

**Were You There? (Lent 6—Palm/Passion Sunday)**

Isaiah 50:4-9a  
 Psalm 31:9-16  
 Philippians 2:5-11  
 Mark 14:1--15:47\* or Mark 15:1-39 (40-47)

*Liturgy of the Palms:*  
 Mark 11:1-11  
 Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29



**Key Verse:** “Give thanks to God, for God is good: God’s love is eternal.”  
 (Psalm 118:29)

Aim: To meet the people in the Passion Story.

**Background**

Today is a day when we focus on the events leading up to Easter. We listen, ponder and grieve. We imagine what those last days were like. In the passage from Mark 11, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. As he enters, people cry out the words from Psalm 118, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” The crowd shouts “Hosanna” which means “save us.” The words from Isaiah give hope to a people who are suffering. Psalm 31 is a graphic description of human suffering interwoven with statements of confidence and trust in God. Jesus’ final words from the cross, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” is a quotation from this psalm.

In the passage from Philippians, Christ is depicted as a humble and obedient servant who endures suffering, then is lifted up to become “Lord of all.” The reading from Mark’s Gospel tells the story of Jesus’ arrest and condemnation by his enemies. The story reminds us that Jesus was abandoned by some of his friends; only his women friends remain faithful to the end. The story of Jesus’ passion invites us to become one of the characters in the drama. Will you take the risk of following right through to the end? Are you willing for the “new covenant” to be written on your heart?

**Faith Sharing**

1. Create a worship table for this week; use a purple cloth and candle. Each day light the candle, read a part of the Passion Story from *The Family Story Bible*. Add a symbol (see below); have a few moments of silent prayer; then extinguish candle.  
**Palm Sunday:** read “Jesus Goes to Jerusalem” (pp. 236-237) and place palm leaf (or evergreen branch) on table; **Monday:** read “Washing Feet” (pp. 242-243) and add a small bowl of water and folded towel; **Tuesday:** read “The Last Supper” (pp. 246-247) and add a piece of bread and a cup of grape juice; **Wednesday:** read “Jesus Prays in the Garden” (pp. 248-249) and add molded clay figure of praying hands; **Thursday:** read “Jesus is arrested” and “I don’t know him!” (pp. 250-252) and add a length of rope and a rooster figure; **Friday:** read “Jesus must be killed” and “Jesus is killed” (pp. 253-257) and add a crown of thorns (twisted rough twigs) and a cross; **Saturday:** gather around the table filled with Holy Week symbols; after a period of silent mediation, join hands and sing “Were You There?”
2. **Lenten Banner:** Make and add last symbol to your banner. Talk about its meaning.



Lent is a time to look clearly at ourselves and our world to see where we are not living as God intends and to consciously make some changes or new beginnings. Traditionally “Lent” was believed to mean lengthening days. But the word Lent may come from the Latin word “lentare” which means “to bend” and in this context Lent can be seen as a time of transformation, of bending toward a new way of being. It is a time to pay special attention to the work of God in our lives, our community, and the world in which we live. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a time of confession and absolution. Knowing and experiencing God’s forgiveness allows us to honestly examine our lives and open ourselves to participate in the renewal God seeks to bring to all creation.

An underlying theme throughout Lent this year is the idea of *covenant* which means “pact”—an agreement or promise. Through the stories of Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the Hebrew people, and Jesus, we learn of the covenants established by God and embodied in Jesus. We hear the words of Jeremiah speaking of a new covenant: one not written in stone but in the hearts of all faithful people. Jesus’ faithfulness to the covenant led him into conflict with the institutional powers and authorities and ultimately cost him his life. The enormity of Jesus’ commitment and faithfulness opened the way to a new covenant relationship for all humanity.

