

Countdown to Easter

On Your Marks:

Advent has its calendar countdown, so why shouldn't Easter? Lent is the time of getting ready for the great Feast of the Resurrection - such an important day that we need to prepare ourselves. If families and children's groups in church can become excited as they light candles or open windows daily on the Christmas countdown, how much more should we be encouraging a similar anticipation for the mystery of the cross and the empty tomb! The following idea takes this as its inspiration for an Easter countdown with Bible stories for each day of Lent linked to the number of days to go.

Get Set:

There are 40 days in Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Eve. (The six Sundays are not traditionally counted in this total.) Why not print off the following countdown to Easter and then staple it together like a calendar from which you tear off a page each day? Each entry has a Bible story linked to the number of days to go, along with some interesting facts, puzzles, thoughts and questions for you to use either as a family or individually.

Go!

Here are the last four days before Easter:

4 days to go

I wonder where Zacchaeus was during these days leading up to Easter.

He had only recently met with Jesus and had been dramatically changed.

Read about it in Luke 19:1-10.

This tax collector had been so amazed by Jesus that he said in verse 8:

'I will now pay back *four* times as much to everyone I have ever cheated' (CEV).

What difference has it made to you that Jesus came to seek and save you?

How has it changed your life - the way you spend your time and your money?

There are 4 books about Jesus in the Bible and each one has a large section given over

to talking about his death. It must be important!

3 days to go

Today is known as Maundy Thursday.

Today we remember the Last Supper.

Read about it in Mark 14:22-26.

It was at this supper or soon afterwards that Peter swore he would never reject Jesus and then Jesus told him that before the cock crowed twice, he would have denied him three times (verse 30).

Would you have been as brave or as cowardly as Peter?

All of us let Jesus down at some time but Jesus still loves us and faces death for us.

They say that both good things and bad things come in threes.

Later Jesus was to remake his friendship with Peter with three questions that cancelled out the three denials (John 21:15-19).

How many expressions using 3 or stories with 3 in the title can you think of?

2 days to go

Today is the day of days.

Today is the day when Jesus took Life down into the darkest depths of Death.

Today is Good Friday.

Read about what happened in Mark 15:20-41.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals. One mocked him; the other put his trust in Jesus even at the hour of death.

Today is the day for making a decision about what you think of Jesus.

Will it be a 'yes' or 'no'? Will you be 'for' or 'against'?

Jesus never gave back evil for evil and so evil was robbed of all its power because of the cross.

Traditional icons (religious pictures) of the cross show two people standing either side.

Can you find out who they are?

1 day to go

Today everything has gone quiet, as we await the greatest event in the whole history of time.

Jesus lies buried in a garden tomb.

One man dared to go and ask for the body, and it is in his family grave that Jesus is laid.

Read about Joseph in Mark 15:42-47.

This took some courage.

Now everyone knew about this secret believer.

Do your friends know that you believe in Jesus?

In preparation for tomorrow get ready a special candle that your family will light, as soon as you are awake, to mark the Day of Resurrection and the end of your Easter Countdown.

Get ready to shout a really big 'Hallelujah'.

Here are the previous six days:

10 days to go

Once Jesus healed 10 lepers.

Read about it in Luke 17:11-19.

Only one came back to say 'thank you', and he was the most unlikely one, because he was a Samaritan, and Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other.

Saying 'thank you' is such a simple thing to do but often forgotten.

The leper, who said 'thank you', got more than just healing in the end.

He learned about faith in Jesus.

Have you forgotten perhaps to say 'thank you' to someone recently?

And the biggest 'thank you' of all is to God, who loves us and never gives up on us.

Send a special 'thank you' card to someone today.

What would be your top 10 ways of saying thank you?

9 days to go

Most of Daniel 9 is a prayer to God.

Daniel says sorry on behalf of the people of God, who are now in exile because they had turned away from him.

Daniel's prayer of repentance is the sort of prayer that people use during Lent as they try to get ready for the Feast of Easter.

Read verses 15-19 in particular.

Earlier in the book Daniel had another vision of someone he called 'The Son of Man' (7:13-14).

This is the title that Jesus gave himself.

Jesus says, 'The Son of Man... will give his life to rescue many people' (Mark 10:45, CEV).

Now we are getting close to the mystery of Easter.

It will be at the ninth hour that Jesus will die for the whole world. The ninth hour (about 3 o'clock in the afternoon) used to be called 'noon' (from the word for 9) but now this is applied to midday instead.

9 is a popular number and occurs in various well-known sayings to do with: cats, stitches, clouds. Do you know what they are?

8 days to go

Luke tells us it was 8 days after Jesus had been talking about the events of Easter that he invited Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray.

