

Celebrating Lent and Easter with Children



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PRC – Practical Resources for Churches

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CONTENTS

An Introduction to Lent and Easter.....Page 3

Telling the Story to Children.....Page 4

Crafts and Activities

- *Lenten Prayer Box
 - Instructions.....Page 5
 - Take Home Sheet.....Page 6
 - Lenten Symbols Sheet.....Page 7
- *Resurrection Eggs
 - Instructions.....Page 8
 - Scripture Readings for Resurrection Eggs.....Page 9
- *Jelly Bean Prayer Bracelets
 - Instructions.....Page 10
 - Jelly Bean Prayer.....Page 11
- *Stone Tomb.....Page 12
- *Caterpillar/Butterfly Craft.....Page 13
- *Lenten and Easter Word Search.....Page 14
 - Word Search Solution.....Page 15

Food-related Activities

- *Resurrection Rolls.....Page 16
- *Easter Cookies.....Page 17

6. Websites.....Page 18



An Introduction to Lent and Easter

The season of **Lent** consists of the 40 days, not including Sundays, before Easter. The date for **Easter** changes each year as it is the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox on March 21st. Therefore the date falls sometime between March 22 and April 25.

The word Lent is derived from the Germanic root for long because it is observed in spring when the days get longer. Lent is a time to prepare for the holiest time of the Christian year by fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and other acts of penance. Many people give up something for Lent (a food, watching TV, etc.) or do something to bring them closer to God such as daily devotions or charitable donations. The church color for most of Lent is **purple** which symbolizes repentance as well as royalty. The word alleluia is not used during Lent and some churches perform a ritual called the **putting away of the alleluias** before Lent begins.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Ashes are a sign of repentance and for centuries the words "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" have been spoken as the sign of the cross in made with ashes on Christians' foreheads at special Ash Wednesday services.

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday and is a time of celebration and eating of rich foods made with eggs, sugar, and butter, which were traditionally prohibited during Lent. The term shrove is the past tense of shrive which means to obtain forgiveness of sins by confession and doing penance; in the past preparation for Lent included going to confession. Other names for the day are Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday, Tuesday of Carnival, Fastnacht Day, and Pancake Tuesday. Churches today celebrate Shrove Tuesday with Mardi Gras celebrations which may include pancake races and dinners of pancakes and other rich foods.

Holy Week is the last week of Lent and the week before Easter; it commemorates the last week of Jesus' earthly life. It begins with **Palm Sunday** when Jesus entered Jerusalem, continues with Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday, and ends with **Maundy Thursday** (Holy Thursday), **Good Friday** and Holy Saturday. The word Maundy is thought to be derived from the Latin word for command and refers to the command Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper. The time from the evening of Holy Thursday until the evening of Easter Sunday is called the Easter **Triduum**. A **Tenebrae** service may be held on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday; the word Tenebrae is Latin for shadows and the service includes a gradual extinguishing of candles. In Roman Catholic and some other churches there is an **Easter Vigil** between sunset on Holy Saturday and dawn on Easter Sunday which is considered the first official celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

Telling the Story to Children

Teaching children about Christmas is fun and easy compared to the challenge of teaching them about Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Memories of the little baby born in Bethlehem are still fresh in their minds when the season of Lent begins; how do we explain that the little baby grew up to suffer and die? In a society of instant gratification and “it’s all about me,” a season which emphasizes repentance and sacrifice can be a hard sell. It may be tempting to de-emphasize Lent, teach about Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and forget the rest but we’re doing our children a disservice when we take that route. The joy of Easter can’t be fully experienced without some knowledge of what happened on Good Friday, and learning about Lent and that we should look beyond ourselves and our needs is a valuable lesson.

It’s important to be aware of what is age-appropriate for children and be conscious of each child’s particular sensitivities and level of understanding. Children younger than three can be told that Jesus is alive and with us today. For preschool children, a simple explanation that Jesus died on a cross, was buried in a tomb, and then rose on Easter Sunday is sufficient. Younger elementary children can hear stories from the gospels without going into too much detail. Older elementary children can be exposed to more particulars of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Whatever we teach our children about the events leading up to Jesus’ death, it’s important to always include the story of Jesus’ resurrection and what it means for us today.

There are many good Easter books and videos for children but always preview them first to make sure they match your beliefs, are not too violent, and include the resurrection as well as Jesus’ death.

When questions arise, answer them honestly. Don’t be afraid to tell the children that you struggle with some of their same concerns. For younger children, a simple explanation such as telling them that Jesus died for us so that we could be together with him in heaven is usually sufficient.

