

A GUIDE TO LENT

TRINITY CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Being a follower of Christ means that we follow Jesus to both his death and resurrection. The season of Lent is a humbling opportunity to walk with Jesus, to realize the sacrifice that he made on the cross, and to prepare our hearts for the good news of our Risen Lord at Easter.

So What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 days, not counting Sundays, before Easter. The first day of Lent is called Ash Wednesday, which gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are gathered after the palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burned. For some Christians, Lent is traditionally a period of fasting and repentance in preparation for Easter. Few people nowadays fast for the whole of Lent, although some do still fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and many believers give up certain things or food as a form of self-discipline.

However, there are many ways you can observe Lent. This guide includes ideas and suggested practices for individuals, families, and Trinity groups during Lent.

A FEW IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

So, what are some ways you, your family or Trinity Group can observe Lent as you prepare for the death (on Good Friday) and resurrection of Christ (on Easter)?

Easter Treasure Box (p.2)

Lenten Candles and Devotions (p. 3-5)

Lent Box (p. 6)

Resurrection Tree (p. 6)

Daily Activities for Lent (p.6)

Prayer Labyrinth (p.7-8)

EASTER TREASURE BOX

This practice is best done with others—your Trinity group, family members, friends, etc.

THE IDEA:

What if on Easter we had not just a hankering for chocolate bunnies, but a hunger to know Jesus and his gift of life...to take a fresh look at the mystery of his death and resurrection and to embrace him as our greatest treasure? What if we kept a tradition that grew sweeter over time and became more meaningful than the traditional Easter basket?

INSTRUCTIONS:

Obtain a bare “treasure box” (found at a local craft store, your garage, etc.).

We suggest that on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter you read “Treasure Hunt!” (Matthew 13) from the *Jesus Storybook Bible* (this story speaks powerfully to “kids” of all ages). If you don’t have a Jesus Storybook Bible, grab your favorite translation. Talk about the story and allow it to lay a foundation for understanding real treasure. Then personalize the boxes with paint, cut-out crosses, etc (you can give each person a box or create a family/group box) in preparation for the treasure hunt. Prayerfully consider what verses you will put inside—one for each person or member of the group to remember God’s word to you in this year.

And then for Easter, before any “yummy” treats are brought out (if you choose to also give other gifts), send the kids or family/group members on a hunt for real treasure (around the house). Once the box(es) is found gather everyone together to read the special gift found inside each box: a scripture verse representing what you sensed God is doing in each person’s life.

Every Easter you can ask God for a special verse to add to each person’s treasure box (you can also put in other, special items for them to decorate their box). Over the years, their treasure boxes will become full of verses—treasure that will not rust or fade, a treasure that celebrates that in exchange for death, Jesus gives us abundant life.

Adapted from Janna and Jim Matthies. *Lenten Activity, Formation at Home*. Common Ground.

LENTEN CANDLES AND DEVOTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Lent is a season of waiting. In that sense it is like Advent. The light of the Advent candles grows brighter as we approach Jesus' birth. However, during Lent everything grows darker as we draw nearer to the unthinkable—Jesus' death on the cross—a death in which Jesus takes on all the sin and darkness of the world.

To symbolize this, we can begin Lent with seven lighted candles. On the first Sunday, one is snuffed out. On the second Sunday, the second candle is extinguished, and so on until Good Friday, when the last one is darkened. It is as if we have seen sin growing in power and finally crucifying the Jesus (who is the Light of the World), leaving us in darkness.

Praise God we don't have to stay in that darkness! In his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated sin and darkness, bringing light and life back into the world. After journeying through Lent, we'll relight all the candles on Easter to rejoice in an empty tomb—to rejoice in Jesus being alive.

WHAT YOU NEED

Seven candles. You can arrange them in a cross shape or make a cross-shaped candleholder (see: <http://skimac.wordpress.com/2007/03/03/lent-in-our-domestic-church/> for an example) and use the readings provided below.

Or

If you've got some skills, make a Cradle to Cross Wreath (which you may use during Advent, Lent and marking the days to the Ascension). See <http://adventtolenttoascensionwreath.blogspot.com/>

LENTEN READINGS

[Devotions may be done individually or with others. The days suggested for each reading may be altered based on your meeting times and availability. Additional devotionals: *Devotions for Lent (Holy Bible: Mosaic)* (found on Amazon) or *An Easter Devotional: Trail to the Tree* at www.aholyexperience.com (under the "free tools" link).]

