

Seen, Heard, Known

Christ sends, but do we still linger within our walls? Christ unifies, yet do we stand divided? The Season of Easter is one of new life and new birth. Filled with the excitement of what God has done and is doing, we do not stay quiet. Instead, we are sent to proclaim and to continue the physical acts of Christ on earth.

Focus scripture: John 20:19–31

At the beginning of John 20:19–31, the disciples are gathered behind locked doors. Likely, the glow of lanterns was kept low. Mary Magdalene had told the disciples of what she had seen in the garden that morning, and they are fearful of how the Jewish authorities might respond to Jesus' missing body. Appearing to them, the Light of the World must make his presence known. Jesus came with a message, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus sends them not only to proclaim the gospel and the message of forgiveness but with the power to grant forgiveness themselves. Possessing the power of the Holy Spirit, they begin to do the work of Christ.

The next scene opens in v. 24, revealing that one of the disciples, Thomas, was not present for this closed-door meeting. The other disciples share the news that they have seen the risen Christ. Thomas rejects their accounts and instead declares that he will not believe until he sees it for himself. In their very first opportunity to do what Jesus sent them to do, the disciples encounter disbelief from one of their own. A week later, Jesus appears to them behind closed doors again. Thomas receives what he asked, yet Christ and the author of John in v. 29 and then in v. 31 declare that new life is not in seeing but in belief.

Human activity and all creation reveal God's way. Acts 4:32–35 provides a glimpse of a community that faithfully responds to what God is doing among them. The presence of the Holy Spirit, which drives us to act in response to gospel news, fosters their selfless giving.

Psalm 133 is a song of ascent that was sung by pilgrims arriving in Zion. The reference to kindred is not one of bloodline but to their common faith and practice. Their coming together from all over to one common place is an act of devotion. The message of the song rings through the context of the church, too; God blesses unity.

Just because we are in the community of believers does not mean we are perfect. **1 John 1:1–2:2** warns believers of the danger that untruths can pose to the unity of the community. Not only do lies separate us from each other, but they separate us from Christ. However, in confession, we practice the good news of forgiveness, which is an ongoing process. What the light of Christ accomplishes is the acknowledgement of the shadows in our life. Community is to be there as we confess where sin still lingers.

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Jesus sends and forgives. From the garden, the risen Christ sent Mary to the disciples, and he then sent the disciples to share forgiveness in the world. When obstacles arose, Christ continued to show up and provide for the disciples' work of sharing the gospel. The disciples still go out, as we see in Acts, to share the message of Jesus Christ with the world while depending on the Spirit to keep them unified. Christ is the unifying factor of the church, and Christ's work still needs to be carried out in the world. Will you go where Jesus sends?



Focus scripture

John 20:19–31

Additional scriptures

Acts 4:32–35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1–2:2

John 20:19–31

Christ, who bears the marks of love, grant us peace and open our eyes to see you among us. Blessed One, whether we see or don't see, may we believe, and through that belief grant us life in your holy and mighty name. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

School-aged children rely heavily on their senses to understand what is real. Reality for them is what they can see, touch, hear, smell, or taste. Younger children have a lively sense of imagination and enjoy fairy tales and make-believe, while older children's curiosity invites them to search for proof. They can be quite passionate about what they believe or don't believe. For example, some are beginning to question fictional characters such as the tooth fairy or Santa Claus.

Children understand that someone's presence can still be with them even after that person has left the room or moved away. They feel the comforting and close presence of a parent as they go to sleep at night. They can

still "feel" the love and care of a grandparent after the grandparent has died and can experience someone with them, although he or she is not physically present. These experiences can help them as they explore this week's story about Thomas and Jesus, though they will still probably have questions about the story of Jesus' resurrection.

This week's session can help children understand that the risen Christ was present in a new way for the disciples and can be present in the world today. As adults, we can give them language to speak of these sacred experiences. Pray that the children will come to a deeper understanding of the risen Christ and their call to share the good news of God's love.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 20:19–31, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 55).
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with a gold or yellow cloth, white pillar candle, gold spiral and tealights (see resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)," p. 111).
- ❑ Bring matches, taper, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p.111); save copies for following Sundays.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring an empty gift bag.