Read about it in Luke 9:28-36.

Jesus began to glow with the light of heaven and was seen talking with Elijah and Moses about the events of Easter to come.

This was such a mystical experience and one which the three disciples never forgot. Isn't it strange that however many times Jesus spoke to them about the fact he was going to die, they simply couldn't believe it? Why do you think that was? Often we hear only what we want to hear.

Pray that this Lent God will open your ears to hear more clearly what God is trying to say to you.

Turn the figure 8 on its side and you have the mathematical symbol for infinity or eternity. It was to give us eternal life that Jesus was to die.

The technique known as Brain Gym™ includes making this shape with fingers, feet, elbows or movements of the eye.

Try doing this as you say perhaps the most famous verse of all linked to Easter and eternal life - John 3:16.

7 days to go

Once Peter had a problem about how many times he should be forgiving someone. Would 7 times be enough?

Read what Jesus said in Matthew 18:21-22.

Jesus went on to tell a parable and make the point that because God has forgiven us, we should forgive others.

The forgiveness that comes to us because of Easter is to be passed on and this is what will change the world.

The more deeply we experience the truth of Easter, the more ready we will be to do this. This is what this countdown to Easter is preparing us for.

7 is arguably the most important number in the Bible.

There are 7 days of creation (can you remember what happened on each one?) and in the Book of Revelation, almost everything is related to 7 - the perfect number.

What is your favourite number and why?

On the cross there are seven last 'words' that Jesus says. Soon we will be hearing these.

In how many different shapes and patterns can you rearrange seven items? Can you make a cross?

6 days to go

The first miracle of Jesus, as recorded in John's Gospel, is that of water turning into wine. It happened at a wedding.

Read the story in John 2:1-11.

6 large jars of water became beautiful vintage wine.

John says this is a sign.

Jesus says to Mary that his hour (his time) had not yet come - but now we are in Holy Week and the hour has arrived.

This is the time that will change everything, like water into wine.

Decide to set apart some extra time this week to read through the stories that lead up to the cross. Why not read it in [The Barnabas Children's Bible](#)?

As you do so, imagine that you are there with the people on the streets, in the temple, at

Bethany or in the upstairs room. What new things can you see?

Make yourself a cube, with its 6 sides, from card and then today, and on each of the following days, draw something from the story that is important for you.

5 days to go

Jesus told a story just before the events of Easter about 5 wise and 5 foolish girls. Read it in Matthew 25:1-13.

Lent is about getting ready to remember the great events of Good Friday and Easter. But Jesus knows that more often than not we are not ready for God and what God is about to do.

Are you ready for the mystery and miracle of Easter Day?

How are you going to get ready this week?

We have been given 5 senses.

So, as you read the stories of Holy Week, use your senses imaginatively to explore the story - what can you see, hear, smell, touch and taste?

Do you also remember the story about the 5 loaves that Jesus broke (see Mark 6:30-44)? Here is another clue to the meaning of Easter.

Here are the previous six days:

16 days to go

Paul's second letter to Timothy is the 16th book of the New Testament.

This is probably the last letter Paul wrote.

He tells Timothy to keep going and to serve God to the end.

It also contains a well-known verse about how special the Bible is for Christians.

Look up 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

How has the Bible inspired you to keep going?

Are there special verses or stories that mean a lot to you?

At the end of the letter, Paul, who was in prison, asks for a cloak and some books (4:13).

What two things would you ask for to bring you some comfort if you felt alone?

Did you know that there are only 16 rules in the artificial language Esperanto? (If only real life were that simple!)

15 days to go

On his second visit to Jerusalem, after he had been converted, Paul stayed with Peter for 15 days.

Read about it in Galatians 1:18.

How hard it must have been for Peter to come to believe that Paul - once an enemy of the faith - really had become a Christian.

Sometimes we can be slow to believe just how great a change in a person's life God can make when they come to see what Jesus did for them on the cross.

Don't give up praying for your friends and family to know Jesus as their Lord, even though it might seem impossible at times.

Lent is a time to recommit yourself to praying for others.

According to Andy Warhol, everyone will have his or her own 15 minutes of fame.

What would you like to be famous for?

14 days to go

Acts 27 tells the dramatic story of a storm at sea and a shipwreck.

The boat was tossed about for 14 days and nights before it ran aground on the island of Malta

Read the story from verse 18.

In the middle of the storm, when all hope was lost, Paul stood up and promised that a miracle would happen, because God had spoken to him (vv. 21-26).

That took some faith!

Have you ever had to stand up and be counted for God like this, when everyone else might understandably have laughed at you?