In observing the season of Lent, it’s best to inspire, not require. Some children may find the practice of giving up a favorite food or TV show meaningful; others may prefer to add something, such as collecting money for the poor or being kind to others. Share with them how you observe Lent and what practices you find meaningful and invite them to decide what they would like to do. If you are in children’s ministry make sure to send home appropriate Lenten activities for families to practice together such as a Lenten calendar, daily devotional, prayers for each week, etc.

[“Talking with Children about Lent and Easter”](#) by Beth Herrinton-Hodge

CRAFTS

Lenten Prayer Box

Have each child decorate a Lenten Prayer Box to take home and use with their families. Use the sample box you've made for classroom prayers during Lent.

Supplies

- *cardboard boxes
- *Lenten/Easter symbols sheet
- *glue sticks
- *scissors

Boxes can be purchased at party stores or you can cover shoeboxes with white paper.

Instructions

- *Hand out the Lenten/Easter symbols sheet and have the children color the symbols as you talk about the meaning of each one.
- *Have the children cut out the symbols and glue them onto the boxes.
- *Hand out the instruction/prayer requests sheets and explain to the children how to use them at home.
- *Pass out slips of the prayer requests and have the children fill them out. Let them share their prayer requests with the class if they want to. Collect the prayer requests and put them in the classroom Lenten box.



Lenten Prayer Box Take Home Sheet

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Today your child made a Lenten prayer box to use at home. We would like to encourage you to set a regular time to write up prayer requests for the box and pray together as a family. A good time to do this is during a meal, at bath time, or before bed. Your child is looking at you to model the Christian faith so be sure to let them know how much you value the importance of prayer.

Blessings,

Your child's Sunday school teacher

.....
My prayer request is _____

.....
My prayer request is _____

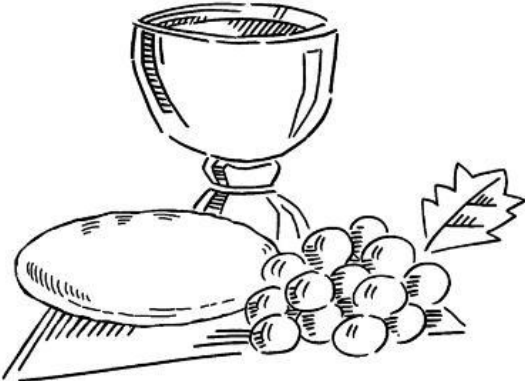
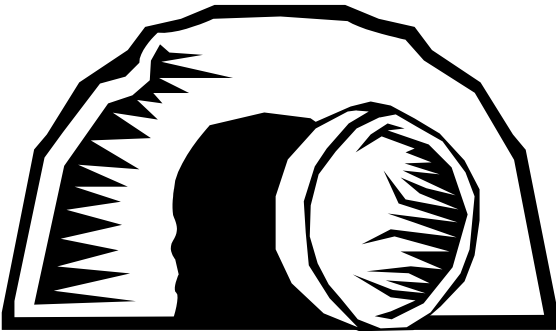
.....
My prayer request is _____

.....
My prayer request is _____

.....
My prayer request is _____

.....

Lenten Symbols



Resurrection Eggs

These can be purchased but why not make your own set and have your students make them to take home? It's a great way for the children to learn about the events of Holy Week. As the children fill each egg read the scriptures and discuss.



Supplies for each set

- *12 plastic Easter eggs that open
- *egg carton or basket or bag (to place eggs in)
- *small artificial plant leaf
- *small piece of cloth with perfume on it
- *piece of brown clay shaped into a small bread loaf
- *3 dimes or play silver coins
- *thorn or small piece of thorny branch
- *piece of purple cloth
- *small cross or two toothpicks tied together to form a cross
- *swatch of burlap
- *small piece of sponge
- *2 or 3 whole cloves
- *small pieces of paper with scripture readings

Instructions

- *Use a permanent marker to write the numbers 1-12 on each egg.
- *Put the items and scripture reading in each numbered egg as follows:
 - #1 - Palm Sunday: small artificial plant leaf/Matthew 21:8-9
 - #2 - Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus' feet: cloth with perfume/John 12:3
 - #3 - Last Supper: brown clay shaped into bread loaf/Matthew 26:17-19
 - #4 - Judas betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver: dimes or plastic money/Matthew 27:3
 - #5 - Soldiers place crown of thorns on Jesus' head: thorn/John 19:2a
 - #6 - Soldiers place purple robe on Jesus: purple cloth/John 19:2b
 - #7 - Jesus carries his cross: cross/John 19:17
 - #8 - Soldiers part Jesus' clothes and cast lots for his coat: burlap/John 19:23
 - #9 - Jesus is given wine and gall on a sponge to drink: sponge/Matthew 27:34
 - #10 - Spices are used to prepare Jesus for burial: cloves/John 19:40
 - #11 - The stone covering Jesus' tomb was rolled away: rock/John 20:1
 - #12 - Jesus' resurrection: the last egg is empty just as the tomb was.

