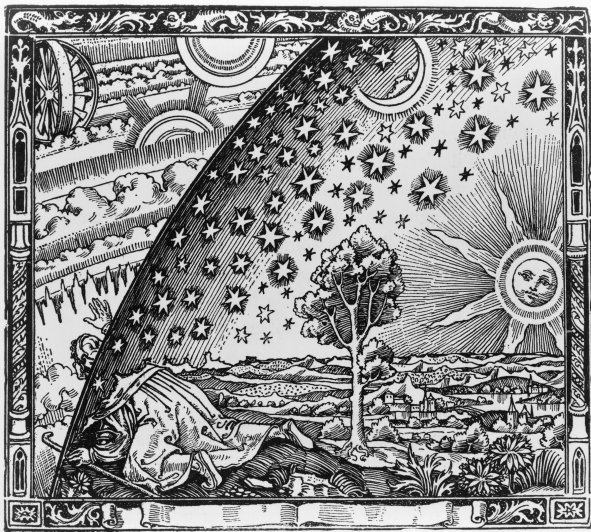3rd May

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
and he shall direct thy paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6

Younger children can learn the words in bold. A set of four cards could be made for sorting into the correct order. Children could divide the verse up between them. By now, if you have been doing these lessons for a while, I expect you are getting quite creative in your approach to memory verses!

On May 3rd, 1494 Christopher Columbus discovered Jamaica.[1] He had discovered (although he did not know it) the New World.

In 1828 Washington Irving (1783-1859) published his account of the life of Christopher Columbus. It contained a description of Columbus trying to convince the Church authorities at the Council of Salamanca that the earth was round not flat:

What a striking spectacle must the hall of the old convent have presented at this memorable conference! A simple mariner, standing forth in the midst of an imposing array, of professors, friars, and dignitaries of the church; maintaining his theory with natural eloquence, and, as it were, pleading the cause of the new world.... To his simplest proposition, the spherical form of the earth, were opposed figurative texts of Scripture. They observed that in the Psalms, the heavens are said to be extended like a hide... and that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, compares the heavens to a tabernacle... or tent, extended over the earth, which they thence inferred must be flat.

It is true that in Columbus's time the officials of the Catholic church had many wrong ways of interpreting the Bible because they placed the traditions of the church alongside it in importance. But they were very well aware that the earth was a sphere. The pagan philosophers had worked that out in ancient times and their ideas were not unknown to members of the Council of Salamanca. They did not picture the earth as shown in the nineteenth century drawing above.

In fact, the officials were more concerned with the wrong distance round the earth which Columbus was presenting. They knew that the real distance was far too great for Columbus to reach India without running out of supplies. Neither they or Columbus had any idea of the existence of the Americas. If the Americas had not existed, Columbus would indeed have run out of food. But Irving's book was the start of the quite incorrect idea that, in Columbus's time, even educated people thought that the earth was flat.[2]

However, the idea that *the Bible* teaches that the earth is flat is still sometimes heard. The Bible does not do this. Rather it speaks of a sphere or ball "the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22). There is nothing in the Bible that would teach that the earth is flat, although of course it uses terms like "sun

1   See September 14th's lesson.
2   See the information about Bede, which is coming up soon in the lesson for 26th May.

rise" and "sun set" and other poetic images as we do today in everyday speech when we are talking about what appears to us from our position on the earth.
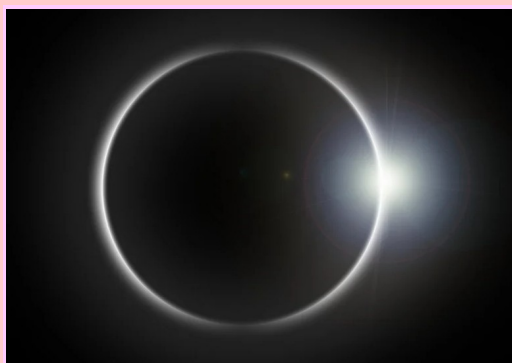
It may surprise you to know that today there are some misguided people who think the earth is flat – probably more than there were in the Middle Ages! Can you think of some easily observable evidence that the earth is a sphere?[3]

Do you have any friends or relatives in the USA, Canada, South America? If so today would be a good day to send them a proper letter by airmail. If you do not already have a contact in the New World to write to see if your church can suggest a missionary or a sponsored child to whom you could write as a penfriend. Having a penfriend is great fun and real paper letters are a treat to look forward to – especially if they come from the other side of the world!

