



A Garden of
Devotion, Conversation
and
Reflection
for Lent and Easter

February 18 - April 5, 2015

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Easter Sunday

One Jesus is alive! The Lord has risen!
All **He has risen indeed! Hallelujah!**

Prayer Loving God, we thank you.
We thank you that Jesus is alive.
We thank you that Jesus is with us again.
We thank you that you love us this much.
Amen.

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder what the women were talking about as they walked together to the tomb?...

I wonder what they thought when they saw the stone was rolled away and Jesus was gone?...

I wonder how we would have responded to the news that Jesus was risen; that Jesus was alive?...

I wonder, would we tell?...who would we tell?...what would we say?

I wonder what this means for us?...

Response Bring out the musical instruments, the noisemakers and the kazoos to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. Play them loudly and with joy, for Jesus is alive this day and everyday!

Easter

Sunday, April 5

Today is a day of celebration. **The Lord has risen - he has risen indeed!**

Easter Sunday has arrived and the day is filled with wonder and mystery; joy and amazement.

Did you rise early today and attend a sunrise service? In worship did you sing loudly; shouting out to the world that Jesus lives today? Did you sit quietly, observing and pondering anew the events of this day?

Did your family share in a special breakfast together at home or at church? Change your tablecloth and napkins today to bright white in celebration of this high holy day?

Check out your garden. Is there evidence of new life there to see?

What does this story reveal to you? How is love revealed in the news that Jesus is alive? How will you receive this news? Will this Sunday of resurrection bring something new to your life?

Scripture readings

Sunday, April 5 - Mark 16:1-8 and/or John 20:1-18
and/or *365 Bible Stories* #333

Activity

Remove the stone covering the 'tomb' in the middle of your garden and view the empty tomb. Place silk butterflies and little silk flowers around your garden. How has your garden transformed over the days of Lent? How have you been transformed over the days of Lent? What is brand new on this Easter Day? I wonder what will happen in the days ahead?...

The Season of Lent

Lent is one of the most special seasons of the church year. It follows the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany during which we anticipated and prepared for the birth of Jesus and welcomed him as God come to earth to be with us. In the season of Lent we travel with Jesus through his adult life as he teaches and reveals to us who God is and how much God loves us. As the journey of Lent progresses we will travel with the Jesus through the final days of his life on earth, his final teachings to his followers, his arrest, trial and crucifixion. Our Lenten journey will conclude in dark times. And then we will wait...we will wait for what happens next.

The name for the season of Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word 'lencten' which means 'spring' and refers especially to the lengthening of the days that happen as winter comes to an end and the spring is upon us. It lasts 40 days, not counting the Sundays, which are always considered 'little Easters' each week. The number 40 reminds us of the time that Jesus spent in the wilderness after his baptism and before his ministry began. In the wilderness Jesus experienced a harsh time of trial and preparation. In the early church Lent was aside especially for the preparation of new converts for baptism on Easter. For everyone it was a time of self-examination, penitence, humility and fasting.

Through time the harsh demands of Lent have softened and people today look upon Lent as a time for growing, learning and reflecting on the meaning and experience of Jesus' ministry and his death on the cross. During Lent in these days, many people focus more time on prayer and meditation, others are more concerned with sharing God's love by helping others, some 'give up' something for Lent and others 'add something more' to remember this season and the love of God expressed in the ministry of Jesus.

This booklet is one of the many ways you and your family can journey through Lent and prepare together for Easter.

How To Use This Booklet

In this booklet you will find daily devotions for families of all ages to use as a guide as you journey together through Lent towards the cross and ultimately Easter morning.

Set aside some time each day to pray, sing, read scripture stories and reflect upon the wonder of what God is doing in these scripture and in this world. The best time to do this is over a family meal. Begin your meal together with the prayer/song written for that week and then read the daily scripture/story for that day. While you are eating discuss the questions written for your pondering and conversation. There are no 'right' answers to these questions. Use the questions to dig deep into the story and discover new learnings and ask questions of your own. After the meal give thanks to God and each other for the opportunity to be together learning and growing and discovering what Jesus, God with us, means to you and how that is changing as you discover new and awesome things about God's love for all of us.

