

## Tale from the Garden!

Over the last few days, the warm sunshine has opened out the first flowers of lesser celandine.

The Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*) is a cheerful sight in spring with its shiny, buttercup yellow flower. Charming and friendly, each is about 3cm across with eight to twelve petals. It has rosettes of glossy dark green heart-shaped mottled long-stalked leaves.

These welcome blooms are among the first to show themselves in spring, studding fields and damp verges with brilliant yellow stars. They're a good source of early pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. As one of the first flowers to appear after winter, they provide an important nectar source for queen bumblebees and other pollinators emerging from hibernation, and other early insects. They are the flower equivalent of the swallow. They nearly always appear in the last weeks of February when the swallows arrive, 'chelidonia' (Celandine) being the Latin for swallow.

Lesser celandine is a perennial member of the buttercup family. A British native, the lesser celandine loves damp woodland paths and tracks, as well as stream banks and ditches. You can also spot it growing in gardens, meadows and shady hedgerows. Although it is not a competitive weed, its persistent root tubers can create blankets of yellow in soggy garden corners.



Did you know?

Traditionally, lesser celandine has been used to treat many ailments, from varicose veins to haemorrhoids (Perhaps a hint why its common name is 'pilewort'! The knobby tubers were thought to resemble piles!), ulcers and warts. The leaves are high in vitamin C and have been used to prevent scurvy. In the Western Isles, the plants were sometimes hung in cow byres to bring good yields of milk.

They are mentioned in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. When Aslan returned and the woodland turns from winter to spring, the ground was covered in all directions with yellow celandine flowers. It was once thought that you could use lesser celandine to predict the weather as they close their petals before raindrops. Celandines respond to the daylight, opening out at dawn and closing up at dusk; like true sun-worshippers, they will also close up before rain. The old Celtic name for them is 'grian', meaning 'sun'.

In fact, the 21st of February is known as "Celandine Day" as this is when peak flowering has been observed to begin. In 1795, the renowned naturalist Gilbert White noted that the first celandines usually appeared in his Hampshire village of Selborne on this date and a similar result has been noted over the centuries ever since. Although Wordsworth's most famous poem was about daffodils, it was the lesser celandine that was his favourite flower:

"There is a Flower, the Lesser Celandine,  
That shrinks, like many more, from cold and rain;  
And, at the first moment that the sun may shine,  
Bright as the sun itself, 'tis out again!"  
(The Small Celandine)



He was such a fan that he wrote two other poems about them: 'To the Same Flower' & 'To the Small Celandine'.

"There's a flower that shall be mine, 'Tis the little Celandine."

(William Wordsworth, 'To the Small Celandine')

In the language of flowers celandine represents 'joy to come'. The heads are so pure and delicate, yet they are among the bravest, coming before the woodland beauties of windflowers and bluebells, when the air is still sharp with frost and the squalls can turn easily from rain to snow. After a long winter of wind and rain, they gladden the heart.

Many of us spend our lives weighed down by obligations. We move through our days performing one tedious task after another - housework, cooking meals, home-schooling, sitting in front of computers teaching/working, & spending so much of our time at home over the past months has often made each day feel monotonous & mind-numbing. We barely have time to lift our heads and take a moment to take in the world around us. But we all need a moment of joy in our days; a moment when we can relax and take pleasure from the good things in our lives. And there are many Bible verses about joy that encourage us to take a break from all the Dos and Don'ts we carry around in our heads.

The word "gospel" means "good news," which suggests we should greet the message of our faith with at least the level of joy we experience when we get infinitely less important good news like a job promotion or a new car or the gift of a beautiful dress. So take some time when you can to read these Bible verses about joy and cultivate a spirit of joy and gratitude. You may find your spirit lifted and your attitude adjusted to a much happier place. As the Bible declares in 1 Chronicles: "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever."

### **John 15 v10–12**

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'"

**The Good News:** Your life will be richer if you take joy in the people whom you love and who love you back

### **1 Chronicles 16 v26–27**

"For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the Heavens. Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place."

**The Good News:** Our God is the god of all that is - that is the best news possible!

### **Luke 15 v7**

"I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

**The Good News:** We believe in a forgiving God; take joy in that knowledge.

### **1 Chronicles 16 v32–34**

"Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

**The Good News:** Rejoice in the amazing natural world that surrounds us.

### **Matthew 2 v9–10**

"And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."

**The Good News:** We can only imagine the joy experienced by the wise men of old when they saw the brilliant star that led them to the baby Jesus.

### **Luke 1 v43–44**

"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

**The Good News:** The baby - later to be John the Baptist - in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy in the presence of Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus. Joyful mothers both - let's share in their joy.

**Psalm 30 v4–5**

“Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favour is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

**The Good News:** If we believe, a joyous morning will follow the blackest night.

**Romans 15 v13**

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

**The Good News:** Hope and joy go hand in hand.

**Psalm 63 v6–7**

“For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.”

**The Good News:** Safe and secure in our faith, we rest joyfully.

**Galatians 5 v22–23**

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

**The Good News:** Joy is among the most unmistakable marks of a faithful heart.

**Luke 24 v40–41**

“And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’”

**The Good News:** The disciples on the road to Emmaus could barely believe that it was the risen Lord whom they met, but they were filled with joy anyway; even in our doubts, the presence of God can lift our spirits.

**James 1 v2**

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”

**The Good News:** We can rejoice even in tough times, secure in our faith and in God’s unconditional love.