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[An Amazing Story](#)."

- ❑ **Bible research group:** Bibles, copies of resource sheet "[The New Testament](#)" (p. 112); save copies for May 6 session.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Easter zone:** shoebox (or other box with lid), colourful gift wrap, slips of paper
- ❑ **Art zone:** mural paper, tempera paints, brushes
- ❑ **Research zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[About Thomas?](#)" map of India
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Peace Doves](#)," poster board, yarn, craft feathers; cut out sets of pattern pieces for younger children.
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** pieces of card stock, fine-tipped markers, addresses of denominational overseas mission church partners, stamps

Bless

- ❑ Bring the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Seen, Heard, Known

Scripture

John 20:19–31

FOCUS To hear, with Thomas and the disciples, Jesus' message of peace and affirmation

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce newcomers. If you haven't met as a group for the last two weeks, invite children to talk about some of the things they've been doing since you were last together.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite children to gather in the worship space and notice the colours of yellow or gold, representing this new Season of Easter. Explain that the Season of Easter is 50 days long. The first day was last week, on Easter Sunday. Teach the children the traditional Easter greeting used each Sunday of this season by followers of Jesus around the world:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Children: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Easter ritual Invite a child to read the "Gathering prayer" on the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p. 111), with the rest of the group responding with "Alleluia!" after each line. Invite another child to light the Christ candle and use a taper to light the first tealight in the spiral.

Sing, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Show the gift bag and invite the children to talk about times when they have had to miss a birthday party or other special event: what did they miss, why did they miss it, what did they hear about it afterwards?

■ How does it feel to hear about something that you missed?

This week's Bible story begins with a time when all Jesus' friends except Thomas were gathered together.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Holy Week review Briefly review the events of Palm Sunday and Holy Week, and Easter Sunday (see [Mark 14:1–15:47](#)). You might use a version of the Bible, such as the *Good News Bible*, that has headings you can scan together as a review.

The Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table. Use the bookmark to find this week's reading from the gospel of John, one of the books of the Bible that tells the stories of Jesus.

Review last week's story of Jesus' resurrection from [John 20:1–18](#). Use the resource sheet "[An Amazing Story](#)" to tell the story based on [John 20:19–31](#).

- How did the disciples react to seeing Jesus again?
- Why do you think they were afraid at first?
- What helped Thomas believe the news that Jesus was alive in a new way?

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Question group The children in this group will have the opportunity to explore what is discovered by asking questions. Bring a picture or photograph from a magazine, such as *National Geographic*, of an intriguing-looking person or group of people, perhaps from a different culture or ethnic group. Place the image in the middle of the group and invite children to ask as many questions as they can think of about the picture. Explain that no one will be trying to answer the questions. Encourage them to dig deeper and deeper with their questions as they look more carefully at the picture.

- **Why is asking questions sometimes a good way to learn?**
- **What questions do you think the disciples might have asked Jesus?**

Bible research group The children in this group will have the opportunity to learn more about the books in the New Testament. Explain that during the Easter season the Bible readings will be from the New Testament. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[The New Testament](#)" (p. 112) and Bibles; review the information and answer the questions together.

Reporting Invite the question group to explain how asking questions can help people learn, and the research group to tell what they learned about the books in the New Testament.

The Bible story and us

Thomas and the disciples encountered Jesus alive in a new way.


- **If Jesus appeared in this room what questions would you like to ask him?**


Jesus sent the disciples out to be God's love in the world.

- **How can we be part of the mission to help share the good news of God's love?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Easter zone: Question box** To encourage children to ask questions during this season invite them to create a question box for collecting their questions about God, Jesus, the Bible, and other questions about faith. Have them cover the box with gift wrap, adding a "Question Box" label. Distribute slips of paper and encourage children to write down as many questions as they can think of about faith, one per slip. Explain that the questions will be collected during the next four weeks and discussed on the fifth week with church elders or members of an adult study group. 

- **Art zone: Mural** Jesus gave the disciples a mission – to share the good news of God's love. Invite children to gather around a length of mural paper and use art supplies to create a group mural illustrating what this mission might look like. They might also depict the Holy Spirit, flowing like a river through their mural. Invite them to choose a title and display the mural in the church hall. 

