

Lent and Easter - Ideas to use at home

Many people are accustomed to marking the Church's year in church, but this can also be an important part of the pattern of your year in the home. If you are a parent, use the ideas here to think about how you could mark Lent with your children. Don't try and do everything with them, or tell them all the information that is included here! Choose the things that you feel would be most appropriate for you and your family. However, this isn't just for people with children at home. Anyone can make many of these practices and patterns part of their home life during Lent. Bible references are included, and these are intended more for adults to read for themselves, or for older children and teenagers. If you have a children's Bible, you could find the equivalent passages there to share with your children. On some days, you could leave a Bible open at an appropriate passage, or mark the passage with an eye-catching bookmark.

If you are a minister or children's leader, you could pass on these ideas to parents in your congregation or children's group.

Here goes...

1. Lent

Talk with your children about why we mark Lent. Lent is the forty days before Easter. In case you try and count the days, take note that the forty days doesn't include Sundays. Lent reminds us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, getting ready for his ministry. Traditionally, it is regarded as a time of denial (hence the tradition of 'giving something up' for Lent) and repentance. It can help children to understand more about the purpose of Lent if you also talk in terms of it being a time of 'getting ready', of getting ready to celebrate the great festival of Easter, (just as Advent is a time of 'getting ready' to celebrate the great festival of Christmas). The story of Jesus in the wilderness can be found in St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 4, verses 1 to 11.

2. Shrove Tuesday

The day before Lent starts is Shrove Tuesday, commonly known as "Pancake Day". *Shrove* means pronounced forgiven for sins. Many years ago, people would go to church to be *shriven*, on the day before Lent starts, to confess their sins and receive forgiveness. Because Lent would be a time of meagre eating, pancakes were a means of using up all fine flour, eggs and milk in the house, in preparation.

On Shrove Tuesday have a *family pancake party* and talk about the tradition of Shrove Tuesday.

3. Ash Wednesday

Lent starts on Ash Wednesday. Ashes were a very old symbol of mourning and repentance, and in some churches they are used in the worship on Ash Wednesday. Traditionally, the ash is made by burning the leftover palm crosses from the previous year, and mixing this with a bit of water. The minister uses the ash to make the sign of the cross on each person's forehead, as a symbol of our need for Jesus in our lives. You may feel that this is a strange custom, but children are often keen to take part in this if they have the opportunity.

On Ash Wednesday, talk about why this day gets its name. Encourage everyone in your family to make a *Lenten resolution*. This could be something that you will do to help others, for example, *giving a regular amount of money* to a particular charity or cause. One way in which you could do this as a family, is to agree which charity or cause you will support during Lent, put a suitable pot on your table, and then agree that you will make a contribution at the main meal of each day. If your children have money of their own, they can be encouraged to give a small amount themselves, but even if this is not appropriate, it is valuable that they see their parents doing this.

People often talk about '*giving up*' particular food or drink for Lent, e.g. chocolate, sweets, or alcohol. If this is going to be part of your faith observance in Lent, it is important to recognise its significance in faith terms. Giving something up that we really enjoy doesn't mean that whatever is being given up is necessarily wrong in itself, but the act of giving something up for a period of time can be a means of coming closer to God. It helps to remind us of all the things that we don't really *need*, and of our ultimate dependence on God. It can help us to be more aware of temptation and of our need of God's help in resisting temptation. It can also help us to appreciate the gifts we have when parts of the world have so little.

Another idea linked to the idea of '*giving up*' something, is '*giving up*' a regular amount of time each day, perhaps to benefit others or to spend some quality time with God, perhaps by sharing in some appropriate Lent reading together or praying together. *Barnabas* produces some very good books that you could share with your children during Lent.

[Play and Pray through Lent](#) by Kay Warrington. This book uses a simple storycloth with 'easy to find' objects, to re-tell 7 passages from the Bible in short daily "episodes". There are also suggestions for how the daily ideas can be incorporated into the Sunday worship. If you and some other parents would like to use this book with your children during Lent, do talk to your minister about how the 'Sunday worship activities' could be incorporated into your church's worship.

[The Easter Experience](#) by Rachel Heathfield includes a daily Bible verse to think about, some thoughts to help children focus on aspects of their own experience which connect with the passage, and ideas for simple activities to help them think further about the passage.

4. Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is the fourth Sunday in Lent. Traditionally it's a day for having a break from the gloom of Lent. (The tradition of keeping this particular Sunday as Mothering Sunday goes back to Roman times when, as the Christian Church spread, there developed the pattern of honouring the Church as a Mother figure. From this, there

developed the tradition of children honouring their mothers on this day. When youngsters worked away from home, they were allowed to go home and visit their mothers on this day, and might take a Simnel cake as a gift.)

You could *make or buy a Simnel cake* to eat on Mothering Sunday. A Simnel cake is a fruit cake with a layer of marzipan baked inside, and eleven marzipan eggs on the top, symbolising eleven of Jesus' disciples. (The one missing stands for Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.) An easy way of making something like a Simnel cake is to buy a fruit cake and some marzipan. Roll out the marzipan to a size that will cover the top of the cake and leave enough left over to make 11 small balls or egg shapes. Melt some marmalade or apricot jam in a saucepan and brush over the top of the fruit cake. Lay the marzipan on top. Make 11 balls from the leftover marzipan, and put them around the edge of the top. Brown lightly under the grill

5. Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is the day when we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem. Crowds came out to cheer him, wave palm branches and lay down their coats on the ground. See St. Marks' Gospel, chapter 11, verse 1- 11

If you are given *Palm crosses* at church on Palm Sunday, bring them home and arrange them in a prominent place in your home. Alternatively, write on the date and use it as a bookmark, perhaps in a Bible. Children could use one as a marker in their children's Bible.

6. Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday. On this day, we remember the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. 'Maundy' comes from a Latin word which means *a command*, and it refers to Jesus' *command* that he gave at the Last Supper, that we must love one another as he loves us. (St. John's Gospel, chapter 15, verse 12). At the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, (St. John's Gospel, chapter 13, verses 1-9) and took the bread and the wine as signs of his body and blood which would be given for us through his death (St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, verses 17-25).

Include some *bread and wine/grape juice* as part of your main meal on Maundy Thursday. Talk about the Last Supper, the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples.

7. Good Friday

Good Friday is the day on which we remember that Jesus died on the cross. Children always ask why this day is called 'Good'. Some people say that it was originally 'God's Friday' and that the name we know developed from that. Another way of looking at it is to explain that although this was an awful day for Jesus, what he did was good for us. However, it is important to try and enter into the sadness and cruelty of this day in some way, and in a way that is appropriate for you and your children, even if only for a short time. Today, the mood of Good Friday is more difficult to appreciate because in many ways it seems like any other day, but you will enter into the joy of Easter Day so much more if you have been able to enter into something of the sadness of Good Friday.

On Good Friday, you could make *Hot Cross Buns* together and talk about why we have a cross on the top. If you are not big home bakers, you could do this more easily by buying

a packet bread mix. Although hot cross buns are in the shops for a long time before Good Friday, I suggest only having hot cross buns on Good Friday, because this then adds to their significance.

You could also *plant some seeds*, either in the garden, a window box or in pots. This helps us to think about the death of Jesus and his burial. When the seeds start to shoot and grow, you can then also talk about the new life that has come from the seeds that were buried in the ground.

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