Pray that this Lent you may gain strength for just such a time.

A 'fortnight' (14 days) is the time it takes for the moon to change from being 'new' to being 'full'.

A collection of 14 items is a 'tessaradecad'.

How quickly can you gather a tessaradecad?

Now play a Kim's game (secretly removing an item or two and asking others to guess what is missing).

13 days to go

Zechariah, in chapter 13 verse 1 of his book, tells us that one day Good Friday will happen!

This prophet looks forward to that day when God will wipe away all the bad that spoils our lives.

Even though Zechariah lived hundreds of years before Jesus came, he gives us other clues to what Easter is all about.

Read Zechariah 3:1-10.

He even foresaw the events of Palm Sunday (9: 9-10).

This time of getting ready for Easter in Lent may seem long, but God's preparation time for Easter was far longer and was signposted all through the Old Testament.

Perhaps it's the most signposted 'surprise' in the history of the world?

I wonder why so many people regard 13 as an unlucky number? Can you think of some reasons? In some streets there isn't even a house or flat numbered 13!

12 days to go

Jesus chose 12 disciples.

Read about this in Matthew 10:1- 4.

What do you know about each of them? Try to find out more information about the ones you haven't heard of before.

They really are a mixed bunch of people.

It's comforting to know that Jesus chose very ordinary people, who were certainly not perfect, as his friends.

Who would you choose to be in a team that you hope will change the world?

Would you rule out some people straightaway? Why? Would God do this?

Only 12 human beings have ever stepped on the moon.

11 days to go

John 11 tells the story of how Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead.

Read about it in verses 17- 44.

This family were close friends of Jesus. They were living in Bethany near Jerusalem. The sisters, Mary and Martha, were sad and angry that Jesus took so long to come. Do you have any experiences of unanswered prayer?

Why do you think this happens?

The miracle in this story happens not long before the greater miracle of Easter and is a signpost of what is to come.

'Back from the dead' Lazarus became a celebrity but he was also in danger (see 12:9-11).

The famous epic film *Ben Hur*, which includes the Easter story, won 11 Oscars.

Here are the six days prior to that:

22 days to go

Peter's second letter is the 22nd book of the New Testament.

He writes to Christians to remind them not to give up their faith but to go on believing in God, even when times are tough.

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4.

He tells them that God has given them rock-solid promises that will help them to get through.

What promises from God can you remember?

Jesus gave many promises to his friends both before and after the events of Easter.

There are more promises in the Old Testament. Look up Isaiah 43:1-7 for some.

Is there a special promise here for you today?

There are 22 Letters in the Hebrew alphabet and 22 chapters in the last book of the Bible.

21 days to go

21 used to be the age when a young person legally became an adult and it is still celebrated as a special birthday today by many.

Tradition says it is also at this age that you are given the key to the house, as a sign that you are now a responsible person.

Read what Jesus says to Peter about keys in Matthew 16:18-20.

What do you think Jesus was trying to say to Peter?

Can you find the symbol for St Peter? It includes keys and something else.

This symbol sums up Peter's own Lenten journey through life.

What symbols for your life so far would you choose?

How many pips are there on a single die?

20 days to go

Isaiah had an extremely embarrassing experience in chapter 20 of his book!

Read what he had to do.

It was certainly a dramatic way to get the message across.

Sometimes God has to catch our attention with something startling like this.

Sometimes protest marches on behalf of the poor or about fair trade have to use similar shock tactics.

I wonder what God wants to say 'loud and clear' to us in this country today?

Play a game of 20 questions. Choose a Bible character or story and then everyone else has to guess who or what it is; however, you can only answer with 'yes' or 'no'.

19 days to go

Hebrews is the 19th book of the New Testament.

The writer uses stories from the Old Testament to help us understand who Jesus is.

Hebrews 12:2 reminds us, 'We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete' (CEV).

Lent is a time to remind yourself to keep Jesus - his love, his life and his example - always in your sights.

I wonder how you can do this today when there are so many other things to distract you?

Do you know the old chorus, 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus'?

Try singing it at different times during the day to help you keep close to God.

I wonder why people who chatter a lot are often described as 'talking 19 to the dozen'?

18 days to go

Jesus once healed a poor woman who had been bent double for 18 years.

Read about it in Luke 13:10-13.

Jesus helped her 'to walk tall' again. Her life was the truly straightened out because of his healing touch.

This can be true for all who come to Jesus in faith.

Do you know anyone who is bowed down with worries, fears or illness today?

God wants to use your prayers and your love to help them to praise God again like this woman.

17 days to go

Jeremiah once bought a field for 17 pieces of silver

Read about it in Jeremiah 32:6-14.