Ash Wednesday

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:12-13

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we/I enter into Lent, may we/I be mindful of you, remembering your great gift of life for us/me. May we/I return to you with all our/my hearts. Amen.

Question: Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. One of the things that many Christians do during Lent, besides fasting, is repent. "Repent" means to turn from doing wrong things and to go in a different direction—toward Christ. What is one thing you can fast from or repent of during Lent?

First Sunday of Lent: Into the Wilderness (Snuff out one/seven candles)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Prayer: Lord Jesus, even though you were hungry, you did not give in to the devil's temptation. When we are/I am tempted to do something we/I know we/I shouldn't, help us/me to resist temptation as you did. As you refused to worship anyone but God alone, help us/me to worship only God, too. Amen.

Questions: What is something you were tempted to do today that you knew you shouldn't do? Did you give in to the temptation or did you say "no" to it? How do you feel about that decision? Pray (with each other) and be assured of God's love for us (despite our choices).

Second Sunday of Lent: Upside Down (Snuff out two/seven candles)

Scripture Readings: Mark 10:13-16 and Matthew 20:16

Prayer: Jesus, you are from the beginning, the Firstborn of all creation, and you became last for our sake. Help us/me to be like you, seeking the good of others, putting them ahead of ourselves/myself. And, help us/me to be like little children, to be with you, remembering that you love us/me so much and enjoy being with us/me, too. Help us/me to see the upside-down nature of God's kingdom. Amen.

Questions: Why do you think the disciples told the people to stop bringing the children to Jesus? Why do you think Jesus wanted to be with the children? In God's Kingdom, the first will be last. What do you think this means? Can you think of a time when the first became last? What about a time when the last became first?

Third Sunday of Lent: Forgiveness and Love (Snuff out three/seven candles)

Scripture Reading: Luke 6: 27-36

Prayer: Jesus, sometimes it is very, very hard to forgive other people, and we/I need you to help us/me love them. Please help us/me to want to forgive and to love. Help us/me to be like you and to love even the people we/I don't like very much. Amen.

Questions: Who is unkind to you? How do you feel when Jesus says to love that person? Is there something you could do (or stop doing) to show love to that person?

Fourth Sunday of Lent: Refreshment (Snuff out four/seven candles)

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-15

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the living water. Help us/me to come to you whenever we/I feel tired and in need of rest and refreshment. Amen.

Questions: Do you think Jesus is talking about water, like in a glass? What is the living water that Jesus will give the woman? How is Jesus like water?

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Touch that Heals (Snuff out five/seven candles)

Scripture Reading: John 11: 17-36

Prayer: Jesus, you loved Mary and Martha, and you came to be with them and to grieve with them after the death of their brother. Thank you that you are with us and share in our sadness when we miss people we love. Amen.

Questions: How do Mary and Martha feel in this story? How does Jesus feel? How do you know? When we lose people we love, do you think Jesus cries with us, too? What does Jesus promise us?

Palm Sunday: (Snuff out six/seven candles)

Scripture Reading: John 12:12-15

Prayer: Jesus, you are the King! You are good and humble and powerful and gentle. We/I praise you, our/my King. Amen.

Questions: Why are the people in this story so excited? What do you do when you're excited? What would you do if you knew Jesus was coming to our city?

Maundy Thursday: Betrayed and Arrested

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:43-46

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this is a dark day. It is the day you were betrayed and arrested. Help us/me to remember you today and remember what you suffered because you love us/me. Amen.

Questions: Why do you think Judas, who was Jesus' friend, betrayed him? How do you think Jesus felt when Judas betrayed him? How did he feel when the crowd seized him? Where do you think they will take him?

Good Friday: Crucified (Snuff out all seven candles)

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:18-23, 32-33

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this is a dark day. It is the day you were crucified and died. Help us/me to remember you today and to remember what you suffered because you love us/me. Amen.

Questions: Why did Jesus die? What does Jesus' death mean to you?

Easter: Christ is Risen! (Light all the candles again)

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:1-7

Prayer: Lord Jesus, this is a bright and glorious day! It is the day you rose from the dead. You beat death and sin and sadness and pain. Help us/me to remember your amazing triumph today. We/I give you praise and honor and glory. Amen.

Questions: Why did Jesus rise from the dead? How does that make you feel?

