

Celebrating Easter as a family

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Themes covered

[Parenting Traditions / family of origin](#) [Parenting tips](#) [Faith and parenting](#)

What's inside this article

- Day one: Jesus enters Jerusalem
- Day two: A very special gift
- Day three: A special meal
- Day four: Jesus explains the good things His death will achieve
- Day five: Innocent of all charges
- Day six: Strange signs
- Day seven: Jesus is alive!

Bunnies and chickens are cute and all, and chocolate eggs are oh-so-yummy, but celebrating Easter without focusing on Christ can make the season seem emptier than a hollow chocolate egg.

As part of your Easter celebration, why not have a special week of Bible readings focused on the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection? Here are some suggested passages and activity ideas that will make your daily Easter storytime a big hit with the kids.

Day one: Jesus enters Jerusalem

Read Mark 10:32-34; 11:1-10.

1. When Jesus came to Jerusalem riding on the donkey, there were also thousands of other people streaming into Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Why do you think the people were so happy to see Jesus arriving at the city?
2. The people had seen Jesus' power displayed in many miracles. They thought that He was coming to Jerusalem to free them from the Romans and to begin ruling as God's chosen king of the nation. But Jesus knew that wasn't going to happen. What did Jesus say was going to happen to Him in Jerusalem? (See Mark 10:33.)
3. Why do you think Jesus wanted to go to Jerusalem, even though He knew He would die there?
4. If the people who lined the streets to cheer and welcome Jesus to Jerusalem had understood that He was coming to the city to die for them, to open a way for them to live forever with God, what do you think they would have cried out to Him as He passed by? What would you have cried out?

Pray

Pray to Jesus together. Tell Him what you would like to have said to Him as He passed by on His way to Jerusalem.

Celebrate!

Role-play Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, or simply have fun horsing around - with mom or dad offering "pony rides" on their back for as long as their energy will hold out!

Day two: A very special gift

Read Mark 14:3-9.

1. Why do you think the woman poured the expensive perfume over Jesus?
2. How did the people watching react?
3. Have you ever been criticized for something you did out of love for Jesus?
4. How do you think Jesus feels when you do things to show your love for Him?

Pray

Thank Jesus for giving you each other to grow and play and laugh with together. Ask Him to help you show your love for Him by always being kind to others.

Celebrate!

Focus on each member of the family, one at a time. Have everyone say one thing that they love about that person. Then spray the person with a small amount of perfume as a reminder of your love. (Men and boys may prefer to be rubbed on the wrist with a men's deodorant stick!)

Day three: A special meal

Read Mark 14:12-16; John 13:1-14:7.

1. In Jesus' day, the Passover meal was a very special celebration. For generations, the Jews had been sharing this special meal together year after year as a way to remember the miracles God had done long ago, in Moses' time. As Jesus and His disciples shared the Passover meal together, Jesus told the disciples some startling news. What did He tell them?
2. How did He want the disciples to react to the news that He was leaving?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said, *My Father's house has many rooms . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you?*
4. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, what was He showing them to always do for one another?
5. What else did Jesus ask the disciples to do for one another, always?
6. These important instructions to love one another were not meant just for the disciples. Who else did Jesus intend them for?

Pray

Ask Jesus who you can show love to. Ask Him how you can show that person your love in a very special or surprising way.

Celebrate!

Because of Jesus, God is waiting to welcome everyone home to heaven when their life on earth is over. God's house in heaven has plenty of room for everyone. How much room do you have for everyone in some of the corners of your house? It's time to find out by playing a squishy game of sardines!

Day four: Jesus explains the good things His death will achieve

Read John 16:5-7,12-14,22-24;17:1-3. As you read these passages, make a note of all the blessings Jesus promises to bring about through His death.