It was a strange thing to do because the country was about to be invaded and everyone be taken into exile.

God told him to do it as a sign that one day the people would own their land again.

What Jeremiah did was a sign of hope.

Christians are called to be 'people of hope' because they know that God never gives up on them.

Pass on some encouragement today.

Maybe there is something practical you can do, like sending an email or postcard to someone who is working for God in a situation that is either far away or very needy.

Apparently the number of times the average person laughs at in a day is 17!

Can you improve on that? Tell each other in your favourite joke to raise a few more laughs and spread cheer as well as hope.

Here are the previous six days:

28 days to go

How about this for a family!

In 2 Chronicles 11:21 we read that king Rehoboam (he came after King Solomon) had 28 sons (not all with the same wife!)

Can you think of 28 different boys' names?

Most families today are small compared to ones in the past, when sadly not all children were sure to survive because of poor health and living conditions.

Every life is precious to God, so take time today to remember the names of all those you know and love and those who love you.

Mathematically '28' is a perfect number, being the sum of all those numbers that can divide into it (1, 2, 4, 7, 14).

27 days to go

There are 27 books in New Testament.

How many can you name?

Most of these books are letters written to encourage Christians in their faith.

To whom could you write today to cheer them up and encourage them by your friendship?

There are 27 different words for snow in the Inuit language!

26 days to go

2 Chronicles 26 records the long up and down reign of King Uzziah of Judah.

He began so well (see verses 5 and 15) but then became proud, assuming a priestly role that wasn't his. He ends his days as a leper, not even able to live in the royal palace. He was like so many of us who start out with great intentions and then give in to temptation.

Lent is a time to recognize this weakness in all of us and turn to God for help. I wonder what God has been saying to you over these last days?

Remember, God's words of warning are only so strong because God loves us so much.

There are 26 letters in our alphabet. Can you think of 26 words that describe God - each one starting with a different letter of the alphabet?

Some of the Psalms work like this, using a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet to describe God and God's word, for example Psalm 119.

And did you know that there are 26 species of goat in the world? Well, now you do!

25 days to go

On the 25th day of the Jewish month of Elul, Nehemiah completed building the wall around Jerusalem.

It was his life's work, given to him by God.
Read about it Nehemiah 6:15-16.

It's great when an important task we have been given to do is completed.
Are there jobs that you've left unfinished today but which you know you must finish?
God wants us to do our work well, whatever it is.

God also promises to complete his life's work, which is to make sure that we get to heaven safely.
Paul talks about this in Philippians 1:6.

Read this and make it your inspiration today as you continue with your Lenten journey.

24 days to go

In John's amazing vision of heaven in the last book of the Bible, there are 24 elders around the throne of God.
Read about this in Revelation 4:1-11.
Each one has a golden crown, which they take off before God Almighty as they sing his praises.

Because Jesus will be wearing a crown of thorns soon, all crowns ultimately belong to him.

How many songs, choruses or hymns can you think of that include the words 'King Jesus'?

How do you think you can best make Jesus king of the 24 hours of your life today?

Pure gold is said to be 24 carats.

Find out what a 'tetrahexahedron' is. How many words can you make from its letters?

23 days to go

In the story of Job, the central figure tries to come to terms with the great problem of suffering.

Chapter 23 is typical of Job's prayer of complaint to God.

Many people struggle with the fact of pain in God's world.
Why does God allow it? What is God going to do about it?

Read this chapter and think through how you would answer Job's complaint.
Is there perhaps also a sign of faith in his prayer?

It's not wrong to express your doubts to God.

Maybe your journey into the mystery of Good Friday and Easter will hold some answers this Lent.

Psalm 23 is perhaps the most well-known passage in the Bible. Can you recite some of it?

Here are the six days prior to that:

34 days to go

Deuteronomy 34 tells of the death of Moses - one of God's very special Old Testament heroes.

What events from his amazing life can you remember?

Look at verses 10-12. What a tremendous description of Moses!

Which people have inspired you as a Christian?

What would you like people to say about you one day?

The word 'fast' has more than one meaning. Isn't it strange that Christians need a in order to down a little and think about God?

33 days to go

King David reigned for 33 years in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 2:11).

Jesus, who came from David's line through Joseph, is also said to have lived 33 years before he, too, died in Jerusalem (... and rose again!)

It isn't how long we live that matters but what we do with the time we have.

Give yourself 33 seconds to recall all you can about King David's life and what he achieved.

Read Psalm 33 - this sums up so well what David wanted to say about what is important in life for all of us.

32 days to go

Jonah is the 32nd book of the Old Testament.

What a story!

