

# EASTER

## April 16: Alleluia

Scripture: **Luke 24:1-12**

Symbol: Butterfly

**Discussion & Activity:** As with the women and Peter, we come to Easter Sunday realizing that Jesus lives. Notice when you read the Scripture the feelings that are described. List together what you feel the women and Peter were feeling. Which of these feelings do you think you might have felt on that Easter morning? When we are faced with something unexpected, as human beings, we may be confused, or frightened, or puzzled before we come to the full joy of realizing what has happened. That was true of Jesus' friends on Easter morning. Now we face Easter with joy and gladness because we know Jesus lives.

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 the picture of the 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.



# 2017 Family/Small Group Study for Lent



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**Intention:** To come together as small groups and begin a 6 week journey through Lent.

These groups can gather based on *geographical locations* and people can invite neighbors...

-or-

Form groups and *use the church* as a place to gather....

-or-

Meet at *locations specific to a group's needs*.

We will be providing the opportunity to create and/or join an intentional small group designed for spiritual growth with a limited time commitment. This will be a great opportunity to practice our discipleship outside the church!

## Week 6

### ***Week of April 9: The Meaning of the Resurrection***

**Scripture:** **Luke 22:14-23; Luke 23:1-49**

**Symbol:** Egg

**Discussion & Activity:** This week – Holy Week – we are in the midst of remembering Jesus' death. You may want to start the week reading the first passage from Luke; then read the second passage later in the week. The discussion centers around the final events of Jesus' life, ending with his death on the cross. At the point the Scripture ends, it seems to be hopeless.

However, we do have an Easter symbol – the egg -- that reminds us that even when it looks as if there is no life, life is still there.

Hold an egg in your hand. Think about how there is life within the egg; 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 family members to tell of one thing about Easter that makes them happy. Ask them to say what makes them happy about Easter; 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 in our community who are in need.

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.

## Week 5

### **Week of April 2: Mary Anoints Jesus**

**Scripture:** [John 12:1-8](#)

**Symbol:** Cross

Discussion & Activity: If you don't have a cross in your home, draw or make one for your family devotional time. Invite everyone to look at the cross as you read John 12:1-8.

In the Scripture we read this week, we read of Mary (sister of Martha and John) anointing Jesus with an expensive perfumed ointment. This would have been the kind of anointing that would have been done in preparing a body for burial. We focus our thoughts on this part of the Scripture for this week. While Jesus' friends might not have known that he would soon be dying on the cross, Jesus knew.

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.

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

One food that is part of the Lenten season is **Hot Cross Buns**. You can make 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.

**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.

*The season of Lent is a wonderful time to start weekly family devotions. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday (this year, March 1, 2017) 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 40 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

## March 1

**Scripture:** **Matthew 6:9-15**

**Symbol:** Praying Hands

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

In reading Matthew 6:9-15, we are reminded to pray. 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 the words together 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 to 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 to an individual who has helped someone feel God's love;
- adding a household task that helps everyone enjoy the home more;
- exercising each week.

# Week 4

## Week of March 26: The Loving Father

**Scripture:** **Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

**Symbol:** Ring

**Discussion & Activity:** Pick up the ring. Talk together about how a ring is a symbol of never-ending love. There is no beginning, and there is no end. The ring is a reminder that if we love as God loves, there is no end to that love.

Read together Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32. This may be a familiar story for you. It's probably one of the first we learn as children, and we continue to read it throughout our lifetime, finding new meaning with each reading. Here we have a father who shows love both to the son who leaves and to the son who stays. Within a family, people do act in very different ways. But we don't have to be the same to receive God's love.

Create portraits of each family member. On a piece of paper, draw a face – or just a circle – for each family member. Talk together and decide what words best describe each family member. Write these words in the face or circle. This week, pray for each person in the family, thanking God for all that family member is.

### Prayer

Gracious God:

We are reminded once again that we don't have to be just like someone else to be loved by you.

And we are reminded once again that you have enough love for everyone.

Help us be people who bring others to you, letting them know that you have enough love for all.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

## Week 3

### **Week of March 19: God Forgives**

**Scripture:** **Isaiah 55:1-9**

**Symbol:** Heart

**Discussion & Activity:** Make hearts from construction paper. Place these where all can see and read together Isaiah 55:1-9.

A key verse in this Scripture is verse 7: “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (NIV).

This verse reminds us that when we sin (and everyone does!), if we confess to God, God will forgive us and give us a new start. Confessing sins is not easy. That’s partly because we feel people wouldn’t be able to love us (and God wouldn’t be able to love us), if they knew our sins. Talk together about what it means to show love to one another even though we do things we shouldn’t do. Make a list together of ways to show love to others.

This week make a list for each person in the family. Include those who live in the household and those who live in other places. Use a separate sheet of paper for each person. At the top of the paper, put the name of the person. Under the name, put ways others in the family can show love to that person. During the week, ask each family member to do one thing for all others in the family from their lists.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord:

We know you forgive us when we sin, but it’s hard to admit to those sins. It’s hard for us to trust that you will forgive us. And it’s hard to trust that those in our family will forgive us as well. Help us focus on ways we can show love and trust to one another. Help us to keep our trust in you. Amen.

**Prayer:**

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

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.

## Week 1

### ***Week of March 5: Jesus Is Tempted***

**Scripture:** [Luke 4:1-13](#)

**Symbol:** Rock

**Discussion & Activity:** When we read about the temptations of Jesus, we are reminded that we all face temptations in our lives.

Pass a rock from one family member to another. The rock is a reminder that Jesus was tempted to turn a rock into bread.

Talk together about what temptations each family member faces at home, at school, at work, and in the community. Talking about these temptations may lead family members to identify what they would like to give up during the season of Lent. They may choose to give up certain foods or treats that tempt them to eat too much; or they may want to limit time spent on certain activities; or they may want to avoid thinking only of themselves instead of others. Family members might want to give up sweets, or give up texting for one day a week, or give up a cup of coffee, or give up a television program. Consider assessing a money value for each thing family members give up. Save this money; then at Easter, give the money saved as an offering for church or for a community project that serves those in need.

Decorate an empty plastic container with symbols, pictures, and words that remind family members of the temptations of Jesus and of your family's temptations. Place this on your dining table or in another place where everyone in the household can see it. Each day, place into the container money that you would have spent on the activities that family members have given up.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God:

Just as you were with Jesus through his temptations, we know you are with us as well. Help us to remember we are not alone.

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

## Week 2

### ***Week of March 12: Teach Me Lord***

**Scripture:** [Psalm 27](#)

**Symbol:** Bible

**Discussion & Activity:** Open the Bible to Psalm 27 and read the psalm together. Let each person in the family hold the Bible.

This psalm is full of beautiful images of God's care. Read this psalm aloud slowly. After reading, make a list together of what the psalmist says God does for us. Are there other images of God that have meaning for members of your family? List those as well. What do these images teach us about God? The psalms are songs. Some are songs of praise. Others are songs of sorrow and longing for God. Some are songs of joy.

Together, write your family psalm this week. For as many days as you can, choose an image of God from the list you have created. Start each day with, "God you are our \_\_\_\_\_" (*fill in the image you have chosen*) because you \_\_\_\_\_ (*name an action of God*). At the end of the week, you will have written a family psalm.

**Prayer:**

God, Our Teacher:

We learn about you from those who wrote the Bible.

We learn about you when we listen to one another tell of your presence and actions in our lives.

We learn about you when we look around us and see your creation.

But sometimes we forget to take time to worship and praise you.

Help us take time to offer our praises and prayers. Amen.