Something to read from science

On 3rd May 1715 the Astronomer Royal Edmund Halley was observing a total solar eclipse. A solar eclipse is something that happens when the moon comes between the earth and the sun. As the moon blocks the sun's light, it casts a shadow that passes on the earth. Anyone observing from within that shadow will see the moon blacking out the sun. As Edmund Halley watched the eclipse approach totality he noticed something very beautiful. He wrote:

About two Minutes before the Total Immersion, the remaining part of the Sun was reduced to a very fine Horn, whose Extremeties seemed to lose their Acuteness, and to become round like Stars ... which Appearance could proceed from no other Cause but the Inequalities of the Moon's Surface, there being some elevated parts thereof near the Moon's Southern Pole, by whose Interposition part of that exceedingly fine Filament of Light was intercepted....

In other words, there are valleys on the moon's surface. As the moon moves over the sun during a total eclipse, light from the sun shines through these valleys making a pattern like a string of beads. When only one "bead" is left the effect is like a diamond ring. Nowadays we call this effect "Baily's Beads" after the nineteenth century astronomer Francis Baily, who made the first detailed description of them.

But how is it that the moon fits so exactly over the sun? They are not really the same size at all: the sun has a diameter over a hundred times the size of that of the earth but the moon only about a quarter the size of the moon. The earth is positioned in exactly the right place for the sun and moon to appear the same size. The sun is about 400 times bigger than the moon and also 400 times as far away from the earth.[4]

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3 E.g. what do you notice when a ship sails over the horizon?
4 More about eclipses on June 4th.

You can demonstrate this easily. Cut out two circles of cardboard of different sizes. Obviously, if you lay them on the table you can never cover the large one completely with the small one. However, if you get someone to hold up the large one at one end of the room and you stand at the other end of the room you will probably be able to hold up the small one so that it completely obscures the large one. You can experiment with distances until you reach a point where the two circles appear the same size. If you do that you will realize that there is just one place – one distance between the two circles – that gives them this appearance.

What an amazing "coincidence" that the earth is in exactly the right position for the sun and the moon to appear the same size! Of course, it is no coincidence. God designed this wonderful feature of our universe and every time there is a solar eclipse we can enjoy it. I'm sorry to tell you though, that the next solar eclipse visible in Britain will not be until September 2090 – which is a very long while to wait. There was a total solar eclipse in December 2021 but you would have had to go to Antarctica to see it!

Some poetry to read

The Elizabethan rhymster Thomas Tusser (1524-1580) died on 3rd of May. You might remember reading some of his lines quoted by Spurgeon in the lesson for 31st January. He was famous for his *Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie*, later expanded to *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie.* This book is all in verse and full of homely advice, proverbs, instruction about farming and country customs. Thanks to Tusser we know a great deal about rural life in Elizabethan England. Tusser's poem was one of the most popular books in Elizabethan times. It was reprinted over and over again through the following centuries down to Spurgeon's day, the late nineteenth century. Here is some of Tusser's advice for this time of year:

> *In May get a weed hook, a crotch and a glove,*
> *and weed out such weed as the corn doth not love*
> *For weeding of winter corn now it is best,*
> *but June is the better for weeding the rest....*
>
> *Slack never thy weeding, for dearth nor for cheap,*
> *the corn shall reward it ere ever ye reap.*
> *And specially where ye do trust for to seed,*
> *let that be well used, the better to speed...*
>
> *Take heed to thy bees, that are ready to swarm,*
> *The loss thereof now is a crown's worth of harm:*
> *Let skilful be ready and diligence seen,*
> *lest being too careless, thou losest thy been.*
> ["been" is an old plural form of "bee".]

Good advice! If you have a little garden plot of your own make sure you weed it well this month.