

## Christian Formation Ideas for Lent: Year C

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“Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencton* – meaning “spring” or “lengthening” from the time of year when the days grow long. The season begins on Ash Wednesday (February 13, 2013) and ends with the Easter Triduum (Maundy Thursday through Easter Day), covering 40 days (excluding Sundays which are little feasts of the Resurrection). Some believe that the word “Lent” may derive from the Latin *lentare*, which means, “to bend.” This understanding reinforces a sense of Lent as a time of preparation for personal and collective transformation. Having nurtured ourselves through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Lent becomes the time to look truthfully at ourselves and make changes.

In the early church, Lent was the time of preparation for the Easter, *Pascha* (Christian Passover) baptism of converts to the faith. Persons were to receive the sacrament of “new birth” following a period of fasting, penitence and preparation. Just as the children of Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Egyptian slavery, we are delivered from the bondage of sin. The bible readings appointed for the Sundays in Lent continue to offer us a short course on the meaning of baptism – our sacrament of initiation into the Body of Christ.

The Great Fifty Days of Easter are the time when those who have reaffirmed their baptismal vows or have been baptized at the Easter Vigil reflect on the meaning of their baptism. Through the lectionary texts they explore the “mysteries” of their faith. The early church called this period of the process *mystagogia*. Today the whole church enters into this period of uncovering anew the mysteries of faith expressed in sacrament, word, and life lived for others. Each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist using Eucharistic Prayer A, we say these words:

*We proclaim the mystery of faith:  
Christ has died. Christ is risen.  
Christ will come again. (BCP 363)*

## Traditions of Lent

### *Liturgical Colors:*

- **Purple** is used in vestments and altar hangings for penitence and royalty.
- **Rough linen** or unbleached fabric can also reflect the mood of Old Testament mourning (wearing sackcloth)

### *Symbols:*

- **Ashes** (prepared from the previous year's palms symbolize our mortality and sorrow for our sins. Job (Job 42:6) and the king of Ninevah (Jonah 3:6) put ashes on their foreheads as a sign of repentance, while also wearing sackcloth
- **Responses & Music** follows a more contemplative stance. Joyful canticles, Alleluias and the *Gloria in excelsis* are omitted from worship. Altar flowers may also be absent.

### *Notable days and practices:*

- **Shrove Tuesday** (the day before Ash Wednesday) was the day all households were to use up all milk, eggs and fat to prepare for the strict fasting of Lent. These ingredients were made into pancakes, a meal which came to symbolize preparation for the discipline of Lent, from the English tradition. "Shrove" comes from the verb "to shrive" (to confess and receive absolution) prior to the start of the Lenten season. Other names for this day include *Carnival* (farewell to meat) and *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday of the French tradition).
- **Ash Wednesday** takes its name from the ashes used as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to publicly signify contrition. With roots in the ancient Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, it is a day to honestly face one's self – to be one with God, our neighbor, all of creation and ourselves. It began to be observed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century as a time for disciplining penitents. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Christians had come to recognize the universal need for self-examination and repentance. Believers began to be blessed with ashes on their foreheads as they began their Lenten fast as a reminder that we are dust, and to dust we return.
- **Retreats** are a common practice during Lent; a time set aside for teaching and learning, fasting and self-denial, meditation, quiet and spiritual growth in our relationship with God
- **Study and Preparation** is also customary for Christians and many churches plan special programs in which prayer practices, Bible study or service to others are offered. It is a time for those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil (or to be Confirmed in the spring) to study and reflect on the Christian faith and their relationship to Jesus Christ.

## Preparation for Baptism in Year C

The lectionary readings for Lent in Year C can be used to explore the five great themes related to Baptism. These ideas come from *The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Education, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition* by Sharon Ely Pearson and Robyn Szoke (Morehouse, 2009).

### The First Sunday in Lent

#### *Baptismal Theme: **Creed***

The Apostles' Creed, in which belief leads to faithfulness: *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth . . .* (BCP304)

#### *Baptismal theme, expressed in the lectionary readings*

Belief and acceptance of Jesus as Lord. The ancient creed outline God's mighty acts for Israel spoken at the time of offering the first fruits of the harvest is matched in this week's reading by the simple statement from Romans, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus responded to temptation by his own "creed" take from Deuteronomy 4:4, 8, 12: ". . . One does not live by bread alone . . . Worship the Lord our God, and serve only him. . . Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

### The Second Sunday in Lent

#### *Baptismal Theme: **Covenant***

The Baptismal Covenant: *Let us join with those who are committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.* (BCP 303)

#### *Baptismal theme expressed in the lectionary readings*

The Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer includes The Apostles' Creed followed by five statements of our commitment to live according to our beliefs. The response to each statement of commitment is the same: "I will, with God's help." Keeping covenant means making right choices (the narrow road) and joining Jesus "on the way" to Jerusalem.