- **Research zone: About Thomas** Invite children to learn more about Thomas. Provide copies of

the resource sheet "[About Thomas?](#)" pencils, and a map of India. Invite children to find the province of Kerala on the map, and then work in pairs to answer the questions at the bottom of the page. Discuss answers as a whole group.

- **Craft zone: Hanging doves** Jesus offered his friends peace and gave them the gift of God's Spirit. A dove is often a symbol for peace and God's Spirit. Provide copies of resource sheet "[Peace Doves](#)"; have children cut out the pattern pieces and follow the instructions to make their own "peace doves" to remember Jesus' message of peace. Use a hole punch to make holes for yarn hangers.
- **Outreach zone: Peace cards** Jesus spoke words of peace to the disciples. Invite children to make peace postcards to send to church partners around the world. Distribute pieces of card stock and invite children to print the words "PEACE TO YOU" on one side of their cards and decorate around the message. Provide a list of partner churches and invite each person to choose from the list and write that address on the other side of the card, along with their name and the name and address of their church in the upper left corner. Add stamps and mail them after church.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candles.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God,
Help us to feel Jesus with us,
when we share his message of peace
and share God's love with others. Amen.

Sing the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or "I've Got a Voice" (pp. 20–21 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), God's peace goes with you."

Reflect

In what ways did the children respond to the good news of Easter? What did you learn about the children from their comments and questions in this week's session?



An Amazing Story

based on John 20:19–31

Vary the tone of your voice to help express the emotions in this story.

Late on Sunday night, Jesus' friends were gathered together in a special meeting place. One by one they had crept down the dark streets of Jerusalem, knocked on the door of the safe house, and given the secret password. At least everyone was there, everyone except Thomas. *(Speak softly, holding your finger to your lips.)*

The disciples were scared. When Jesus died they had gone into hiding. They were afraid that the Roman soldiers would arrest them too. Peter arrived in the room, and checked to make sure that the doors and windows of the room were locked. *(Invite children to pretend to lock doors.)*

The disciples were also puzzled. Peter had called this secret meeting because there had been strange reports in the city that day. Peter told the disciples that some people had been saying that Jesus' tomb was empty and Jesus' body was gone! Then Mary Magdalene arrived and told them that she had seen Jesus earlier that day, and that he was alive in a new way. *(Look questioning.)*

As Peter and Mary were talking, something totally unexpected happened. Jesus was suddenly there in the room with them! *(Use an amazed tone of voice.)* Everyone stared in amazement. Was this a ghost?! No one said a word.

Jesus smiled and said, "Peace be with you." When the disciples heard Jesus' voice they knew

something wonderful had happened. It was true! Jesus really was alive in a new way! *(Use a happy tone of voice.)*

"Listen," said Jesus. "I have a very special mission for you. I'm sending you out into the world to continue the work that I started." Jesus noticed that everyone looked worried. "We aren't brave enough...We aren't good enough..." they said. Jesus knew the disciples were afraid, so he blew gently on each person and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will help you to teach others about living in loving ways." *(Invite children to make blowing sounds.)*

And then Jesus disappeared. As soon as Jesus left, the disciples went to tell Thomas that Jesus was alive. Thomas listened carefully but he just couldn't believe this story. "That's impossible," he said. "How can Jesus be alive again?"

A week later, all the disciples were together again and this time Thomas was there too. And just like the time before, Jesus suddenly appeared in the room, even though the doors and windows were locked. *(Use a dramatic tone of voice.)* Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you."

Now it was Thomas' turn to be amazed. "Is it really you, Jesus?" he asked. "Oh, yes it is! My teacher! Now I won't ask any more questions." *(Use an excited tone of voice.)* But Jesus told Thomas and the other disciples to keep asking questions, even though they wouldn't always find an answer.

After this, the disciples' lives were completely changed. Now it was time to do the job that Jesus had given them. Their mission was to share the good news of God's love with everyone. But they didn't have to do the work alone. The Holy Spirit would help them wherever they went.



