

How could you survive in Tudor England?

Presented by Ruth Goodman

The power of prayer: Video transcript

Professor Ronald Hutton, an expert on English rituals, explains the importance of Palm Sunday celebrations in early Tudor England.

The truly wonderful thing about Palm Sunday ritual is you get three things in one. You get people reminded of what the Christian message and the Christian story is all about. You get the greenery, which symbolises spring and hope and new life, and you get something which is actually going to protect your house and your family and your farm.

And all this in one symbolised in this procession with a layman - that's Peter up there, dressed up as a prophet - to dress this up as fun, make it something people can engage in and which they can make their own.

It's just a totally brilliant way of giving religion to the people and enabling them to share in it. The truly insanely wonderful thing about Palm Sunday ritual is that it ended in a kind of spring version of a snowball fight.

And it's a wonderful example of the way in which religion round about 1500 introduced an element of just sheer merrymaking at the end of something solemn and profound, to remind us that we are alive and being alive means having fun.

This is the last ritual of Palm Sunday, but it's a really important one. It's where we take the crosses woven out of our consecrated greenery and put them over the doorway of your home to protect it for the next year against witchcraft, curses, demons and general misfortune. It's the ultimate security system circa 1500. Does it work? Apparently so, England is still here.