February	22	Ash Wednesday
	26	Signs of God’s Promise (Lent 1)
March	4	Keeping Faith (Lent 2)
	11	A Passionate Way (Lent 3)
	18	God So Loved (Lent 4)
	25	The Heart of the Matter (Lent 5)
April	1	Were You There? (Lent 6—Palm/Passion Sunday)
	6	Good Friday

## People of the Covenant

The logo for this Unit depicts several covenant symbols—both of God’s covenant with us and our covenant with God. The **rainbow** is a sign of God’s promise to never again destroy the earth in response to humanity’s God-given freedom to choose evil. The **stone tablets** represent the commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, given by God to help guide the Hebrew people in the way of the covenant. The **wheat seed broken open** is a poignant image of the way in which Jesus understood his own death to be the beginning of a great harvest of healing and transformation. A **broken loaf and chalice of wine** are worldwide symbols of Jesus’ continuing presence within the covenant community of the Church. These symbols are all contained within a **heart of human hands**, reminding us of Jeremiah’s vision of the covenant written on our hearts. We participate as people of the covenant by meeting, touching, holding, and reaching out to one another and to God.

### Using This Leaflet

This leaflet is intended to help members of the congregation follow up at home on the things we have been learning and thinking about in church school, worship, and adult lectionary study groups. Each week the children’s lesson focuses particularly on 1 of the 4 readings which is marked with an asterisk (\*). We encourage you to use some of the ideas below to enhance your family faith-sharing time together.

Week 1—February 26, 2012

## Signs of God’s Promise (Lent 1)

Genesis 9:8-17\*  
Psalm 25:1-10  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
Mark 1:9-15



**Key Verse:** “Teach me your ways, O Lord; make them known to me.” (Psalm 25:4)

Aim: To discover the new beginnings that God offers in Lent.

### Background

The lectionary readings this week, and during the Season of Lent, invite us to explore what it means for us to be in covenant relationship with God. The Genesis passage tells of God’s “everlasting covenant” with Noah and all future generations—that God will never again respond to human evil with total destruction. According to the *New Interpreter’s Bible* this divine commitment signals a new way of dealing with evil—a way of long-suffering solidarity with humans.

Psalm 25 is a personal prayer of lament and praise; the psalmist pleads with God to remember and keep God’s promises. In the reading from 1 Peter, a comparison is drawn between the story of Noah and Christian Baptism. In the waters of Baptism we pass through death into a renewed covenant with God.

Week 5—March 25, 2012

## The Heart of the Matter (Lent 5)

Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16  
Hebrews 5:5-10  
John 12:20-33\*



**Key Verse:** “I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)

Aim: To try to make sense of Jesus’ life and death.

### Background

The prophet Jeremiah is a forerunner of Jesus Christ both in his role of suffering servant and in his vision of a “new covenant” described in today’s reading. This new covenant will not be written on stone, but on the hearts of the people. Psalm 51 is one of the great penitential psalms in which a restoration of right relationship with God is yearned for. Psalm 119 praises the Law and those who keep it.

Hebrews was written for Jewish Christians who had endured persecution. The writer reassures the faithful that Jesus too suffered greatly and thus understands their plight. The image of the seed lies at the heart of John’s understanding of the meaning of Jesus’ death. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, something new will enter and transform the world. Within the husk of the seed (this transitory life) lies the promise of eternal life.

### Faith Sharing

1. Read “The Story of Jeremiah” from *The Family Story Bible*, pages 141-142. Pass around a large heart shape cut from red paper as you read today’s key verse. Print “God Loves Us—We Are God’s People” on the top of the shape and write or draw things that help you to know God’s love.
2. Some children will be bringing home planted seeds. Place their pots in a sunny location; add another pot of soil and a container of wheat seeds. For every loving act during the last 2 weeks of Lent plant a seed. Water and watch them grow.
3. **Lenten Banner:** Make another symbol for your banner. Talk about its meaning.

**God So Loved (Lent 4)**

Numbers 21:4-9  
 Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22  
 Ephesians 2:1-10  
 John 3:14-21\*



**Key Verse:** “God so loved the world that to us the Son was given, that believing in him we should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Aim: To discover healing power in the light of God’s love.

