

2018 Family Study for Lent

by MaryJane Pierce Norton

The season of Lent is a wonderful time to start weekly family devotions. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday (this year February 14, 2018) and lasts forty days (not including the Sundays). Sundays are excluded because those are the days we remember Jesus' resurrection. Every Sunday is a little celebration of Easter and thus a time of joy.

Historically, the Christian church has recognized Lent as a time to bring people closer to God. Individuals and groups engage in Bible study, in mission and service, and in fasting to prepare themselves for Easter.

The forty days of Lent are symbolic of Jesus' time in the wilderness before he began his ministry. During that time, he was tempted; but he stayed true to God.



Provided here are Scriptures and suggestions of activities to use during a family time of devotion for the weeks of Lent.

Ash Wednesday - February 14, 2018

Scripture: [Matthew 6:9-15](#)

Symbol: Praying Hands

Discussion & Activity: If you are able, attend an Ash Wednesday Service at church. Talk together as a family about the service and what it meant to you.

In reading Matthew 6:9-15, we are reminded to pray. And Jesus gives us some specific words to pray, which helps us remember specific people and things for which to pray. We pray for food, for treating people as we want to be treated, for forgiveness, for seeing God's goodness daily. Through the entire season of Lent, we will be observing practices of prayer and actions that help us live in ways that Jesus has taught us to live.

Fold your hands in prayer. Spend a minute in silence looking at your hands and thinking of all the times and

ways you pray. Talk together about times of prayer: meal times; morning prayers; evening prayers; quick thank-you prayers to God during the day. Talk about ways you can help one another remember to pray during this season of Lent. You may want to sing or read together the words of the hymn, "It's Me, It's Me, O Lord (Standing in the Need of Prayer)" found on page 352 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Often, Lent is seen as a "giving-up" time. Plan ways that Lent can be an "adding-life" time. In order to "add to," we often have to "give up." For instance, maybe someone wants to give up an hour of television in order to add an hour for Bible study. Prepare a list with each person's name on the list. Together, decide what each person will do to add life during Lent and what he or she might want to give up in order to do so. Think about such things as:

- recycling items;
- reading Scripture daily;
- sending a note of thanks each week to someone who has helped him/her feel God's love;
- adding a household task that helps everyone enjoy the home more;
- exercising each week.

Prayer:

Dear God: As we begin this time of Lent, help us be a praying people.

Remind us to pray every day. Guide us to make prayer an important part of what we do all through the day.

Amen.

(You may also want to say The Lord's Prayer together as part of your prayer time.)

Week 1—Week of February 18, 2018: Jesus Begins His Ministry

Scripture: [Mark 1:9-15](#)

Symbol: Water

Mark quickly moves from Jesus' baptism, to Jesus' temptations, to Jesus' ministry.

Discussion & Activity:

Have water in a pitcher and an empty bowl. Pour water from the pitcher into the bowl. You may each want to dip your fingers into the water. Talk together about all the things that water does: It nourishes us. It cleans us. It offers us beauty. It provides transportation. Think together about these and other ways that water makes our life healthy and fun and beautiful.

Talk together about baptism. When we use water in baptism, we remember again Jesus' baptism. If you would like, access this short video on baptism and view it together: www.umc.org/news-and-media/baptism-gods-gift-to-us-all.

This was the start of Jesus' ministry of teaching us about God. When Jesus was baptized, he heard a voice saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved." Naming is still an important part of our ritual of baptism. Create *Name Posters* for each person. Print your name on the poster. Then draw or cut out pictures from magazines that tell something about you. Say together the name of each family member, adding after the name, "God loves you and calls you by name."

Take time for family members to say how they are doing with what they have added to and given up in their life.

Prayer:

Gracious God:

We remember Jesus' baptism and give you thanks for the ways he has taught us to love you.

We remember that you call each of us by name, and we give you thanks for the ways you have created each of us.

Help us to remember we are not alone. We are your children and you are with us.

Help us to share this knowledge with others so that they too can know your love and care.

Amen.

Week 2—Week of February 25, 2018: Teach Me Lord

Scripture: [Mark 8:31-38](#)

Symbol: Bible

Discussion & Activity:

Jesus taught his disciples. Because his teachings are recorded in the Bible, he continues to teach us today. Think together about what you know that Jesus has taught us. What is your favorite Bible story or Scripture? Ask each person to name his or her favorite Bible story or Scripture.

Spend time telling one another stories from the Bible. OR select two or three Bible stories to read together.

Make your own “Important Scripture” booklets. Take one sheet of paper for each person in the family. Fold it so that you have four pages. On each page, name a Bible story or Scripture verse that is important to a member of the family. Draw pictures or write the Scripture or story on that page. Place these with your Bible and include these stories and verses in your prayer time during the week.

Take time for family members to say how they are doing with what they have added to and given up in their life.

Prayer:

Dear God:

Today we give thanks to you for Jesus and all that he taught us.

We thank you for our Bible and what we learn about you as we read and study the stories and verses contained in our Bible.

Sometimes we get too busy to read our Bible. This week, help us to take time to read and study stories and verses from the Bible.

Help us see ways for us to live out these stories and verses so that others will want to read and study the Bible as well.

Amen.

Week 3 — Week of March 4: A Place of Worship

Scripture: [John 2:13-22](#)

Symbol: Coins

Discussion & Activity:

As you read the Scripture, pass coins from one person to another. While this may be a familiar story for you, it may also feel out of place. We are used to this being part of what we consider during Holy Week. In the Gospel of John, it is placed early in Jesus’ ministry. Luke 19:46 contains this verse: “And he said, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.’”

We often have interesting reactions to money. On the one hand, money helps us obtain shelter, food, and things

we need for living. It enables us to take care of the poor, feed the hungry, and give so that others may come to know the love of God. On the other hand, money can also end up being the source of worship instead of God.