Adapted from Piper, Noel. 2003. *Treasuring God in our Traditions*. Wheaton: Crossway. Readings adapted from *Family Devotions for Lent* by Kimberlee Conway Ireton. Ireton's devotional material with readings for each day of Lent may be found at: <http://www.kimberleeconwayireton.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/family-devotions-for-lent.pdf>

LENT BOX

Find any box and have put in your favorite toys, games, or whatever you'd like to sacrifice for lent. If you'd like, you can label the box "Good-bye for Lent—See You at Easter!". Items can be added to it weekly or all at once, at the beginning of Lent (Ash Wednesday). Find a place in a closet or on a high shelf where it's out of sight. Don't forget to bring it out for opening on Easter. You can also do some variation of this. The idea is to give up something dear to you, reminding you of the sacrifice that Christ made as you prepare for his death on Good Friday.

Idea found at: <http://catholicicing.com/2010/02/lenten-sacrifice-ideas-and-activities/>

RESURRECTION TREE

If you're familiar with the Advent Jesse Tree (also called the Jesus Tree), the Resurrection Tree is its Lenten equivalent. Take a bare tree or large bush branch and cement it (or some other semi permanent way) into a pot/container. Set the tree out in your home, hanging symbols/ornaments (made, found, bought, appropriate Christmas ornaments) that remind you of the Crucifixion and Resurrection and things that point toward the names and facets of Jesus that are related especially to his sacrifice for our redemption.

As at Advent, the symbols we place before us will have deeper meaning if we have "found" them ourselves. Perhaps those discoveries will occur as we consider the state of our relationship with Jesus and our understanding of the salvation he offers us. Reading the gospel accounts of his last days (Matthew 21-28; Mark 11-16; Luke 19-24; John 11-21) will be essential for this consideration. Take some time to read through some of these passages. Like the symbols on Advent's Jesse Tree, most of these objects won't be ornaments but small toys and household items that we "re-create".

On Easter, remove all the symbols of death and leave only those that remind you of life on the tree (or adding new ones if you need)—because Jesus is alive! Leave the Resurrection Tree up for a while during the season of Easter to remind you that CHRIST IS RISEN!

Adapted from Piper, Noel. 2003. *Treasuring God in our Traditions*. Wheaton: Crossway.

DAILY ACTIVITIES FOR LENT

Take your favorite activities listed under the *49 Activities and Practices for Lent* (beginning on page 7 of the guide found at: <http://www.miikogibson.com/ebooks/LentenTreeActivities2009.pdf>) and print them out on cardstock. Mix all the activities in a container and pull one out each day during Lent to do together (most of these activities are best done with others, but can be modified for individuals). Or string/clip them up on some twine (making a countdown or calendar to Easter) and do one activity each day.

THE FINGER LABYRINTH

As the children within the Trinity community grow up among us, we want to expose them to a variety of spiritual disciplines in hopes that every personality type can discover a way to connect deeply with God. One such discipline is the prayer labyrinth. Some find a prayer labyrinth a wonderful tool to focus their mind and bodies as they pray, or talk to God.

The following excerpt (from Pamela C. Hawkins' *The Awkward Season: Prayers for Lent*) is a simple primer for the intent and use of a finger labyrinth:

“A labyrinth is simply a design for a path. Often confused with mazes, which are intended to trick those who try to figure them out, labyrinths are designed to be clearly followed from beginning to end.

“Every labyrinth pattern, weather created for walking by foot or tracing by finger, has only one way in, one center, and one way out. A [prayer] labyrinth simply offers an opening through which we seek, meet, and spend time with God.

“Traditionally, when praying the labyrinth, Christians follow three classic stages or movements. First, as we enter the labyrinth path, we are invited to release, to let go of all that stands in our way and distracts us from God--or destination and center. As we move toward the center of the labyrinth, we are invited to be mindful of obstacles that may prevent us from being open to God's presence and leading. Second, as we reach the center of the labyrinth, we are invited to receive what God desires for us. It may be a word or a nudge, a comfort or a call. At the center, we rest and reflect upon what God chooses to reveal to us. Third, as we go out from the center on the same path by which we entered, we are invited to return to the world, open to new ways of living, being, and praying.”

At Trinity, we adapt this model in age-appropriate ways. Toddlers sing praises and review their 3 Basic Truths. Elementary-aged children are encouraged to pray prayers of love, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and requests as a starting point, but are certainly given freedom to explore. As the children grow and are able to understand more complex concepts, we can model and explain the three classic stations of a prayer labyrinth to them: release, receive, and return.

If your child especially connects with prayer labyrinths, you may want to invest in a handheld pewter labyrinth. Make your own using cardboard and sharpies, air-dry modeling clay, or masking/painters tape on your carpet or rug. Pick any form that resonates with your family's personality. However, although paper copies are simple, they can be just as meaningful.