Each day there are scriptures to be read. Consider using *The Children's Bible in 365 Stories* in place of, or in addition to the bible readings if you have younger children in your home. It is published by Lion Children's Books and is available for purchase from Augsburg Fortress. On the days when no bible story number is listed the scriptures are shorter and easier for younger ones.

You will also plant a small tabletop garden that will grow and change during this season. You may wish to prepare this garden at a congregational Lent Event. Or, you could gather the materials needed and set aside an evening at the beginning of Lent to construct your garden at home. Once it is planted set it on your dining table to enjoy and add little bits to from time to time.

Throughout your time there will be activities mentioned that your family can do together. These are not difficult and often make use of items you already own. We learn from all of our senses so taste, touch, hear, smell, see that the Lord is good.

Holy Week

Prayer

Loving God, we have been traveling with Jesus for many days now and things are getting more difficult. We have arrived in Jerusalem and the people are all around us. They are shouting and pushing and people are arguing. Jesus continues to care for all of them and even us as we travel too. This week Jesus is the most special person of all, and yet there are times when he is hated and horribly hurt. Things are about to change. We can feel it in the air. Draw near to us when the story becomes scary. Help us to understand what all of this means. Amen.

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder why these people to responded to Jesus the way they did?...

I wonder why some people saw Jesus' love and others did not?...

I wonder how Jesus was feeling in this story?...

I wonder what God's love means in this story?...

I wonder what is beautiful in this story?...

I wonder what God wants to share with us today?...

Sung Response

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest! (2X)
Lord we lift up your name with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord my God! Hosanna in the highest!
(Book of Praise #216)

Holy Week

Sunday, March 29 - Saturday, April 4

Weekly Theme

We have come to the last week of Lent. This is Holy Week and as Jesus enters into Jerusalem he is greeted by crowds celebrating his arrival. They cry out “Hosanna!... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” The people are desperate for change and believe that Jesus as the one who will make those changes happen. He has revealed in his ministry that he can heal the sick, lift up the poor and protect the downtrodden. He has taught his followers about a God that loves them, forgives them and wants them to come to him. The people believe that Jesus will overthrow the Roman occupation and usher in a new kingdom of God on earth.

As the week progresses jubilation begins to be shaken. Jesus speaks of going away, and dying, and being raised up, and his followers watch Jesus go down a different path than the one they are expecting. There are many things to wonder about this week; a donkey and a garden, palms and perfume, bread and wine, nails and a cross, and then...a tomb. Ponder anew the meaning and message of the events of Holy Week.

Scripture readings

Sunday, March 29 - Mark 11:1-11 and/or *365 Stories* #318

Monday, March 30 - Mark 14:3-9 and/or *365 Stories* # 317

Tuesday, March 31 - Mark 14:10-11 and/ *365 Stories* #322

Wednesday, April 1 - Mark 14:12-25 and/or *365 Stories* #325

Thursday, April 2 - Mark 14:32-50 and/or *365 Stories* #327

Friday, April 3 - Mark 15:25-41 and/or *365 Stories* #332 (do not read last two paragraphs)

Saturday, April 4 - Mark 15:42-47 and/or *365 Stories* #332 (last two paragraphs)

Activities

Place a cross made of twigs in the garden on Good Friday. Take it down on Holy Saturday.

The Wonder of Lent & Easter

As you enter into this season of Lent approach this time of devotion with the posture of wonder. When we read and reflect on the stories of scripture in ‘wonderment’ we allow ourselves to enter into a space where the mystery and possibility of God can be deeply contemplated. Wonder invites us to enter into a sacred place where previously held assumptions, knowledge and experience can be reconsidered and new understandings and experiences may be found.

The great Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, believes that ‘astonishment’ ought to be the first activity of all theological perception, inquiry and thought. He states that all those who read scripture and reflect on the meaning of what they discover there ought to be astonished and filled with wonder, becoming continually more and more astonished with each new approach. He says that, “In one way or another (we) are obliged to consider the question of the wonder of God.”

