The Symbols of Lent and Easter

The idea: to explore the symbols of Lent Easter and create a cross including representations of these symbols. The picture below shows a finished cross. Traditionally Easter crosses were often made from the branches of an old Christmas tree. However, anything can be used to make it. Some of you may remember we did this in our Easter service three years ago. Below you will find a reflection on the different symbols and a brief description of what needs to be made, and, should you wish, a prayer to join in with.

During Lent, we remember Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness and reflect on his journey to the cross. The story of that journey is peppered with symbols and images and we invite you to make some of these symbols and add them to the bare cross as you go through Holy Week:

Day 1: The Dove

You will need: Dove Template, attached below

Although we are thinking mostly about events and symbols linked to Holy Week, the first symbol takes us a bit further back in Jesus' story

The dove has long been a symbol of peace in our history but it has great symbolism in the Bible too and is mentioned 46 times in Scripture. One of the first times we hear about a dove is in the story of Noah when he sent out a dove to see if the waters had receded.

The dove is a symbol of God's Spirit and we see it appear as Jesus was baptised by John, with God's words, 'This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

The reading from Mark's gospel continues, "At once the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, and He was there for forty days," That number 40 is echoed more than once in the Bible but we particularly associate it with Lent. Lent is traditionally described as lasting for forty days, in commemoration of the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, before beginning his public ministry,

Pray together: "Spirit of God, be with us each day, on our journey through Lent and life. Amen."

Make the Dove and fix it to the cross

Day 2: The Palm Branch

You will need: green paper or palm leaves to colour in – see suggested template below

We continue Jesus' story with the very recognisable image of the Palm Branch. In ancient times, palm branches symbolized goodness, well-being, and victory. They were often depicted on coins and important buildings. King Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple. But we most associate them with Palm Sunday.

"Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey. The people threw their cloaks and palm branches on the ground. They waved palm branches and shouted,

"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Use green paper or colour in palm branches and fix some of them to the cross and put on the floor around it.

Day 3: Stars

You will need: some card stars (approx. 6-8cm in diameter) covered in foil, or alternatively a sheet of peel off sticky stars.

Remind the children of God's promise to Abraham in the Old Testament reading: 'I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven (Genesis 22.17).

- Encourage your family to think of the different generations of people they know in their lives and/or at church, including, perhaps, some who have died or moved away.
- Give each child some stars to stick on the cross in memory of the people they know and have known.
- **Pray together**: Thank you, God, for all the people we have known and love in our lives and all those who have worshipped you faithfully, over the years, and for the future generations who will do so. Amen.

Day 4: The Temple and the Lord's Prayer

You will need: a scroll of the Lord's Prayer, see below. For images of coins try Google and search for coins from Jesus' time – print or draw several or use real coins

The next symbols take us to the day during that week in Jerusalem, when Jesus went to the Temple to pray. But he was very shocked to see what was going on that very holy place. There were people selling all kinds of goods and treating it like a market place – not somewhere where you could go to pray.

Make a scroll of the Lord's Prayer which Jesus used to teach us how to pray. This scroll represents the place of holiness in our lives and the importance of talking to God, and so we place it on the cross.

Let's say it together now:

Pray Together: Our Father ……..

Attach the scroll to the cross

Coins

The coins represent things that get in the way of our relationship with God. In the Temple the traders had forgotten they were in a holy place, a place for prayer – they were just interested in making money.

We ask God to help us remember that Jesus loved the Temple and was upset that the traders were not treating it as a holy place.

We ask God to help us, through our words and actions, to come closer to Him and not to let our greed and selfishness get in the way of our relationship with him.

(Children can put their pennies at the foot of the cross and fix some to the cross)

Day 5: Ears of Wheat

You will need to make: ears of wheat – see template below and you may either want to draw a loaf of bread or even use a real one

Ears of wheat and their seeds feature in several stories in the Bible and are a symbol of generosity and of course growth.

At this time, we are reminded of the bread and wine which Jesus shared with his friends during their last meal together on the night on which he was betrayed.

In Matthew's gospel we read: "While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Place an ear of wheat and a loaf of bread at the cross, to remind us of Jesus' sacrifice at the cross.

Ear of wheat either fixed to the cross or put in the soil and the bread put on the floor

Day 6: Light and Dark

Finally, we reach the end of our Lenten journey and come to the events of Good Friday. The Easter story is not an easy one, or in places, a pleasant one; it is a journey of light and dark, from the triumphant entrance by Jesus to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the cruelty of his death on the cross on Good Friday, followed three days later by His resurrection on Easter Sunday.

We are using ribbons, gold and red, to symbolise the dark and the light of Jesus' life and death.

The red ribbon symbolises the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross.

The gold ribbon symbolises the light and the hope which His resurrection brings each one of us.

We add these symbols to the cross. We join our gold ribbons together as a symbol of the love of God who brings us together.

Knot the pieces of gold ribbon (if you have it or join gold-coloured paper) together and drape them over the cross at the top, so that the ribbons stream down.

Press 6 pieces of red ribbon (or strips of red paper) into the base of the cross, so that they spill out over the pot all the way round. Invite family members to take a piece of ribbon and hold it out straight as the prayer is said.

As we add the red ribbon to remind us of Jesus' death and sacrifice, we pray:

"Loving God, who sent your only Son into the world to save it, we remember the blood that He shed for us on the cross. We remember that He suffered in order to bring light to our dark world. Help us to live in the light of the world. Amen.

Templates

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Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
and forgive us our sins as we
forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but
deliver us fromevil. For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.