### The Third Sunday in Lent

#### *Baptismal Theme: **Calling***

The welcome given to the newly baptized: *We receive you into the household of Christ. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.* (BCP 308)

#### *Baptismal theme expressed in the lectionary readings*

Baptism is a calling into ministry. For the Christian, baptism is the "burning bush" experience that makes sense of the rest of one's life in Christ. The fact that baptism comes for many in infancy means that the church must constantly look back to baptism to reaffirm the sacred calling to participate with God in continuing acts of salvation. The gospel reading is a solemn reminder that with the call comes accountability. God expects the Christian and the church to bear fruit: "If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." (Luke 12:9)

*The Fourth Sunday in Lent**Baptismal Theme: Eucharist*

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of baptismal renewal and reconciliation, and a foretaste of the Reign of God: *Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good your vows to the Most High.* (Offertory sentence at the Eucharist, BCP 376)

*Baptismal themes expressed in the lectionary readings*

“Holy Baptism is appropriately administered with the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast” (BCP 298). It has been said that the Eucharist is the only “repeatable” part of the baptismal rite. Those made sons and daughters of God at their baptism are welcomed to the feast of the Eucharist as the prodigal son was welcomed by his father with sandals, a ring, and feasting. Christians are fed for the journey both as a remembrance and as a promise.

*The Fifth Sunday in Lent**Baptismal theme: Promise*

The Thanksgiving over the Water: We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (BCP 306-307)

*Baptismal theme expressed in the lectionary readings*

God did a “new thing” as Moses led the slaves of Egypt through the water of the Sea of Reeds into the wilderness at Sinai. God did a “new thing” as Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and celebrated Passover in the Promised Land. God promises a “new thing,” a “new Exodus” when water will flow in the desert for God’s people. God does a “new thing” in leading Christians into the waters of baptism where they are “buried with Christ” so that they may “share in his resurrection.”



## Ideas For Children and Their Families

### Pancake Relay

*Materials:* Frisbees or plastic coffee can lids, 1 per team (this is to replace real pancakes – so no edible food is used), paper or plastic dinner plates, 1 per team

*Play:*

1. Divide participants into relay teams of 6-8 people and have them each form a line, one behind the other at a 'starting line.'
2. Give the starting participant on each team a "pancake" and a dinner plate.
3. Each participant runs to a predetermined finish line and then back to the team, flipping the pancake as they run. Set a minimum number of flips (perhaps 6).
4. As each participant returns to the team, he or she should pass the pancake and plate to the next in line.

### Making Pretzels

The pretzel has been used during Lent for over 1500 years. It is thought that originally pretzels were made by monks to resemble arms crossed in prayer. These breads were called "little arms." This can have deep spiritual meaning for us during Lent. Since basically only flour and water are used, pretzels can remind us of fasting.

*Ingredients:* 1 cake yeast, 1 ½ cup warm water, 1 tsp. salt, 1 T. sugar, 4 cups flour

*Directions:* Dissolve yeast in warm water and sugar for about 5 minutes. Mix the flour and salt and add yeast mixture. Knead well (7-8 minutes), adding more flour if necessary to form firm dough. Let rise, covered, in a greased bowl until double. Preheat oven to 475°F. Divide dough into 32 equal parts. Roll each part into a snakelike strand, form strand into pretzel shape, and place on greased baking sheet. Brush with beaten egg and sprinkle with coarse salt if desired. Bake for about 10 minutes or until done.