As you approach the stories of Lent and Easter lean in close to experience these stories from a fresh perspective and expectantly look for new details and new meanings with each reading. Ask wondering questions of the stories; ponder the places where the stories are set, wonder about the people you meet, look deeply at the relationships and feelings of all involved, and reflect on God’s message and intent for this world as shared through these stories. What is God saying in each story? Where is grace to be found? Lean in and discern with the whole of your being the fullness of what is there. And then, take a step back in awe and delight in all that God has done and is doing in this season of Lent and Easter and what God is calling you to hear and do.

Notes: Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston) 64-73.

A Lenten Garden

As a growing and transforming visual symbol of Lent and Easter make a mini garden for the center of your dining table. To make this garden you will need the following:

a mini terra cotta pot (approx. 2" wide)
a shallow terra cotta saucer/tray (approx. 10" wide)
small pebbles (approx. a cup)
potting soil
grass seed, and/or another fast growing ground cover
a river rock (a bit wider than the mouth of the mini pot)
spray water bottle

1. Place the mini pot on its side in the center of the terra cotta saucer. This will be the tomb in the garden.
2. Fill 3/4 of the surface of the saucer with potting soil placing it around the sides of the mini pot and packing soil up and over the sides and bottom of the mini pot, covering the body of the mini pot until just its mouth visible.
3. Place the small pebbles in the saucer in front of the mouth of the mini pot filling up the last 1/4 of the saucer's surface.
4. Place the larger river rock over the mouth of the mini pot.
5. Sprinkle grass seed over the soil.
6. Spray the soil lightly every day with the water bottle.
7. Place the saucer in filtered sunlight and watch and wait for new life to spring forth.

Over the days of Lent you will be adding new things to the garden. Many of these things can be found easily in your home. You may wish to collect in advance: a few mini animals, a few small twigs, a small piece of card stock, small silk flowers and butterflies, and a glue gun.

Prayer

Dear Jesus,
Many times, when you told parables, you said;
"Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!"
We want to listen.
We want to understand.
We want to experience, your joy and wonder.
Show us, Jesus, show us.
Amen.

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder what the kingdom of God is?...

I wonder where the kingdom of God is?...

I wonder how the leaven (yeast) makes the bread expand?...

I wonder how the seeds felt about the places they landed?...

I wonder how we can be salt and light?...

I wonder how the sheep felt when the shepherd rescued it and carried it home?...

I wonder how the shepherd cares for all of the sheep?...

I wonder who my neighbour is, and how I could help?...

I wonder what Jesus said to the children, and how they felt when Jesus spoke to them?...

Sunday, March 22 - Saturday, March 28

Weekly theme

This week we will read some of parables that Jesus told. These wonderful stories are so simple and yet so rich with layers of meaning. With each parable chat about what you know about the common, everyday things mentioned in the parable. Jesus uses yeast, sheep, and seeds to tell us special things about God's love and what God thinks about his creation. Pay attention with each parable to Jesus' audience; think about who the story was told to. Why would Jesus want to tell this story to this group of people? Look also for clues to the deeper meaning of each parable. Does Jesus introduce the parable by saying what the parable is about to reveal? Compare each of the parables to each other and reflect each day what new thing you are learning about God.

Scripture Readings

Sunday, March 22 - Matt. 13:33 and/or *365 Stories* #271

Monday, March 23 - Mark 4:1-9 and/or *365 Stories* #270

Tuesday, March 24 - Matt. 5:13-16 and/or *365 Stories* #281

Wednesday, March 25 - Luke 15:3-7 and/or *365 Stories* #286

Thursday, March 26 - John 10:2-5, 11-18 and/or *365 Stories* #307

Friday, March 27 - Luke 10:25-37 and/or *365 Stories* #302

Saturday, March 28 - Mark 10:13-16 and/or *365 Stories* #305

Activities

This week there are many things to taste and touch and observe. Place yeast in warm, sugary water and watch it grow, and/or bake some bread to enjoy. Look carefully at your garden and see how the seed is growing in all of the different places; around the rocks, under the animals, in the shadows. Tell personal stories of being lost and being found. Each of the parables also points also to a new way of living into God's kingdom. Make plans together to join this kingdom of God way of life.



