



Holy Week
&
Easter Sunday
Reflection Guide

MARCH 20-27, 2016

PROVIDED BY
EPICENTRE CHURCH
PASADENA

Holy Week in the Church liturgical calendar is the week before Easter, beginning with Palm Sunday and ending on Holy Saturday. During this week, Christians take time to specifically recount and reflect on Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, where he was to lay down his life for all people on earth.

Easter season can be a busy season for Christians because of family gatherings as well as a time to reach out to those who do haven't received the abundant and eternal life Jesus has to offer. However, in the midst of all the celebration and reaching out, it is important that we take time to allow Jesus' earthly journey to once again touch our own hearts. *"Freely you have received, freely give."* (Matthew 10:8) We can only bring the pure love of Jesus to our neighbors when we have freshly received that deep love ourselves. We, therefore, invite you to join us on a reflective journey through the Holy Week and Easter Sunday using the reflection guide provided here. May you encounter the love of the Father through Jesus in a fresh and deeper way this Easter season!

A Word for Young Families

Easter has become so commercialized and often our kids are bombarded by bunnies and Easter eggs more than the true meaning of Easter. It is our responsibility as parents to guide our children, to help them understand and to focus on "the real reason for the season." In each of the reflections in this guide, there will be family suggestions that you can use to talk about Easter with your children and to grow together as a family. May you be drawn closer together as a family in faith and in the love of Jesus. Try using a children Bible to make the reading more understandable for younger children.

Families with children under 2/3 – though your child may not be able to do many of the activities suggested here, it doesn't mean you can't read the scriptural passages with them. Look for a children's Bible with the same stories or paraphrase them yourself. It's never too early to begin telling them about Jesus!

Worship Songs Suggestion

Here is a list of suggested worship songs for this week. Consider putting them on a playlist and worship to it during your facetime, when you are doing chores at home, or while driving.

"For the Cross" - Bethel

"Forever" - Bethel

"Calvary" - Hillsong Live

"Death in His Grave" - John Mark McMillan

"It Was Finished" - Bryan and Katie Torwalt

"Dust We Are and Shall Return" - The Brilliance

"Your Love Remains" - The Brilliance

"Resurrecting" - Elevation Worship

Palm Sunday

March 20

Scripture Reading: John 12:12-18

Reflection:

Imagine yourself there on the streets of Jerusalem. You hear people talking about Jesus, who has done many miraculous signs, and he's coming into town. You see the crowd with palm branches, waving them and laying them on the ground as a sign to welcome Jesus. You hear people shouting, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" For a people who had been waiting for over 400 years for the Messiah to come, what do you think was going through their minds? Why do you think they were so excited?

In your own life, is there a situation where you are waiting for the Messiah/Deliverer to come? "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20) Jesus is coming and is in your situation, what would you shout to Him on His coming? Consider writing your own chorus of praise and share it with your lifegroup, your family & friends, or post on social media as a declaration of faith.

Family Suggestion:

Read the story and act it out!! First, consider doing a craft like making a banner for Jesus. What would be written on the banner? Then, bring out all the stuffed animals as the crowd! Use pots and pans to drum up the celebration! Wave the banner high and welcome Jesus! End with a praise song (make up a family praise song!). Afterwards, put the banner in a prominent place in the house for the rest of the week.

Monday of Holy Week

March 21

Preparation:

Consider lighting a scented candle or spray your room with air freshener for this reflection.

Scripture Reading: John 12:1-11

Reflection:

Read this passage slowly a couple times. Imagine yourself watching this happen in front of your eyes – you are seeing Mary gently pour the perfume over Jesus's feet and wiping them with her long hair; you can smell the fragrance (hence the scented candle/air freshener ☺). What comes to your mind? What emotions does it evoke in you? What does Mary's action tell you about her heart towards Jesus?

The story of Mary's extravagant love for Jesus came after Jesus raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead (John 11:38ff). Take sometime to remember what Jesus has done for you and what you are most grateful for from Jesus. If you were with Jesus at a dinner party, what would you bring to Jesus to show Him your love? Journal your reflection and response.