*Heavenly Father, we ask you to bless these little breads. Each time we eat them may we be reminded of the special season we are in and that through prayer we will become better people to each other. Let us not forget those who are in need of our prayers daily. Keep your loving arms around us, O Father, to protect us always. Amen.*

## Ash Wednesday Scavenger Hunt

Invite older children to search for hidden items (a knotted rope, chocolate bar wrapper, bandage, bag of sand or stones, pictures of homebound parishioners, paper heart or happy face, taped-shut box, sock or sweater, light bulb). When all have been found, ask the participants to bring them forward at the appropriate times during the reading of an adaptation of Isaiah 58:

Fast by outward acts of justice and mercy rather than in ritualistic fashion. Untie those who are unfairly bound (rope), take away heavy loads from people who are worn out (sand or stones), set free everyone you know who feels trapped (box), share the food you have with the very hungry (candy wrapper), look after the ones whom everyone forgets (pictures), share your clothes with the shivery and poorly dressed (sock or sweater), be kind to your own family (heart or face). If you do these things, your life will be like God's own sun (light bulb), and whatever hurts in your life will be quickly healed (bandage).

## Putting Away the Alleluia

The Church has the custom of not speaking or singing the word "Alleluia" during Lent. Expressing joy, putting it "away" for Lent is like putting away a favorite toy for a while – to appreciate it better later. Churches often take banners down; eliminate flowers in the sanctuary. A symbolic ritual to help children move into this season is to "say goodbye" to the Alleluia. Decorate a banner or poster board with the word "Alleluia" in large letters. Everyone can participate in decorating the poster with markers, glitter, stickers, sequins, etc. Using any of the prayers or rituals below, it can then be 'veiled,' put in a dark corner or closet of the church, or physically buried (make sure you put it in a waterproof bag or container and mark the spot!). On Easter, there can be a celebration as it is unburied!

## A Ritual for Saying "Goodbye"

*Reading:* Psalm 112:1-7

*Song:* A favorite Alleluia song

*Leader:* It's time to say goodbye to our friend, the Alleluia. We will let it rest for a while, so that it will return to us at Easter full of enthusiasm to remind us again who we really are: loved children of God.

*Prayer:* Lord God, our Creator, as we bury this sign of heaven's song, help us to turn ourselves to living a good Lent. Help us to give up things that stand between your love and us, and walk with Jesus on the road that leads us closer to you. We give up our Alleluia for a little while so that we may appreciate the music in our heart and life when we sing it again at Easter. Amen.

*Leader:* You are now invited to say your own good-bye to the Alleluia, if you wish.

*Prayer:* Lord, we are giving up for a time the song of heaven so that we may prepare our hearts and minds to be ready for heaven. Help us, in Jesus, to die to selfish habits that keep us from you and to live more fully your peace and joy. Help us to be renewed in your Spirit as we live this holy season of Lent. Amen.

(Adapted from *Arts and Crafts for Lent: From Mardi Gras to Passiontide* by Jeanne Heiberg (1997: Paulist Press))

## Bury the “Alleluia”

Leader: (Shout) ALLELUIA

Children: (Shout) **Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

Forty days of Lent: Jesus spent 40 days in the desert to seek God’s will.

Then He taught, preached, and healed to show God’s love. Alleluia.

**Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday: We are marked by the sign of the cross

because we came from ashes and we return to ashes. Alleluia.

**Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

Lent ends with Palm Sunday: A parade with branches when Jesus came into Jerusalem  
the first day of Holy week. Alleluia.

**Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

He celebrated the Last Supper: Was betrayed with a kiss, was accused and whipped.

He hung on a cross, laid in a tomb, and rose on Easter that we may see God’s love. Alleluia.

**Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

During Lent we bury the “alleluia” to remember that He died for us.

It returns on Easter with new life in Christ. Alleluia.

**Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

(Shout) ALLELUIA.

(Shout) **Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

(whisper) Alleluia.

(whisper) **Praise the Lord. Alleluia.**

(Silently bury the “alleluia”)

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## Make a Prayer Cloth

Make a prayer cloth for a prayer table or the center of the family dinner (or classroom).

*Materials:* unbleached muslin or white cloth, magic markers, paper, pencils, scissors, ruler

*Preparation:*

1. Count the number of people who will contribute to the prayer cloth and divide it so that everyone will have a section. Rule out vertical and horizontal lines to form squares, or draw circles around plates or form irregular patchwork sections.
2. Talk about why it is important to pray: We give a little of our time and attention to God, who gives us everything. We put aside busy thoughts to make room in our minds and hearts for God and the wonderful gifts God wants us to give us: peace, joy, light, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, healing, happiness – the expansion of all our talents and gifts.
3. Each person chooses a section of the cloth to draw a symbol of a treasure that prayer brings, such as a dove, peace sign, heart, sun, jeweled cross, treasure box, rainbow, lamb, candle, etc.
4. Draw the symbol on the paper with pencil. Outline it with a dark marker.
5. Place the paper drawing under the cloth, to form a guide on the cloth for drawing. Trace the drawing with markers, filling in where needed.