adapted from wearethatfamily.com/2012/03/diy-mini-resurrection-garden/

Wednesday, February 18 - Saturday, February 21

Weekly Theme

We begin Lent with two readings from the prophet Joel that tell us to blow the trumpets and sanctify a fast, for the day of the Lord is coming near. Joel's rural community has experienced an agricultural crisis that has included a plague of locusts. Joel tells his listeners that the days ahead need to be different. The day of the Lord is coming and they must gather and tell God's story to their children. They are moving into a time out of time; betwixt and between ordinary time. These special times are to be marked with special gatherings, prayers and activities.

How will your family define time during these days; how will you prepare to wonder during these days of Lent or Easter. As a family decide how you will pray together, read the stories together, and talk about each of the stories you will encounter in these days. Commit together to take time and enjoy this special time together.

Scripture Readings

Ash Wednesday, February 18 - Joel 2:1-2

Thursday, February 19 - Joel 2:15-16

Friday, February 20 - Matt. 6:1-6 and/or *365 Stories* #262

Saturday, February 21 - Luke 18:9-14 and/or *365 Stories* #263

Activities

If you have not made your tabletop Lenten garden yet, do that this week to give it ample time to grow. Place it on the dining table so you can observe its transformation.

You may wish to think of other ways you mark this time out of time. Think of new foods you may try. Cover the table with a purple table cloth and use purple napkins. Use special dishes. Set aside at least one day per week to eat 'lightly' and donate generously to a local food bank. You could invite extended family, friends and new neighbours to join you for meals during this season and share these stories together.

Prayer

This week begin with a minute of silence. You may wish to offer a silent prayer to God, or reflect on the day you've experienced. Where did you see evidence of God's handiwork today; when did you hear God cry out in sorrow?

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder why the people forgot God?...

I wonder what happens when the people look up at the snake?...

I wonder why Jesus is compared to the snake?...

I wonder why Jesus healed these people?...

I wonder what a miracle is?...

I wonder if miracles happen today?...

I wonder who Jesus is?...

Response

Say or sing together a poem or song you have written that speaks of who Jesus is to your family. If you have written more than one poem or song make use of one each evening.

Sunday, March 15 - Saturday, March 21

Weekly Theme

This week we look at two seemingly different trains of thought. The first involves the exodus story of the people of God. In this story the people have grown weary of the time in the desert; they have been on this journey for so long and they are bored with a steady diet of manna. They complain constantly to Moses about the time it's taking to get to the promised land and they have become distracted and begin to set their eyes on other things. The people of God turn away from God. Snakes invade the camp and bite at the heels of the people. God tells Moses to place a snake out of bronze high on a stake and have the people set their eyes on the snake. The people begin to get well again and return to God. John uses this image of looking upon the snake to show how Jesus must be lifted up.

For the rest of the week we will read about the miracles of Jesus. We often focus on the particular healing done for each person, but perhaps this week you could direct your attention to Jesus, the one being lifted up in each story. Who is Jesus and what is the miracle in each of the stories. Could Jesus be the miracle?

Scripture Readings

Sunday, March 15 - Numbers 21:4-9 and/or *365 Stories* #72

Monday, March 16 - John 3:14-21

Tuesday, March 17 - Mark 2:1-12 and/or *365 Stories* #266

Wednesday, March 18 - Mark 6:30-44 and/or *365 Stories* #282

Thursday, March 19 - Mark 8:22-26 and/or *365 Stories* #299

Friday, March 20 - Mark 10:46-52 and/or *365 Stories* #313

Saturday, March 21 - Mark 8:27-30 and/or *365 Stories* #293

Activities

Poetry is a wonderful way of expressing our faith. Try writing poems or songs this week that speaks of Jesus and who Jesus is to you. Perhaps you will write a poem or song that you add a new verse onto each day, reflecting the new names and understandings you have for Jesus. Use these poems in your devotions together.