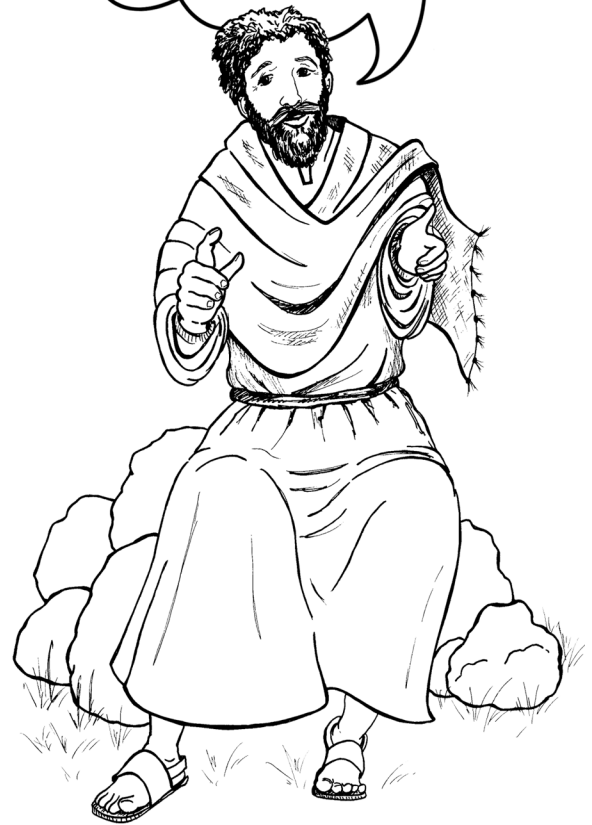
ABOUT THOMAS?

According to tradition, the apostle Thomas went to India in 52 CE. That was long before the gospel writers wrote down the stories of Jesus and the early church. Thomas is said to have arrived by ship in Kerala on the Malabar coast of India. In India, Thomas told many people the stories of Jesus the Christ, and many became Christians. This happened before Peter went to Rome in 69 CE. Therefore, Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself.

Going to India by ship would not have been too difficult for Thomas. Ships made the trip regularly because India and the Roman Empire were trade partners. We know there were Jewish settlements in Malabar (Kerala) in the first century. A beautiful Jewish synagogue still stands in the city port of Kochi on the Arabian Sea. Perhaps Thomas had friends or relatives there.

Today, the three major religions of Kerala are Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. They have lived in harmony for centuries. Today there are about nine million Christians in Kerala alone.

Hello. My name is Thomas. Not long after I met the risen Christ in that upper room in Jerusalem, I knew that God was calling me to tell others the good news about Jesus. So I went to India.