**Background**

On this “Laetare” (meaning “rejoice”) Sunday, the readings center upon God’s grace in the midst of great suffering and brokenness. The book of Numbers describes the fears which haunted the Israelites in the wilderness. In today’s reading, the people are plagued with poisonous snakes and appeal to God for mercy and help. God provides a method of healing from the bites: by looking at a bronze serpent lifted on a pole (today this is the emblem of the medical profession). Psalm 107 is a thanksgiving song, a public testimony to God’s transforming goodness.

In the letter to the Ephesians Paul emphasizes that we are made whole through the gift of God’s grace, and that our response will be a life of good deeds. The reading from John comes at the end of Nicodemus’ night visit with Jesus. John links the image of the bronze serpent with the image of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. One of the essential proclamations of John’s Gospel is that God brings about our healing and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. “God so loved the world...”

**Faith Sharing**

1. Copy today’s key verse on a long strip of paper. Decorate with drawings or pictures of people of all nationalities. “Wrap” verse around globe or map to illustrate God wrapping loving arms around all humankind.
2. Lenten love project: take time each day this week to do something loving for someone (e.g. call someone who is lonely, take a homemade gift to a shut-in, baby-sit for a single mother, etc.).
3. Make Easter Cards: layer grated colored crayons between sheets of wax paper; cover with newspaper and press with warm iron till melted. Cut into egg shapes, glue onto front of folded construction paper and write message inside and send to friends, relatives and others.
4. **Lenten Banner:** Make another symbol to add to your banner. Talk about its meaning.

The story of Jesus’ testing in the wilderness is always told on the first Sunday of Lent. In Mark’s account, Jesus is baptized, then the Spirit compels him to go into the wilderness where he is tested for 40 days. As we begin this Season of Lent, we reflect on our covenant relationship with God and on God’s promise to be with us amidst the world’s chaos.

**Faith Sharing**

1. If your family did not attend an Ash Wednesday service you could have a family experience at home. Ashes are a symbol of repentance and forgiveness. Talk together about some of the things in each of your lives that you would like to work on during the Season of Lent. Write these on small pieces of paper, crumple into a metal container and set fire to them. As the paper burns, say together: “Dear God, please forgive us for the things in our lives which do not show your love. Help us to to live in your way. Amen.” When the ashes are cool, take turns dipping in a finger and making the sign of the cross on each other’s forehead.
2. Read the story “God Sends a Rainbow” from *The Family Story Bible* pages 24-25. Paint a rainbow to remind you of the covenant God made long ago with Noah and all creation: place small amounts of food coloring in glass containers; use small paintbrushes to gently paint the arcs of a rainbow onto absorbent paper (e.g. paper toweling or tissue paper). Let dry and mount on construction paper (gray to symbolize clouds or purple to symbolize Lent). Copy the words of God’s promise (bottom of p. 25) and mount below rainbow. Read these words often during Lent.
3. **Lenten Banner:** Use a rectangle of purple felt, folded over at top and sewn to accommodate a length of dowel. Glue on 6 squares of Velcro (if you would like to use your banner again each year). Each week make one symbol (*see below*); glue on Velcro piece and attach to banner, talking about what the symbol represents.

**Palms:** Palms were waved triumphantly as Jesus entered Jerusalem. (John 12:13)



**Rope:** A rope was used to bind Jesus when he was led away to the High Priest. (John 18:12)



**Forty:** The 40 days of Lent are symbolic of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness after his Baptism and before the beginning of his ministry.



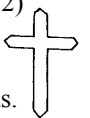
**Crown of Thorns:** The soldiers mockingly placed a crown of thorns on Jesus’ head. (John 19:2)



**Loaf and Cup:** Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples during the Last Supper. (Luke 22:19-20)



**Passion Cross:** This cross is distinguished by its pointed ends. It is also known as the cross of suffering indicated Maundy Thursday or Good Friday (as contrasted to the empty plain cross—symbol of resurrection.)