Prayer

Lord teach us to pray:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder what the day of the Lord is?...

I wonder why we should tremble?...

I wonder what this special time will be like?...

I wonder what kind of stories we need to hear?...

I wonder how I should pray?...

I wonder how God receives my prayers?...

I wonder how we will spend this time together during Lent?...

I wonder what God has to share with us?...

Response

On Wednesday close your time together with the 'blaring of trumpets'. Find some musical instruments, and/or kazoos and play them as loud as you can. Make lots of music/noise to mark this new time we are starting - a time out of time. Then put those instruments away and don't bring them back out again until Easter Sunday.

Sunday, February 22 - Saturday, February 28

Weekly Theme

Let's start at the very beginning. We're going all the way back to creation when God brought life out of chaos. The chaos was made up of emptiness, darkness and water. I wonder what God was dreaming of when creation was about to happen? Out of chaos the wind of God spoke light into existence as the first act of creation. Day by day life began to burst forth by the word of God. And everything that God created was good. I wonder what God did to celebrate this great new thing?

Humanity, in the image of God, joined creation and was entrusted with keeping creation safe and cared for. Yet, men and women have struggled with keeping up with the creativity of God. So much so that God decided to start over again using Noah and his family in this new creation. After the flood God made a covenant with Noah and all of his descendants to never ever destroy creation again. And, as God's signature, he set a rainbow in the sky. Yet we have continued to destroy and turn our backs on God.

And so, God gave a new thing to humanity, a Son.

Scripture Readings

Sunday, February 22 - Genesis 1:1-25 and/or *365 Stories* #1
Monday, February 23 - Genesis 1:26-2:3 and/or *365 Stories* #2
Tuesday, February 24 - Genesis 9:1-7 and/or *365 Stories* #9
Wednesday, February 25 - Genesis 9:8-17 and/or *365 Stories* #10
Thursday, February 26 - Mark 1:1-8 and/or *365 Stories* #249
Friday, February 27 - Mark 1:9-11 and/or *365 Stories* #250
Saturday, February 28 - Mark 1:12-15 and/or *365 Stories* #252

Activities

As you think about creation place some small animals in your tabletop garden. As you read about God's covenant create a colourful rainbow sign attached to a twig and place it on a high spot in your garden for everyone to see.

Prayer

One Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
All They are like trees planted by streams of water,
One **which yield their fruit in its season, and their**
All **leaves do not wither.**
One In all that they do, they prosper.

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder why God felt rules were important?...

I wonder what God was trying to reveal to the people through all of these rules?...

I wonder how the people responded to a set of rules to adhere to?...

I wonder what is so important about these rules?...

I wonder why Jesus broke some rules and followed others?...

I wonder where we see God's glory revealed?...

I wonder what Jesus meant when he said that the people could destroy the temple and he could restore it in three days?...

Sung Response

A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this shall all know you are my disciples:
if you have love one for another. (repeat last 2 lines)
(Book of Praise #225)

Sunday, March 8 - Saturday, March 14

Weekly Theme

Rules, rules, rules! We're not terribly fond of rules. And what is there to wonder about rules - they are just there to be followed, aren't they?

In the midst of learning how to follow God, God set some rules in place. In fact over time he set a lot of rules in place. Why? What are they for? How do they make us better followers of Jesus? And are some rules more important than others? Are there rules that are meant to be broken?

Jesus was often questioned and challenged on his following of the rules. Seek this week for a deeper understanding of the rules and what they are really all about. What are the rules that make your family more faithful? What are the rules that hinder faithfulness?

