



Lenten Activity Guide

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40-day period of repentance and renewal preceding Easter. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends with the worship service on Easter. The word “lent” is derived from the Middle English word “lente,” which means springtime. Lent is a special time for meditation and prayer, giving us time to recall the Easter story and absorb its meaning – that Christ lived and died to redeem the world from sin.

Lenten Scripture Readings:

Hebrews 12:1

Psalm 141:2

Genesis 9:12

Matthew 25:40

Psalm 119:148-149

Luke 18:31

Zechariah 9:9

John 14:6

Matthew 22:37-38

John 13:5,12,15

Luke 22:19-20

Luke 23:33-34

Matthew 26:20-25

Luke 22:40-44

Matthew 26:40-45

Matthew 26:47-56

Matthew 26:59-66

Mark 15:12-20

Luke 23:33-46

John 19:41-42

John 24:1-6

Preparing Our Hearts for Easter During Lent:

Help Others - Participate in community or church projects that help others; look for ways to help your neighbors, such as running errands for a someone ill or housebound; give gently used toys and clothing to the needy; donate time and/or money to help alleviate hunger, poverty and suffering, locally and around the world.

Make Special Time for Prayer and Reflection - Make prayer a daily habit. Set aside part of your day for quiet time when interruptions are at a minimum. Pray the psalms or use a devotional guide to choose daily prayers, or attend the church-wide Lenten Bible study. Think about things in your life that you need to change, and pray for help in changing them. Accept difficulties patiently, and through prayer, try to understand and accept them.

Attend Lenten and Easter Worship Services - Special worship services are held throughout Lent, especially during Holy Week. Attend them to help renew and strengthen your faith, and gain a greater understanding of Christ’s Passion.

Crafts:

Create A Tree of Crosses - Find a dead tree branch and place it in a coffee can filled with sand. Cut out crosses and write a special commitment on each one. Attach a piece of ribbon to the top of each and hang them from the tree.

Create a Special Snack for the Birds - This activity helps us to remember to care for all of God's creatures. Use a cookie cutter to cut a shape out of a slice of bread. Poke a hole in the top with a straw and brush the bread with egg white. Press birdseed onto the bread shape and let it dry. Thread a piece of yarn or string through the hole and hang it on a tree branch.

Make a Giving Box - Decorate a shoe box or coffee can with Lenten symbols (see back of this page). At the end of each day, have each family member put the extra change in their purses or pockets into the container. After a few weeks, donate the money to church, a shelter or a charity.

Make a Hosanna Egg - Write "Hosanna! Christ Is Risen!" on a slip of paper. Fold it up and put it in a plastic Easter egg. Put torn pieces of tissue paper on the egg, using a paint brush and a 50/50 mixture of white glue and water to stick them on. Let the eggs dry. Open the eggs on Easter morning.

Bring a Sign of Spring Indoors - If you have a pussy willow or forsythia bush in your yard, cut some branches on a slant and bring them in the house. Set them in a container of warm water and put them in a cool place, like the basement, until the branches begin to leaf out. The water and warmth will cause them to bloom - a symbol of spring and of our renewal in Christ.

Lenten Symbols:



Ashes are an ancient symbol of sorrow and repentance. Traditionally, the Ash Wednesday ashes are ashes from the burning of last year's palms.



The butterfly is a symbol of the resurrection.



The crown of thorns is a symbol of the crucifixion.



Grapes and wheat symbolize the wine and bread shared during the Last Supper.



The palm branches remind us of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.



A bag of coins is symbolic of the 30 pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed Jesus.



Forty stands for the 40 days of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. It is a number used repeatedly in the Bible, and signifies "a period of transformation."



The rooster reminds us of Peter's three denials of Jesus.



Jesus used the basin and towel when he washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper.



Pretzels are a Lenten bread that came from Europe. Early settlers called them "pilgrims' tokens" because they looked like praying arms crossed across someone's chest.

The Days of Holy Week:

Palm Sunday is the specific day when we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Many churches reenact Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on this Sunday during the season of Lent. This practice can be traced back to the fourth century in the city of Jerusalem. During this procession, participants carry palms and other branches into the church. The church becomes a symbol of the city of Jerusalem. After the procession with palms, the worship service that follows usually becomes more somber as Holy Week begins.

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday that occurs during Holy Week. The emphasis for this Thursday is on Jesus' new commandment of love: "Love one another even as I have loved you." The word maundy comes from the English form of the Latin *mandatum*, which means commandment. Maundy Thursday is a combination of three things – a time to commemorate the Last Supper, a time when penitents are reconciled to the family of believers, and a time to prepare for Baptism. It is also a time when the discipline of Lent is concluded with forgiveness. Jesus' new commandment to his disciples, "Love one another even as I have loved you," contrasts sharply with Judas' betrayal at the completion of the Last Supper. Jesus' love for all people is demonstrated in his service to others, as well as in his gift of himself for our salvation. The washing of the disciples' feet as part of the Last Supper was a concrete example of the loving service Jesus shared with his followers. Foot washing is often a part of Maundy Thursday celebrations today, as a response to the new commandment and as a symbol of Christian charity and service.

Good Friday, the Friday during Holy Week, became widely kept as a commemoration of the cross by the end of the fourth century. On Good Friday, we emphasize a time of reflection, intercession, and adoration of Christ as the sacrificial lamb. Many churches commemorate Good Friday with a *Tenebrae* service, a service commemorating the sufferings and death of Christ. This service is conducted in a darkened church and is often thought of as a service of shadows.

About Easter Sunday:

Easter Sunday is the greatest Sunday of the church year, for without the resurrection, everything else would have no meaning. As such, it is welcomed with song and procession and joy by millions of people throughout the world. The days of fasting and reflection in Lent are over. The celebration is just starting!

Like the women who visited the tomb early on that first Easter, many churches begin their Easter celebrations with sunrise services. Sunrise services have long been held in the United States. The first of such services is thought to have taken place in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1741.

Easter is the oldest festival of the church year. Unlike Christmas, Easter does not fall on the same day each year. Easter is always celebrated on a Sunday, but that Sunday can fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25.

Easter is a most joyful season. The color for Easter is white and the symbols associated with the season are beautiful and bright. Everything about the celebration points to the glorious resurrection of Jesus.

