending on the severity of the winter) until late March, during which time each stem will be lined with flowers.



According to Wikipedia, forsythia is a genus of flowering plants in the olive family *Oleaceae* and is related to olives, lilacs and ash. There are about 11 species, mostly native to eastern Asia, with one native to south-eastern Europe. In Chinese medicine, forsythia (*lian qiao*) is used to clear heat, soothe inflammation and calm the skin. White forsythia is native to a small area of central Korea. It is seriously endangered in the wild as it is regarded as a medicinal plant with properties similar to witch hazel, and is illegally harvested for the black market trade in Korea. It is widely grown as a cultivated garden plant, however, so there is no risk of extinction other than in the wild.

Forsythia was first grown in this country in the mid-1800s and is deer resistant. The genus of these deciduous shrubs is named after the Scottish botanist William Forsyth, who helped to establish the Royal Horticultural Society.

In the Victorian language of the flowers, forsythia translates to anticipation. That expectation of spring is aptly mirrored in forsythias, which bloom extravagantly and early, providing a ray of sunshine when it is needed most. Folklore says: "Three snows after the forsythia bloom," - we had snow last year in March, so we'll have to wait to see if that holds true. But in the meantime, we welcome the brilliant yellow or white blooms exemplifying gentle, effervescent energy, announcing the arrival of spring. Whichever of the forsythia varieties you prefer to grow in your garden, all of them will burst into cascades of bright yellow (or white!) blooms that will bring your garden back to life. So, plant your own forsythia flowers today and witness the magic of Mother Nature in your garden!

The sunny harbinger of spring: forsythia ... What does harbinger mean in the Bible?

It means 'forerunner', 'precursor', 'herald'. It means **one that goes before or announces the coming of another.**

We've just about to host the 3rd SONGFEST at church when all things 'vocal' will be explored & encouraged through 2 days of workshops & concerts. We might think singing is easy if you have a musical voice. But singing isn't just for the talented, it's something we can all do. The

best way to spread good cheer, is by singing aloud for all to hear! There is something joyful about singing loudly, regardless of how good or bad it is.

We deal with a lot of noise in our society. A lot of people are vying for our attention.

Advertisements bombard us from every angle no matter whether we are in our home, in our car, or around town. We tend to think of noise as a bad thing, but that isn't always the case. If you're at a sporting event, it is the noise that can build even more excitement.

Did you know the Bible can be quite noisy? Words such as "shout" or "cry out" show up with a high frequency. But the Bible is selective. Not everything is loud. But when it comes to the subject of the Lord's coming, the **coming of our Lord is to be heralded without fear for all to hear**. Isaiah 40 v9 reads 'You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voices with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"'

John the Baptist was a forerunner & a herald. Many thought that he was the promised Messiah but his mission was only to announce the Good News, preparing the way for Jesus' coming. Another word for sharing the good news message is 'evangelism' – in a way that word tells us a little more. We get the English word 'evangelist' from the Greek noun 'euangelistes', which means 'bringer of good tidings,' or 'announcer of good news.' You might spot the word **angel** lurking in the middle of both the English and the Greek words, and you'd be right to make this connection. An angel is a messenger, or an envoy, and when the message they bring is from God, it is good; ('eu' is the Greek word for 'good'). So, an evangelist is one who, like the angels, brings a message of good news from God. What is their message? Nothing less than the infinite God of love come down, God-with-us, peace on earth, joy to all, reconciliation, new life... There is a broad sense, then, in which all Christians are called to be evangelists. We are all called to speak, live and act in ways that bring this good news of God-with-us to those we meet. We are all messengers of glad tidings.

This season is a time of warming weather and the glad tidings that nature is coming back to life. As flowers bloom and animals are born, we are reminded of the innocence and beauty that exists in this world and that there is new life all around us. As Christians, we are given new life and new mercies every morning. Spring provides a wonderful reminder to us that we should be living a full life and leaving the old dead parts of life behind. There is always hope during the coldest, darkest winters of life. Spring will come and new life will come forth! Isn't that something to sing about?