When the people of Nineveh did eventually turn to God (see Chapter 3:7-9), they began with a fast.

To stop doing what is our everyday routine in order to refocus and put God first, is what Lent is really all about.

A full set of human teeth is 32.

What will you be eating today?

Give thanks to God for food and particular remember those who do not have enough to eat.

Try this: if you fold a single sheet of paper in half five times and then cut the edges, see how many leaves of paper you have.

31 days to go

Josiah became a king when he was eight years old and reigned for 31 years.

He decided to put God first in his life.

Read the story of how God's law was rediscovered in the temple when they were cleaning in 2 Kings 22:3-13.

If you were a king and could pass any law you liked, what would it be?

What would you decide were the most important things for the good of all?

Over half the months in the year have 31 days, so that must mean there is roughly about a month to go to the Feast of Feasts!

30 days to go

A 30-year-old marriage is celebrated as a pearl anniversary.

Jesus told an important parable about pearls.

Read Matthew 13:45-46.

What do you think Jesus is saying to us in this story?

I wonder if you have ever come close to something like the precious pearl?

I wonder whether you have ever discovered anything so precious that you would give up everything to have it?

29 days to go

King Hezekiah reigned for 29 years (see 2 Chronicles 29:1-2).

In that time Hezekiah saw the most amazing miracle happen, when Jerusalem was saved from an invading army.

Read about it in 2 Chronicles 32:20-23.

Many people today in the world face real disasters like this.

Pray that God will send help to them - perhaps you have heard about situations from the TV where people are facing famine, war or disease. God wants to use your prayers today.

The 29th of February is an extra day every four years. Hezekiah, too, was given extra years to live beyond his normal span, but he didn't use them well.

How would you use an extra day, if it were given you this week?

And the six days before that (remember that Sundays are not included):

40 days to go

Lent begins today. 'Right away God's Spirit made Jesus go into the desert. He stayed there for forty days' (Mark 1:12-13).

Read the story from Mark 1:12-13.

Where would you go if you wanted to be quiet and alone? Where would you go if you had a big decision to make about the future?

Did you know that Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon and is connected to the word 'lengthen', because the days are getting longer up by now?

On Ash Wednesday (today) it is traditional to burn the palm crosses from last year. Then the mark of a cross is made on a person's forehead using the ash to help people remember the journey towards Easter on which they are now.

39 days to go

There are 39 books in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is rather like Lent in that it is a long period of getting ready for the coming of Jesus.

How many of the Old Testament books can you remember without looking up?

Can you work out which Old Testament books are hidden in the following anagrams?

Threes; Used Ox; I select cases; Rose clinch.

38 days to go

Once Jesus healed a man who had been ill for 38 years.

Read about it in John 5:1-8.

The poor man had no one to help him when the water was stirred up and he wanted to be put into the pool.

Is there anyone sick you know, who might like your help today?

Perhaps a visit, a phone call, a card, some flowers - and certainly a prayer - could be some of the ways God wants you to be a friend to that person

Daffodils usually appear about this time of year. Once upon a time they were called *Lent Lilies*.

37 days to go

In Genesis 37 we begin to read the story of Joseph, the dreamer, who was given that very special coat by his father Jacob.

What do you remember about Joseph's story? Can you sing some of the songs from the musical?

God took Joseph on a long and often painful journey through jealousy, slavery, injustice and imprisonment before he was ready to play his part in rescuing his family from starvation.

I wonder what things God wants to teach us as we travel the long journey through Lent towards Easter?

Did you know that 37 metres was the length of the first flight made by Orville Wright in 1903? What a long way flying by air has come since then!

36 days ago

In Exodus 36 we read about some skilled builders.

Bezaliel and Oholiab were gifted by God to help build a portable temple for God (the Tabernacle) in the desert.

Read about it in verses 1-7.

Yet, even though they were gifted workman, Moses needed to raise money to do the work.

Many people put aside money during Lent to help Christians who work in other parts of the world.

Could you decide to put a small part of your pocket money aside so that God will be glorified, just as God was by these builders in the Bible?

5p a day during Lent would add up to £2, and in the developing world that can buy a lot that would change lives.

35 days to go

King Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he began to reign (see 2 Chronicles 20:31).

Read about his amazing battle tactics in verses 20-23 of this chapter.

He put praising God first! What is your favourite praise song? Sing it now!

How do you start each day?

How do you begin your prayers?

Try thanking God for what you have before you ask him for anything else.

'To fast' means 'to go without food'. This is what Jesus did in the desert and Christians still do today during Lent and at other times. It happens for most of us during the hours of sleep, which is why the first meal of the day is called 'break-fast'.

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