Scripture Readings for Resurrection Eggs (NIV Translation)

Egg #1: Matthew 21:8-9

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

Egg #2: John 12:3

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Egg #3: Matthew 26:17-19

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Egg #4: Matthew 27:3

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.

Egg #5: John 19:2a

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head.

Egg #6: John 19:2b

They clothed him in a purple robe.

Egg #7: John 19:17

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

Egg #8: John 19:23

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

Egg #9: Matthew 27:34

There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

Egg #10: John 19:40

Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen.

Egg #11: John 20:1

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

Jelly Bean Prayer Bracelets

Go over the Jelly Bean Prayer before you make this project and send home a copy with the completed bracelets.

Supplies

*12 inch lengths of leather lacing

*beads in the following colors: red, green, yellow, orange, black, white, purple, and pink

Instructions

*Give each child a copy of the Jelly Bean Prayer, a 12" length of leather lacing, and one bead of each color.

*Have the children make a knot at one end of the leather lacing to hold the bead in place. This knot can also remind the children that they're held tightly in God's loving arms. As the children make knots in the bracelet have them think of them as hugs from God.

*Have the children put a red bead on the leather lacing and read the first line of the poem. Let them know that Jesus died for them because he loves them.

*Make another knot.

*Add the green bead to the bracelet and read the next line of the poem. Give thanks that God made the world.

*Add another knot.

*Put a yellow bead on the bracelet and read the appropriate line of the poem. Thank God for making the sun.

*Make a knot.

*Add the orange bead and read the next line. Give thanks that God is with us day and night.

*Add a knot.

*Put the black bead on and read the appropriate line. Ask God to forgive us when we don't do what is right.

*Add a knot.

*Add the white bead and assure the children that God forgives us when we ask.

*Add another knot.

*Add a purple bead and read the next line of the poem. Explain that purple is the color of Lent and sadness and that it was sad that Jesus died.

*Add a knot.

*Put the pink bead on and read the next line of the poem. Let the children know that Jesus died but then he rose from the dead so that we can be with him forever when we die.

*Tie the ends of the bracelet together.

*Let the children have a jelly bean of each color for a snack.

JELLY BEAN PRAYER

RED IS FOR THE BLOOD HE GAVE.

GREEN IS FOR THE GRASS HE MADE.

YELLOW IS FOR THE SUN SO BRIGHT.

ORANGE IS FOR THE EDGE OF NIGHT.

BLACK IS FOR THE SINS WE MADE.

WHITE IS FOR THE GRACE HE GAVE.

PURPLE IS FOR HIS HOUR OF SORROW.

PINK IS FOR OUR NEW TOMORROW.

A BAG FULL OF JELLY BEANS

COLORFUL AND SWEET,

IS A PRAYER, IS A PROMISE,

IS A SPECIAL TREAT

MAY THE JOY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

FILL YOUR HEART AND BLESS YOUR LIFE.



Note: In addition to making the Jelly Bean Prayer Bracelet or instead of making it, you may give each child a jelly bean of the various colors in the poem, wrap in fabric netting, and tie with a bow.

Stone Tomb

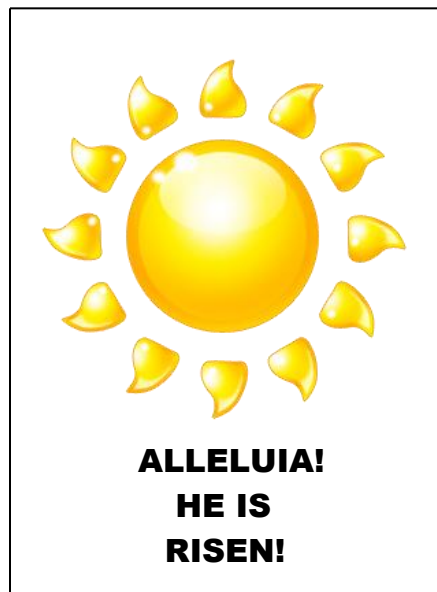
This activity is simple enough for children to do but is also enjoyed by youth and adults.