Scripture Readings

Sunday, March 8 - Exodus 19:1-8, 10-11, 16-20
and/or *365 Stories* #61

Monday, March 9 - Exodus 20:1-12 and/or *365 Stories* #62

Tuesday, March 10 - Exodus 20:13-17 and/or *365 Stories* #63

Wednesday, March 11 - Exodus 21-23 (skim the many rules listed)
and/or *365 Stories* #64

Thursday, March 12 - Mark 3:1-6 and/or *365 Stories* #268

Friday, March 13 - John 2:1-11 and/or *365 Stories* #318

Saturday, March 14 - John 2:13-22 and/or *365 Stories* #319

Activities

Take some time this week to summarize the most important rules for your family. Can you get your family 'rules' summarized in just a few words? Write them down, discuss them, change them and seek to understand together how they shape and form you as children of God. When your rules are agreed upon, write them on a tiny piece of card stock and attach them to a twig and place this sign in your tabletop garden.

Prayer

Sing *Johnny Appleseed* together and remember the story of the pioneer John Chapman and his care for God's wonderful creation.

**O the Lord is good to me,
and so I thank the Lord.
For giving me the things I need;
the sun and the rain and the appleseed.
The Lord is good to me!**

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder how the water and the land, the trees and plants, the sea creatures, the birds and animals felt about this new thing?...

I wonder what God expects of us as we care for creation?...

I wonder if God has ever cried over creation?...

I wonder if I am a part of God's covenant with Noah and his descendants?...

I wonder if there are other messengers of Jesus?...

I wonder if 40 is a special number?...

Response

One: For thus says the Lord: ...Surely I know the plans I have for you,

All: **Plans for our welfare and not for harm, to give us a future with hope.**

One: When we call upon God and come and pray, God will hear us.

All: **When we search for God, we will find God.**

Thanks be to God

(adapted from Jeremiah 29:10-13)

Sunday, March 1 - Saturday, March 7

Weekly Theme

God made a covenant with Noah never to destroy the living things on the earth. Now God is reaching out to another faithful family and establishing a covenant with Abram and his wife Sarai. Abram and Sarai are a very old couple and more than anything they wanted children to make their life rich and to pass on their faith and inheritance to. Their hope for a child is long gone. Yet, we can expect God to do the unexpected. God promised Abram a son, and more than a son, God promises Abram heirs more numerous than the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert. God covenants to give Abram a family, and Abram promises that his family will love God from one generation to the next. In sealing this covenant God changes Abram and Sarai's names to show that things are new and different.

In the New Testament stories this week we hear about another name change. One of Jesus' very first disciples gets a name change too. Names are filled with great meaning. Look into the meaning of the new names given in these stories. What might God expect of these newly named people?

What else is unexpected this week?

Scripture Readings

Sunday, March 1 - Genesis 12:1-5b and/or *365 Stories* #12
Monday, March 2 - Genesis 13:5-12 and/or *365 Stories* #13
Tuesday, March 3 - Genesis 15:1-6 and/or *365 Stories* #14
Wednesday, March 4 - Genesis 17:1-7
Thursday, March 5 - John 1:5-42 and/or *365 Stories* #251
Friday, March 6 - Mark 8:31-38 and/or *365 Stories* #294
Saturday, March 7 - Mark 9:2-9 and/or *365 Stories* #295

Activities

What do the names of your family members mean? Who gave each person their name? Discover the meaning behind your names.

Prayer All

**Come Lord Jesus, be our guest.
Let this day to us be blessed.**

Read Today's Scripture Story

Dinner Conversation

I wonder how Abram felt leaving his home to go live someplace he had never been before?...

I wonder what it was like to travel such a long way with so many people and things?...

I wonder how Lot felt when Abram set off to the west, and how Abram felt when Lot chose the east?...

I wonder what Abram told Sarai after looking at the stars with God?...

I wonder what happens to us when our name gets changed?...

I wonder what the disciples thought when Jesus told them he would be arrested and be killed?...

I wonder how Jesus felt when when he dazzled with light on the top of the mountain?...

Response

Bless each other with the traditional blessing used in worship, but this time use each other's names in the blessing. Use different names each night (ie full names, nick names, baby names, names of endearment).

The Lord be with you (name) .
And, also with you (name) .