**Keeping Faith (Lent 2)**

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16\*  
Psalm 22:23-31  
Romans 4:13-25  
Mark 8:31-38



**Key Verse:** “Do you gain anything if you gain the whole world and lose [your real self]?” (Mark 8:36)

Aim: To affirm our future in God.

**Background**

Living in covenant relationship with God sometimes means we are called upon to trust in God’s promises, even when circumstances seem hopeless. In the reading from Genesis, God’s promise about descendants seems unbelievable to Abraham and Sarah. The couple ultimately keeps faith, in spite of doubts, and God’s promise is fulfilled in the birth of Isaac. The Psalm is a hymn of praise telling how one generation will tell the next of God’s actions.

In the reading from Romans, Paul reminds us that covenants are living relationships involving trust. They are not earned, but gifts from God. In the passage from Mark we see a transition into a new phase of Jesus’ ministry—a time when he began helping the disciples face the implications and cost of remaining faithful to their chosen path. For Jesus, being faithful to the covenant meant following a path which lead to his death. Are we ready to give up certain privileges and comforts in response to God’s call to work for justice and peace?

**Faith Sharing**

1. Read together the stories of Abraham and Sarah in *The Family Story Bible*, pages 26-27, 36-37. God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah, with Jesus, and with us, requires total commitment. Visit a library and look up some stories of contemporary people who have demonstrated intense commitment (e.g. Oscar Romero, Yitzhak Rabin, Nelson Mandela, Olympic athletes, etc.).
2. During Lent, one way to demonstrate our commitment to follow Jesus and be faithful to God’s call is to fast or to simplify our meals. Some families eliminate desserts; some reduce meat consumption and substitute simple rice or vegetable meals to show solidarity with others around the world. Others commit themselves to live on the amount of money a family on social assistance would receive for food. Choose one or more of these options each week. Contribute the money saved to a “Lenten Food Box” (shoe box decorated with Lenten symbols). On Palm Sunday donate money to world development and relief work.
3. **Lenten Banner:** Make another symbol to add to your banner. Talk about its meaning.

**A Passionate Way (Lent 3)**

Exodus 20:1-17  
Psalm 19  
I Corinthians 1:18-25  
John 2:13-22\*



**Key Verse:** “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

Aim: To explore the story of Jesus’ anger in the temple.

**Background**

In today’s Exodus reading we have the familiar story of the Ten Commandments which outlined right relationships with God (the first 4) and with neighbors (the last 6). This is how God’s covenant people are to live. The writer of the Psalm praises the law and its life-giving qualities.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he attempts to describe God’s power as vastly different than the coercive power with which we are so familiar. Jesus’ way was full of passion and strength. It was an expression of God’s power within him through which he was able to overcome evil without becoming evil. In the reading from John we also see Jesus portrayed as a powerful, authoritative presence whose passionate act of overturning tables and freeing animals challenged the very authority of the Temple. From this time on, the authorities began actively seeking a way to get rid of this hot-headed reformer. What injustices arouse passionate feelings in us? What tables would Christ overturn today?

**Faith Sharing**

1. Read the story “The Moneychangers” in *The Family Story Bible*, pages 238-239. Why was Jesus so angry? Look at a recent magazine or newspaper. What unfair things in our world would make Jesus angry today? Brainstorm ways to channel anger into positive action.
2. In the Gospel reading Jesus “cleansed” the temple. In a way, Lent is a time for “cleaning.” Do some spring cleaning for your church. Do some Spring cleaning of your own, too. Give away items no longer needed to agencies, or hold a garage sale and donate the proceeds to a mission project or a charity.
3. Read “The Ten Commandments” in *The Family Story Bible*, pages 88-89. Talk about the rules your family has that make it possible for you to live in respectful and loving relationship. Make a chart “The Ten Commandments of the (your) Family” and, using consensus, list the 10 most important rules for your family.
4. **Lenten Banner:** Make another symbol to add to your banner. Talk about its meaning.