Supplies

- *plastic soup bowl
- *stones (aquarium stones can be purchased from a pet store)
- *2 craft sticks
- *cross and sun patterns
- *oak tag (either gray or white)
- *craft glue or cool glue gun
- *8" foam or plastic plate
- *Easter grass or Spanish moss

Instructions

- *Turn bowl over and cut an opening of approximately 1" x 1" in the bottom front, to make an opening to the "tomb."
- *Cut a circle of oak tag large enough to cover tomb opening. If using white oak tag, color the circle gray with crayons or markers.
- *Push a craft stick through the back top of the bowl and leave the slit open.
- *Dip stones in glue and stick on inverted bowl; cover it completely with stones.
- *Cut out the sun and cross.
- *Glue the sun to the top of one craft stick and the cross to the top of the other craft stick.
- *Spread glue on the 8" plate.
- *Place the tomb (bowl) in the center of the plate and arrange grass around it.
- *Insert the cross on craft stick in the slit in the top of the tomb. Change it to the sun on Easter.



Caterpillar/Butterfly Craft

The butterfly is a wonderful Easter symbol and a great way to teach children how Jesus rose from the dead and about the new life we have through Jesus. The caterpillar spins a cocoon (chrysalis) and goes inside to sleep; from the outside it looks like it's dead but inside the cocoon wonderful changes are taking place. When the caterpillar emerges it has been transformed into a beautiful butterfly!

Supplies

- *coffee filters
- *watercolor markers
- *chenille sticks
- *empty toilet paper rolls
- *brown package wrapping paper (or brown grocery bags)
- *scotch tape or glue

Instructions

- *Give each child a coffee filter and have them open it out and press it flat. Let them decorate the filter with the markers. Watercolor markers tend to bleed and make interesting designs.
- *Give each child a chenille stick and have them fold it in half.
- *Then, have the children scrunch their filters in the middle and wrap the chenille sticks around the middle of the filter and twist, bending the ends to form antennae. Gently fan out the filters to form wings.
- *Give each child a toilet paper roll and piece of brown paper cut to approximately 8" x 8".
- *Have the children carefully fold the butterflies' wings and put the butterflies into the toilet paper rolls. Wrap the toilet paper rolls in the brown paper and tape or glue the paper in place along one side, and then twist the paper at the top and bottom of the roll to seal the cocoon.
- *Have the children open their cocoons on Easter morning to release their butterflies!



Lent and Easter Word Search

U G C E Q T W K S O Q P P E R
B U T T E R F L Y C R S A G K
J B M O T L R T O E P S S G M
W E E R T B V H T S L M S S H
X Z R Z Y U X Z U E T U O Y C
B J V U M Y E X A H U S V Y D
C T P Y S L Z I L S K M E K K
V I O A S A L D K A M Y R T M
A J U R L I L J N W C R D T R
L S N X L M J E A N N A S O H
F I W Y L S S P M J S K Z O G
M V B E S E J E S U S B R C I
V Q R O S R G M G S W Q V Z Y
T L R N R B M N U B R S I Z F
G C O X S Z S W A B C Z G U Q

ANGEL
ASHES
BUTTERFLY
CROSS
EGGS
HOSANNA
JERUSALEM
JESUS
LILY
PALMS
PASSOVER
PRETZELS
TOMB

Word Search Solution

```

+ + + + + + + + + + P P E +
B U T T E R F L Y + R + A G +
J B M O T + + + + E + + S G +
+ E + + + + + + T S + + S S +
+ + R + + + + Z + E + + O + +
+ + + U + + E + + H + + V + +
+ + P + S L + + + S + + E + +
+ + + A S A L + + A + + R + +
+ + + + L I L + + + + + + + +
+ + + + L M + E A N N A S O H
+ + + Y L S S + M + + + + + +
+ + + + S E J E S U S + + + +
+ + + O + + G + + + + + + +
+ + R + + + + N + + + + + +
+ C + + + + + + A + + + + +

```

(Over, Down, Direction)

ANGEL (9, 15, NW)
 ASHES (10, 8, N)
 BUTTERFLY (1, 2, E)
 CROSS (2, 15, NE)
 EGGS (14, 1, S)
 HOSANNA (15, 10, W)
 JERUSALEM (1, 3, SE)
 JESUS (7, 12, E)
 LILY (7, 8, SW)
 PALMS (3, 7, SE)
 PASSOVER (13, 1, S)
 PRETZELS (12, 1, SW)
 TOMB (5, 3, W)

Food Related Activities

Resurrection Rolls

These treats are not only delicious but also a good way of emphasizing the point that the tomb where Jesus was laid was empty on Easter morning. If you are a Sunday school teacher you can make these rolls with the children in the church kitchen or make them at home ahead of time.