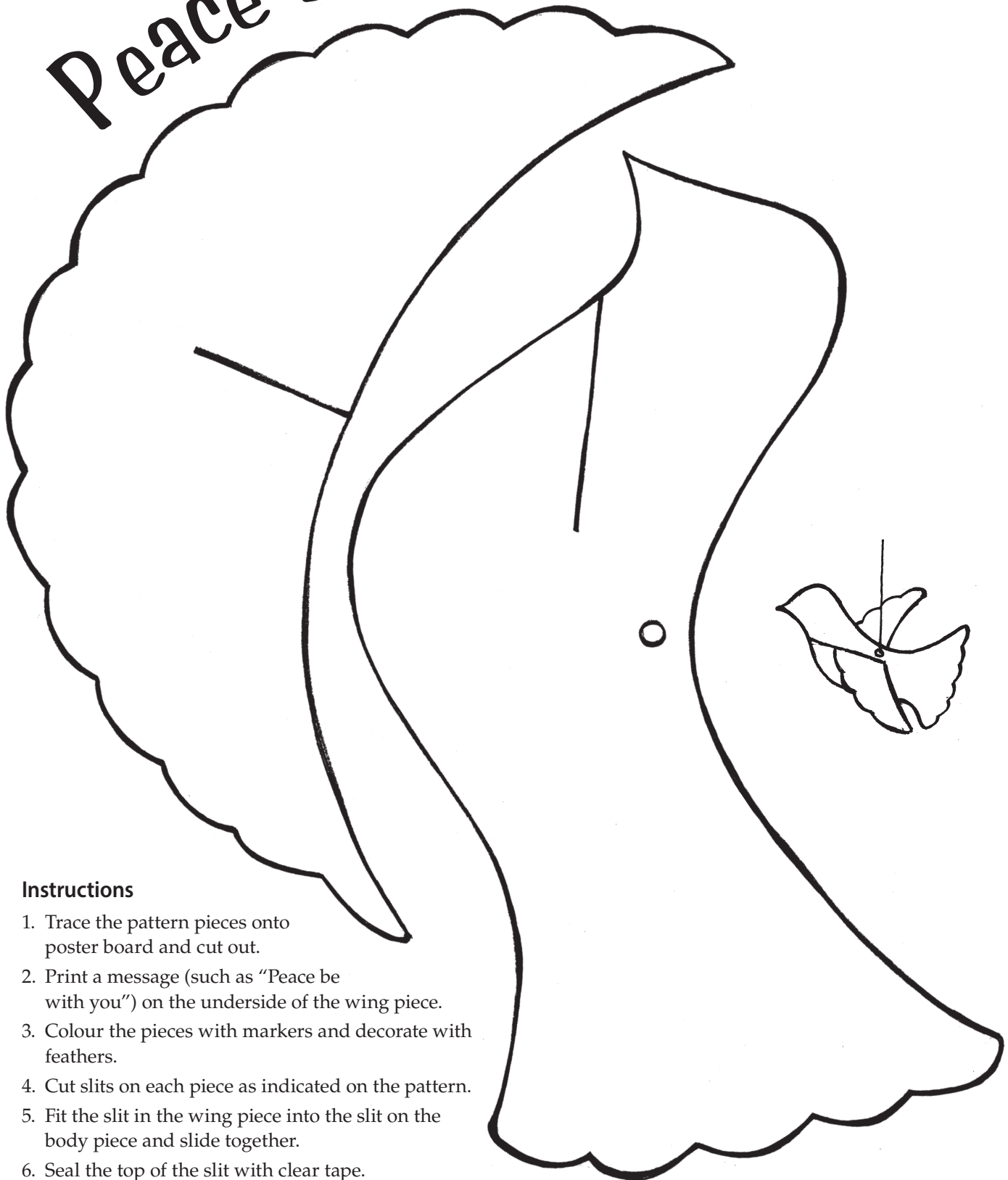


What do you think?

- What new information did you learn about Thomas or about Christians in India?
- What does it make you wonder about?
- What are three questions you would like to ask a Christian your age in Kerala?



Peace Doves



Instructions

1. Trace the pattern pieces onto poster board and cut out.
2. Print a message (such as "Peace be with you") on the underside of the wing piece.
3. Colour the pieces with markers and decorate with feathers.
4. Cut slits on each piece as indicated on the pattern.
5. Fit the slit in the wing piece into the slit on the body piece and slide together.
6. Seal the top of the slit with clear tape.
7. Add a yarn hanger.

Rituals for Lent

Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

May God’s love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

Lent 1

One: Lent is a special time of praying. *(Light the purple candle.)*

Two: On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.
(Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 2

One: Lent is a special time of praying. *(Light the purple candle.)*

Two: On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. *(Place a star beside the candle.)*

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 3

One: Lent is a special time of praying. *(Light the purple candle.)*

Two: On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. *(Place an object from nature beside the candle.)*

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 4

One: Lent is a special time of praying. *(Light the purple candle.)*

Two: On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for giving us hope when times are hard. *(Place a stone beside the candle.)*

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 5

One: Lent is a special time of praying. *(Light the purple candle.)*

Two: On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for your love that is deep in our hearts. *(Place a heart beside the candle.)*

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.



Easter Season Resources

Prepare an Easter worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold or yellow cloth and place a white pillar candle in the middle.
2. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
3. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
4. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

Gathering prayer

Reader: Loving God, we celebrate this Season of Easter, a time of new life and joy.

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to be witnesses to the new life in Christ. (*Light the central Christ candle.*)

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to spread the light of this good news. (*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

All: Alleluia!

Somlandela

Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Somlandela, yonke indawo.
Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Lapho eyakhona somlandela.

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
We will follow, we will follow him.
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
Wherever he will lead us we will follow.

Traditional Zulu song

Prayer lines (May 20)

I thank God for your gift of music in our church community.

I thank God for your leadership in our church community.