Family Suggestion:

Help your children understand what happened and the extravagant gift Mary gave to Jesus. Have each family member share one gift they have received that has made them feel special and loved. Then have each family member think and share what would be the one special/valuable gift they would give to Jesus that they think would make Jesus feel very special and loved. Let your kids be creative!

Tuesday of Holy Week

March 22

Scripture Reading: John 11:45-53, Luke 22:1-6

Reflection:

Today's passage from the Gospel of John came after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Shouldn't such a miracle be celebrated and result in praise and worship to God? Read the passage slowly again, asking the Holy Spirit for understanding the hearts of the chief priests and the Pharisees – what really drove their hatred of Jesus? What made them unable to see or accept Jesus as the promised Messiah? How about Judas? Why did he betray Jesus? Was it because of money? (see John 12:6; Matthew 6:24)

If people who knew the Law and were supposed to be guides for others in the way of God could fail to see Jesus for who He really was and if someone who had walked with Jesus so closely for 3 years could end up betraying him, what does it tell us about the human heart and our ability to be 100% faithful to God by our own knowledge & strength? Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."* Spend sometime praying for yourself and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and help you. Ask Him to show you if there are things in your heart and life that are (potential) hindrances to you being 100% faithful to Him. Journal your reflection and response.

Family Suggestion:

Parents, betrayal might be a hard concept to teach little ones. So just do your best. After reading the passages, you can consider using examples from your children's lives when they disobey you to talk about how hard it is to do the right thing. It doesn't mean they don't love you, but it's just hard sometimes because we want to do what we want. Think of one example in your own life when it's hard for you to obey God too. Then talk about why we need the Holy Spirit to help us. Spend sometime praying over your children and ask for the Holy Spirit to fill them and help them to desire to please God.

Wednesday of Holy Week

March 23

Preparation for family: Buy some beans or pea seeds for planting. Soaking the beans overnight will speed up sprouting process.

Scriptures: Mark 14:12-26; John 12:23-26

Reflection:

Read these two passages slowly a couple times. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and unfold them for you. What did it cost Jesus to love you? What vision did He possibly have in mind when He chose to walk the path to death on the cross (John 12:23ff)? What is He inviting you into?

Write a letter to Jesus, expressing your reflection, thoughts and response to His invitation.

Family Suggestion:

Choose one or do both:

1. Explain to your children the meaning and significance of the Passover meal (ref: Exodus 12:1-30), and why Jesus used this meal to talk about His death and the new covenant (He's the sacrificial Lamb once and for all).
2. Do some planting! Search the web for "how to grow bean (on cotton balls) with children." You are doing this activity to talk about today's passage from the Gospel of John. It will take a few days for the beans to sprout, so you have a few days to continue to talk about what Jesus' saying here. The beans may not be producing "many seeds," but it definitely produces "new life," which you can talk about what Jesus' death means for us (to give us eternal life).

Thursday of Holy Week (Maundy Thursday)

March 24

Scriptures: John 13:1-17; Matthew 26:47-56

Reflection (choose one or do both):

1. Read these two passages slowly several times, and write down what you notice about the heart and intention of Jesus. How would you describe Jesus' way of love?

Read John 13:14-17 again. Is there anyone Jesus is asking you to "wash their feet" (could be figuratively or literally ☺)? Are there new ways of serving others that Jesus is inviting you to try?

2. Do you need to experience Jesus' cleansing and forgiveness? Or do you feel weary and need His refreshing? If so, just sit back quietly and ask Him to come and wash over you. Listen to what He may want to say to you. Write them down. And take time to thank Him for His heart and how He has shown you His deep love.

Family Suggestion:

1. After reading both passages, you can talk about what Jesus was like, and what He said and what it tells about the character of God.
2. Based on the passage from the Gospel of John, as a family, ask the Holy Spirit if there's anyone or any family He would like you to do something special to serve them. Have the kids help brainstorm ideas, do the planning and decide on when you will do it. If possible, have your kids be ready to explain to the person or family why they are doing it using this teaching and modeling from Jesus.