## Almsgiving and Outreach

Giving to others is important throughout the year, but especially during Lent. Households can prayerfully consider what portion of their income they will share with the poor or those in need. Collecting money or food for those in need is an act of discipleship that recalls the practice of almsgiving of the early Church. There are a number of worldwide organizations, as well as local charities in



addition to specific Episcopal initiatives that respond to disasters and provide additional ways for individuals to express their Lenten devotion. Using a family mite-box or jar/bowl for coins located at a central place where the family gathers for meals and prayers of thanksgiving can serve as a reminder to keep those who are in need foremost in our thoughts. Each evening the following table blessing can be prayed:

*I was hungry:* And you gave me food.

*I was thirsty:* And you gave me drink.

*I was a stranger:* And you welcomed me.

*I was naked:* And you clothed me.

*I was ill:* And you comforted me.

*I was in jail:* And you came to see me.

Lord Jesus Christ, make our Lenten offerings turn us toward all our brothers and sisters who are in need. Bless this table, our good food, and ourselves. Send us through Lent with good cheer, and bring us to the fullness of your Passover. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Additional Resources for Families and Multi-Generational Activities During Lent

*Alleluia! Messages for Children on Lent and Easter Themes* by Elaine Ward (2003: CSS Publishing) Explanations on the various themes and symbols for Lent and Easter

*Before and After Easter: Activities and Ideas – Lent to Pentecost* by Debbie Trafton O’Neal (2000: Augsburg) Ideas and activities to do with children.

*Bible Stories for the Forty Days* by Melissa Musick Nussbaum (Liturgy Training Publications) offers a story from the Bible for each day of Lent, accompanied by colorful illustrations. Characters from the Old and New Testaments take us through the forty days of preparation towards Easter joy.

[CandlePress](#) booklets offer a variety of activities on a theme that can take place over the weeks of Lent.

*Family Countdown to Easter: A Day-By-Day Celebration: With Stickers* by Debbie Trafton O’Neal (1999: Augsburg) is a day at a glance with stickers to count the days from Shrove Tuesday to Easter.

*Forty Days and Forty Nights: A Lenten Ark Moving Toward Easter* by Judy Jarrett and Peter Mazar (Liturgy Training Publications) is a calendar for counting down the days of Lent by opening one window per day on this three-dimensional Noah’s ark. A companion booklet connects the animals on the ark with prayer and Lenten values.

[Give Us This Day: Lenten Reflections on Baking Bread and Discipleship](#) (2007: Seabury Books) Using bread as a metaphor for the spiritual journey, the book includes recipes for families, church school classes and youth groups as well as individuals that connects baking, food and social justice along with prayer and reflections. Mediations for every day in Lent – from Shrove Tuesday pancakes to Easter Challah Bread.

[Growing Together 2: Sacred Celebrations for Spring and Summer](#) (2012: Morehouse Education Resources) is a downloadable volume full of activities for spring and summer seasons, including Mardi Gras, Lent, and Easter.

*Lent and Easter in the Domestic Church: Activities to Celebrate Catholic Liturgical Seasons* by Catherine and Peter Fournier (2002: Ignatius Press) has many activities for experiencing Lent at home.

*Things to Make and Do for Lent and Easter* by Martha Bettis Gee (1998: Bridge Resources) Numerous projects and activities for children.

[\*Under the Fig Tree: Visual Prayers and Poems\*](#) for Lent by Roger Hutchison (2015: Morehouse) offers an image for each day of Lent (thru Easter) along with a piece of scripture for reflection. A calendar poster, [\*Gather, Share, Remember\*](#) is also available.

*What is Lent?* A coloring book from Channing Bete, Inc. (Scriptographic) offers puzzles and coloring pages.

[\*What We Do In Lent: A Child's Activity Book\*](#) by Anne E. Kitch (2007: Morehouse Publishing) A pen-and-ink book for children ages 4-7 filled with puzzles, word games, and pictures along with explanations about the season of Lent.