

A JOURNEY TO EASTER FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

The Season of Lent is the Journey to Easter. Lent is a time to reflect on how much God loves us. During Lent we are encouraged to explore the gift of quiet. During Lent we take time to think about our relationship with God. We work at deepening our understanding of who God intends us to be.

The liturgical color for Lent is purple which symbolizes royalty.



The Season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, 6 weeks before Easter. Ash Wednesday falls on February 17 in 2010. Traditionally, palm branches that were used in last year's Palm Sunday services are burned down to ashes and saved. At this year's Ash Wednesday services, these ashes will be mixed with a little oil and then used to mark a cross on the forehead of believers.

THE JOURNEY TO EASTER

With your children, create a special place to hold Lenten worship services. This may simply mean adding some sacred objects to the table where you gather for meals. It may mean creating a special worship center in a corner of your living room. Consider including a candle (especially



purchased or made for your Lenten services), a Bible, a cross, something to symbolize the coming of new life such as a small budding plant. The important thing is to create a space that is comfortable and relaxed for everyone. Be sure you are close enough to join hands during times of prayer.

Keep your worship services brief and simple. Follow the same order each time. Remember that young children love repetition and ritual. You may want to gather for worship every day or just once a week. Include children in deciding what works best for your family.

Suggested Order of Worship

Gathering - Light a candle. Lighting a candle reminds us that God is always with us, no matter where we are. Sing a song or listen to some music. Read a verse or two of one of the Psalms. Invite members of the family to share what is going on in their lives. Pray a short prayer that simply thanks God for being present and that lifts up shared concerns, problems and joys.



Exploring Scripture - (Scripture suggestions are listed below.) Depending on the ages of your children, you might consider using a Children's Bible or a Bible story picture book. The *International Children's Story Bible*, illustrated by children from around the world is recommended. It is available from most Christian bookstores or you can order from Cokesbury or Amazon.

Your time of exploring the scriptures might go something like this:

- Choose a passage of scripture ahead-of-time. You may want to pick just a few verses or you may want to lift up several different passages. Scriptures, such as those describing the events of Holy Week and Easter Sunday Morning, lend themselves to being acted out.
- Encourage everyone to be silent for a few moments to think about the scriptures.



- Present the scripture again. If you acted it out the first time, this time just read it. If you read it from a Bible storybook first, read it from the Bible the second time.
- After another few moments of silence, ask family members what thoughts they have to share. Ask questions that are open ended, such as, “I wonder what Jesus meant when he said . . .” or “I wonder what you like best about this story.” There is a lot of mystery in our Christian faith and it is O.K. if you don’t know answers to all of your children’s questions. Sometimes it is appropriate to simply say, “I wonder about that too.” As a family, you could go on fact finding adventures. Public libraries and perhaps your church library will have Bible dictionaries, maps, concordances and commentaries. These resources provide word definitions, historical contexts, and explanations of scripture passages. However, during your services of worship, encourage each other to concentrate on opening one’s self to the words in the scriptures– imagining the story and wondering what special message might be there for each member of your family.

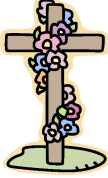


Closing - Take turns saying a closing prayer or use the same prayer each week such as the “Lord’s Prayer” or the “Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi” or read a Psalm. Instead of putting out the candle, tell the children that you are going to change the light. Use a candle snuffer and together watch as the flame is changed to smoke that disappears into the air. You can say something like, “Watch as I change the light. The light that was in one place at one time is now in all places at all times (This ritual is taken from the book, *Young Children and Worship* by Jerome Berryman and Sonja Stuart.)”



Family Activity - Plan some family activities to enhance your family’s Journey to Easter.