Good Friday March 25

Scriptures: Matthew 27:27-54

Reflection:

1. Read or listen to audio Bible of Matthew. 27:27-44. Let yourself hear the mockery and insults, feel the weight of the cross on Jesus and see the beating and nailing of His body to the cross. Allow your senses take in all that was happening around Jesus' crucifixion. Do not run away from the horror. Try your best to stay. Contemplate the truth that He did this for YOU. What do you want to say to Jesus?
2. Read or listen to audio Bible on Mt. 27:45-54. The last cry of Jesus was followed by the sound of the temple curtain (60 feet high, 20 feet wide, 4 inches thick), which had been used to separate the Holy of the Holies from the Holy Place, tearing from top to bottom on its own; the rumbling of the earth and splitting of rocks and people rising from the dead. Allow your senses to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the moment. Write or draw a description of the impact of the moment on you. What do they tell you about God's heart for you and humankind? What do they tell you about God's love and forgiveness? Respond accordingly.

Family Suggestion:

Depending on what kind of Bible you use to read the crucifixion story to your children, some may find the pictures and/or the story too overwhelming emotionally. Be sensitive to your children's emotional threshold and adjust accordingly. The main thing is to help your children know how far God went to show His love for us and to make a way for us to be reunited to Him. If it's not too much, let your children feel the sharpness of a nail and talk about what it might have been like for Jesus to have nails hammered through His body. Guide your children in giving thanks to Jesus.

Holy Saturday

March 26

Scriptures: Matthew 27:57-66; Luke 23:50-56

Reflection:

Look back to your reflection on Palm Sunday – the experience of joy, hope and excitement when Jesus was entering Jerusalem. But now, He is dead and buried. His tomb closed off by a huge stone and it's the Sabbath, which means everyone's limited on what they're allowed to do and certainly there's no visit to the tomb!

Sit silently for a while. No music. No nothing. If you were to pray, you can address God the Father, but no talking to Jesus. Try to experience what Jesus' disciples experienced – Jesus was no longer around. They couldn't ask him questions and didn't understand. They didn't know why it ended that way and what's going on. Lots of questions, but no answer. Feel the sense of loss and emptiness. Journal down what it was like to be "without Jesus." You may consider actually living this whole day as though Jesus' no longer present and walked in the disciples' shoes for a day and write down your experience at the end of your day.

Family Suggestion:

After you read the story of Jesus' burial, explain to your children what the sabbath is. Because it's a sabbath, no one went to the tomb. So, it's a first full day Jesus' followers were without him around.

Consider turning off the lights and sitting in the dark with your children (maybe a tiny little light so you are not tripping over each other ☺). Compare being in the dark to the followers experiencing the death of Jesus (the Light). Talk about what it feels to be in the dark, not having any light to help you see where you are going and to do the work you need to do. Do you feel fear? Do you feel lost? Talk to your children about what it's like when we don't have Jesus in our lives.

Easter Sunday

March 27

Scriptures: Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20; John 20:19-23

Reflection:

1. *If you were a woman*, imagine you were there with the two Mary's and were among the first people to be told by the angel that Jesus had risen. You were then met by Jesus on your way to tell the other disciples. What went through your mind and how did you feel, after a day of complete loss and despair? What was it like to have Jesus back in your life? Write a letter to Jesus as a response.

If you were a man, imagine having the women come and tell you Jesus had risen. You went and met Him in Galilee and He came into your midst and spoke peace over you. What was it like to have this roller coaster experience as you saw Jesus getting arrested, deserted, and crucified. You lost your leader and then saw Him alive again! Write a letter to Jesus as a response.

2. Jesus didn't come to the disciples simply to restore their joy and give them peace. He came to them and commissioned them to go tell others about Him. Who will you tell about Jesus? What will you say to them? Be ready to share the joy and hope you experience today!

Family Suggestion:

It is a day of celebration, just like Palm Sunday, again! Take out your pots and pans. Raise your voices high. Google "Resurrection Roll Recipe" and do some meaningful baking.

If your children have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, ask them if they want to. You can look back to the reflections you've done together this week and explain to them again who Jesus is and what He has done for them. If they are ready, pray with them to begin the disciple's journey today!