I thank God for the way you care for our church building.

I thank God for the ways you help lead worship.

I thank God for your visits to people who are sick or can't get to church.

Thank you hand cards (May 20)

Fold construction paper in half and trace a hand outline.
(See illustration #1.)

Cut out the shape, leaving the folded side intact to make a card.

Choose a prayer line, cut it out, and glue it inside the card.
(See illustration #2.)

Write your name below the message.

On the outside of the card, print the name of the person chosen to receive the card.



Illustration #1

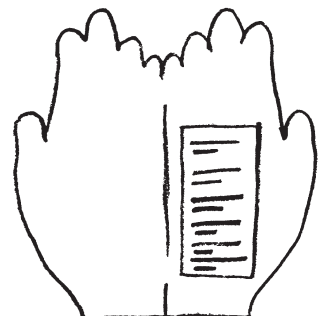


Illustration #2

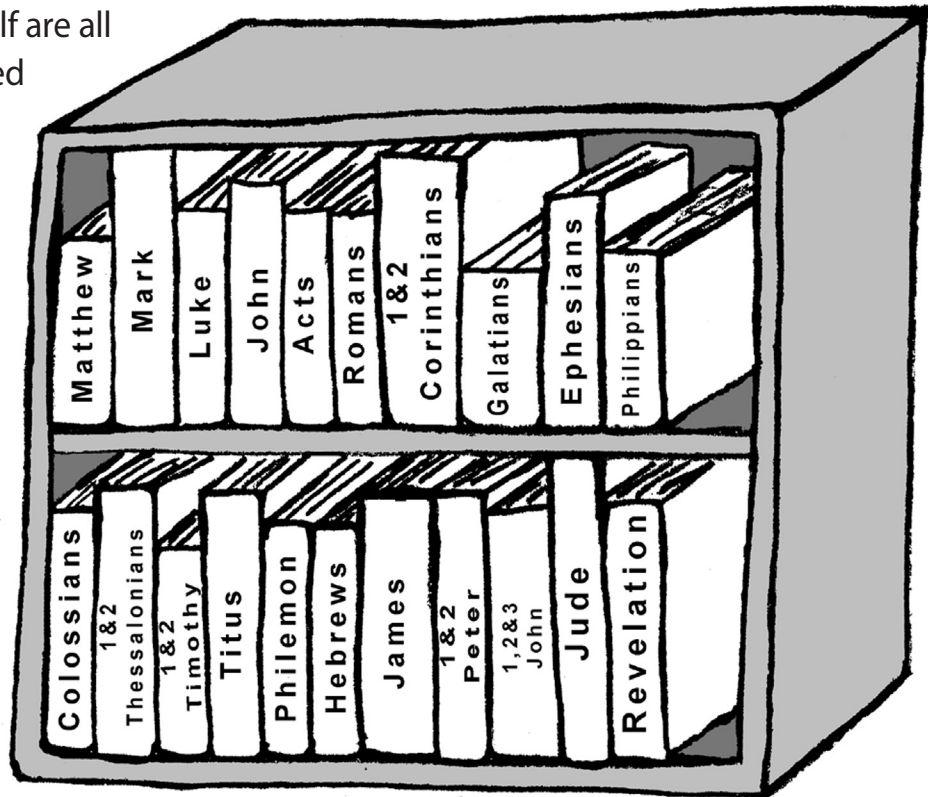


The New Testament

The books on this bookshelf are all in the part of the Bible called "The New Testament." How many books are there?

The gospels

The first four books include stories about Jesus. Look in your Bible to find the whole title for each of these books. What do these titles tell you about these books? Each writer tells the stories about Jesus in slightly different ways.



Acts

The first book after the gospels is usually called Acts. But the name of this book is longer. Look in your Bible to see what it is. This book is thought to be a continuation of one of the gospels. Which one? (*Find out by looking at the introduction to this book in your Bible.*)

Letters

All the books following Acts except the last one are letters written to various churches, or individuals, or groups of people. How many letters are there? The titles of these books might be the name of the writer or the name of the receiver. Sometimes more than one letter was written to the same person or group. Which ones are these?

The last book

The last book in the New Testament describes the visions of a man called John. What is it called?