- Talk about what it means to give up something for Lent. As a family, decide what you could agree to “give up” that would help you focus better on God’s love. If you are giving up something that costs money, perhaps the money you save could be given to your church or to someone in need.
- Plant some seeds in small paper cups and watch them grow as you journey to Easter. Talk about how the seed is like a tomb. Inside that tiny seed, buried in the earth, it is very dark. It appears as if it is dead, when in fact life is hidden inside the seed.
- Cut out and color or paint paper butterflies, roll them up and make cocoons by wrapping string or ribbon around them. The butterflies could also be made out of clay and placed inside of empty toilet paper tubes. Talk about how much the cocoons look like tombs. They seem to be lifeless but things are not always what they seem, especially when God is involved. On Easter morning release the butterflies from their cocoons. Hang the paper butterflies where the movement of air will make them flutter.

- Learn about the meaning of Christian symbols (examples of symbols and explanations follow). Make symbols out of paper or air drying clay. Model Magic is great. It comes in many colors and can be found at any craft store. It is not as hard or as messy as regular clay. You can hang the symbols on a bare tree branch secured in a bucket of sand or rocks. Lenten symbol creations could also be added to your family's worship center.
 - Create banners. Towels work well as banners. Use a large one for the whole family or use small hand towels for individual banners. Banners can depict some of the scripture stories you are hearing read during Lent. Banner ideas could include: Making a cross and covering it with spring flowers or butterflies on Easter morning; making an image of the tomb that is opened up on Easter morning; depicting flowers that are hidden behind brown felt, representing the earth. On Easter morning the felt can be removed to reveal the beautiful blooming flowers.
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- Create a Holy Week mural. Illustrate the events of Holy week with pictures, symbols and scriptures.
Holy Week events include:
 - Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11).
 - Jesus throws the moneychangers out of the Temple (Matthew 21:18-22).
 - Mary anoints Jesus (Matthew 26:6-13).
 - The plot to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:17-25).
 - The Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-35).
 - Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30-46).
 - Jesus' arrest and trial (Matthew 26:47-27:26).
 - Jesus is crucified and buried (Matthew 27:31-66).
 - Decide on outreach activities that your family could do together such as making cards for people in your church who are ill or making visits to people in nursing homes.
 - What are your ideas? Share your ideas with other families. Send them to us and we will post on the web. Send to:

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Season of Lent Scriptures from the Common Lectionary

First Sunday of Lent

Psalm 91:1-2; 9-16
Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

Second Sunday of Lent

Psalm 27
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Philippians 3:17 – 4:1
Luke 13:31-35

Third Sunday of Lent

Psalm 63:1-8
Isaiah 55:1-9
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Psalm 32
Joshua 5:9-12
2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Psalm 126
Isaiah 43:16-21
Philippians 3:4b-14
John 12:1-8

Sixth Sunday of Lent - Palm Sunday and Beginning of Holy Week

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Luke 19:28-40

Easter Sunday - During the Easter Season,
two New Testament scriptures are
read on Sundays. No Old Testament
scriptures are read.

Psalm 118, 1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
John 20:1-18

Symbols of Lent and Easter

The book, *Symbols of Faith: Teaching Images of the Christian Faith*, by Marcia Joslin Stoner has helpful explanation of Christian symbols that are used throughout the whole year. Also included are activities for intergenerational groups to do together. This book was published in 2001 by Abingdon Press.

- Palm Branches - Jesus' entry into Jerusalem
- Loaf of bread and a chalice - The Last Supper
- Moneybag and/or coins - Betrayal by Judas
- Rooster - Denial by Peter
- Cross, nails, crown of thorns - The Death of Jesus

Resurrection

- The lily - Bulbs appear to be dead but hold within them the flower of new life.
- Peacock - When the peacock's feathers fallout they are replaced by new feathers that are brighter and more beautiful than the old feathers.
- Eggs - Eggs hold new life within them.



- Phoenix rising - There is a very old legend about a phoenix dying in a great fire and rising from the ashes to live again.
 - Bunnies, flowers, butterflies - All signs of new life



I trust that these suggestions will help your family feel and trust the presence of God's loving spirit as you prepare for the celebration of Easter. May you and your family be renewed and filled with hope during this Lenten Season.

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