Ingredients

- *can of refrigerated crescent rolls
- *8 marshmallows
- *1/4 cup melted butter
- *2 Tbs. ground cinnamon
- *2 Tbs. sugar

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly grease a baking sheet.
2. Separate crescent rolls into individual triangles.
3. Mix the cinnamon and sugar together in a small bowl.
4. Give each child a marshmallow and tell them it stands for Jesus and his purity.
5. Have the children dip their marshmallow into the melted butter and cinnamon/sugar mixture. The butter and cinnamon/sugar are like the oil and spices that were rubbed on Jesus' body.
6. Give each child a crescent roll triangle and explain that this represents the cloth that Jesus' body was wrapped in. Have the child completely wrap the triangle over the marshmallow and seal the edges together.
7. Place in the oven for 10-12 minutes until golden brown. Explain that the oven is like the tomb Jesus was placed in.
8. When the rolls have been removed and cooled, have the children open their "tombs" to see that they are empty inside. Jesus has risen! (The marshmallow melts but the roll remains puffed up – empty.)



Easter Cookies

These cookies are a great way to reinforce the lesson of the empty tomb on Easter morning. Teachers can prepare them at home and bring them to class for their students to enjoy. The recipe can also be sent home with the suggestion that parents prepare the cookies the night before Easter Sunday.

Ingredients

- *1 cup whole pecans
- *1 tsp. vinegar
- *3 egg whites
- *pinch of salt
- *1 cup sugar
- *wooden spoon
- *Ziploc bag

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees.
2. Put pecans in Ziploc bag and let the children break them into small pieces with the wooden spoon. This shows how Jesus' body was broken on Good Friday.
3. Have the children smell the vinegar as they put 1 tsp. of it into a mixing bowl. Tell the children when Jesus was thirsty on the cross he was given vinegar to drink.
4. Add the egg whites to the vinegar. Explain to the children that the eggs represent life and that Jesus gave his life so we could have eternal life with him.
5. Sprinkle a little salt into the children's hands. Let them taste it and tell them it stands for the salty tears shed by Jesus' followers when he died. Put a pinch of salt into the bowl.
6. Tell the children that so far the ingredients don't seem very tasty, but now we are going to add 1 cup of sugar to them because the sweetest part of the story is that Jesus died because he loves us.
7. Beat the mixture with a mixer on high speed for 12-15 minutes until stiff peaks form. Tell the children the white color represents that we are pure because our sins have been cleansed by Jesus.
8. Fold in the broken nuts and drop by teaspoons onto a cookie sheet covered with wax paper. Explain that each mound represents the rocky tomb where Jesus' body was laid.
9. Put the cookie sheet in the oven, close the door and turn the oven off.
10. Tell the children that the cookies will be left in the oven while they sleep, just as Jesus' followers slept as he lay in the tomb.
11. On Easter morning, give the children a cookie and let them take a bite and see that they are hollow. Jesus' followers were amazed when they went to the tomb on Easter and found it empty; Jesus had risen from the dead!

Websites to Visit for More Lenten Activity Ideas

These resources come from denominations or independent organizations which may have different theological viewpoints from your church. Please evaluate and revise these resources accordingly.

Articles on how to teach children about the events of Holy Week

- [7 Ways to Explain Holy Week to Children](#)
- [Talking with Children about Lent and Easter](#)

Resources for family devotions and activities

- [Creative Communications for the Parish](#) – sells Lenten family devotionals and children’s activity books
- [Christian Tools of Affirmation](#) – sells Lenten children’s activity booklet and other items
- [Family Devotions for Lent](#) – free downloadable booklet
- [Lenten Activities for the Family](#) – free booklet, includes Lenten tree activities

Resources for children’s ministry

[Keeping a Holy Lent](#) – booklet with basic information about Lent

[How to Make Palm Crosses](#) – pictorial directions

Resource for family event

[Resurrection Sunday Bible Journey for Families](#) – event with four stations