Jesus is reminding us that the purpose of the temple isn't for the exchange of goods. It is for worship of God.

Do you have a place in your home that helps you worship God? Maybe it's the table where you place a family Bible. Maybe it's a chair near a picture that reminds you of God. Maybe it's a worship center where you have placed a cross. If you don't have a place in your home that reminds you to stop and worship God, together decide on a place that will help you do so. Put something in the place you've selected to remind you of God: a Bible, a cross, a picture of Jesus, a poster of a Bible verse.

Decide on a project -- either through your church or that you can do on your own -- that helps those in need. Collect money for the remainder of Lent to give to this project. Make a container in which to place the money you will donate.

Take time for family members to say how they are doing with what they have added to and given up in their life.

Prayer:

Dear Lord. Help us in our worship of you.

Help us have places where we can recall the stories of your love, think about your son, Jesus, and all that he taught us, and give thanks for the world you have created.

Help us see ways to aid those in need.

Amen.

Week 4—Week of March 11, 2018: Jesus Brings Light

Scripture:[John 3:14-21](#)

Symbol: Candle

Discussion & Activity:

This week's reading includes one of the most familiar verses of Scripture: John 3:16. You may want to recite this together each day this week. In addition to this verse, consider the message of light in the world contained in verses 19-21.

Light the candle. Dim the lights and together look at the light from the candle. Think about these words in the Scripture: "...the light has come into the world..."

Recall together where you have seen God's light this week through the actions of others, in the news, in things that have happened in the family.

Create a poster of light. Cut out paper candles. Each day, write on a candle one way you have experienced God's presence in the world. Glue this onto a larger sheet of paper or poster board. Daily, give thanks for how you see God's light in the world.

Take time for family members to say how they are doing with what they have added to and given up in their life.

Prayer:

Gracious God:

We thank you so much for the many ways light comes into our world through Jesus.

We ask you to help us notice daily when people do good things for others;

when people care for the world you have created;
when nations treat other nations in just ways.
Help us notice the increasing light of each day.
Receive our thanks and praise.
In Jesus' name, we pray,
Amen.

Week 5 —Week of March 18, 2018: The Meaning of the Cross

Scripture:[John 12:20-33](#)

Symbol: Cross

Discussion & Activity:

Read together John 12:20-33. This is a very difficult passage for us to understand. Jesus is telling his followers that he must die, but that his death will give life to others. Sometimes it is hard for us to talk about Jesus dying on the cross. Because we know that he rose from the dead, we sometimes try to skip over his death. But this was what he was willing to do for people to know of God's love and care for all.

Pass around the cross. Feel each part of the cross. Recall that the cross on which Jesus died was not a smooth, beautiful object like the ones we wear today. Think about the pain that was part of Jesus' cross.

Ask each person in the family to say how it makes them feel to talk about Jesus dying on the cross. Remind one another that we use the sign of the cross to remember Jesus even today.

A food that is part of the Lenten season is Hot Cross Buns. You can bake these using prepared cinnamon roll dough or bread dough. Add a cross of white sugar frosting to the tops of the rolls. Eat these as a reminder that Jesus died so that all might know God.

Take time for family members to say how they are doing with what they have added to and given up in their life.

Prayer:

O God: It is hard to think of Jesus, whom we love so much, being put to death on the cross.

And yet, when we look at the cross, we are reminded that he did this as a gift so that we might be forgiven of our sins.

Thank you for the gift of your son Jesus.

Amen.

Week 6 —Week of March 25, 2018: The Meaning of the Resurrection

Scripture:[Mark 11:1-11](#); [Mark 14:1-15; 47](#)

Symbol: Egg

Discussion & Activity:

This week – Holy Week – we are in the midst of remembering Jesus' death. You may actually want to start the week reading the first passage from Mark, then reading the second passage later in the week.

Hold the egg in your hand. Think about how within the egg, there is life; but from the outside, we don't always see it. Name other things that may look dead, but really hold new life. Think about plant bulbs or bare tree limbs.

While we remember Jesus' death, we also prepare to celebrate his new life. After being so sad about Jesus' death, we learn that he is alive; and this fills us with joy! Ask each person in the family to tell of one thing about Easter that makes him or her happy. Then respond together by saying "Alleluia!"

Decorate Easter eggs together. We use eggs as a symbol of the new life we have because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Make a list of other things that help us remember new life.

Prayer:

God, as we remember Jesus' last week, remind us that through bad times and good times, you are with us.

Help us notice the suffering in the world around us.

Help us find ways to offer the blessings of Easter to those who are in need in our community.

Don't let us skip too quickly over the suffering just to get to the happiness of Easter.

Remind us that you are there for us in both bad times and good times.

Amen.

EASTER —April 1, 2018: Alleluia

Scripture: [John 20:1-18](#); [Mark 16:1-8](#)

Symbol: Butterfly

Discussion & Activity:

Attend an Easter Worship Service. List together those things that happened in worship that helped you know of God's love.

Sometimes Easter can be just a day when we eat chocolate, go to church, and are happy for a short time. But Easter gives us reason to be joyful every day. Look at a picture of a butterfly. Think about its beauty that emerges from a dull chrysalis.

Decide on one or two Easter actions to continue during the next weeks that help spread the news of God's love.

Ideas include: continuing to give to a charity; taking food each week to a food pantry; praying for one another;

writing a note each week to someone who might be lonely.

Prayer:

God:

We say together, "Alleluia" because Jesus rose from the dead.

We see new life around us, and we give thanks to you for all the signs of new life.

Help us be joyful this Easter and never forget the wonderful gift Jesus gave to us all. Amen.

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