1. What were the different blessings Jesus promised? (The Holy Spirit will come; the Holy Spirit will bring the disciples messages from Jesus; God will answer prayers made in Jesus name; and Jesus will give people eternal life.)
2. How were the disciples feeling as Jesus spoke these words to them?
3. Jesus promised to come back to the disciples after He rose to life again. How did Jesus say they would feel when they saw Him again?
4. Do you think going to the cross was easy for Jesus, or hard?
5. Can you think of something that was hard for you to do, but you did it anyway and were blessed as a result?

Pray

Thank Jesus for sending His Holy Spirit. Pray that you will become very good at listening to His Spirit and hearing what He wants to say to you.

Celebrate!

Although the disciples were very sad when Jesus spoke about His death, He promised that their sadness would turn to lasting joy. Take turns making the saddest face you can. Now take turns making the happiest faces ever. Capture your expressions with a camera!

Day five: Innocent of all charges

Read Luke 22:54-71; 23:1-5, 13-26, 32-34, 38. As you read today's Scripture verses, see if you can identify all the different sins committed by various people.

1. How many different sins did you find? (Peter breaks his promise to Jesus and also lies three times; Jesus' captors poke fun at Him; the council, priests and scribes lie about Jesus' so-called crimes; and Pilate condemns the innocent Jesus.)
2. In contrast, what did Pilate say about Jesus three times?
3. What did Jesus say to God about all the people who had done sinful and hurtful things to Him?

Pray

Thank Jesus for His love and for always being ready to forgive you. Thank Him that He went through all the pain of the cross so that you could be forgiven for all the wrong things you have done.

Celebrate!

In Jesus' day, when criminals were hung on a cross as punishment for serious crimes, a sign was nailed to the top of the cross telling what they had done wrong. Pilate couldn't find anything that Jesus had done wrong, so the sign on Jesus' cross simply said "King of the Jews."

Take a dinner plate and washable markers. Think about something that you did wrong in the last few days. In words or pictures, make a "sign" on your plate that tells what you did wrong. Next, fill the sink with warm soapy water. As you wash your plate in the sink say, "Father, forgive me, because Jesus paid for my sins on the cross." Your "sign" – the record of your sin – has gone!

Day six: Strange signs

Read Matthew 27:45, 50-66.

1. Several strange things happened as Jesus hung on the cross. What were they? (Darkness from noon until 3 p.m.; right after Jesus died the curtain in the temple tore in two all by itself; there was an earthquake; and

- dead people who had loved God came back to life.)
2. How do you think the people felt when they saw all these unusual events?
 3. What was the special significance behind the temple curtain being torn in two? (The curtain had hidden the special holy place in the temple where God's presence resided. Only one priest could enter there once a year. The tearing of the veil symbolized that God was no longer "hidden." Through Jesus, everyone could now come into God's presence.)
 4. Who asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body and put it in a tomb?
 5. Why was that a brave thing to do?

Pray

Thank Jesus for being brave enough to go to the cross. Ask Him to make you brave enough to always do what is right.

Celebrate!

Make a pretend "tomb" by draping blankets over a table. Take turns wrapping each other in bathroom tissue and laying the "body" in the tomb. Pretend you are the chief priests and Pharisees: pile up cushions over the entrance of the tomb to make sure no one can get in to steal the "body."

Day seven: Jesus is alive!

Read Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-20, 28-53.

1. When the women told the other disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, what was their initial reaction?
2. How did the disciples react when Jesus Himself appeared among them?
3. Why do you think Jesus asked for something to eat?
4. What did the disciples do after Jesus left?

Pray

In Jesus' time, the priests offered sacrifices and prayers at the temple every morning. When they had finished, they would lift their hands over the people and bless them, reciting Numbers 6:24-26. When Jesus lifted His hands over the disciples, they could see the wounds from the nails that held Him to the cross. Now, the priests and animal sacrifices would no longer be needed. Jesus was the final, all-sufficient sacrifice who would bring God's blessing to everyone who believes in Him.

Choose an adult to pray a blessing over the family. Have them raise their hands and pray aloud this text from Numbers 6:24-26:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.

Celebrate!

Share a special treat together. If you wish to be a little elaborate, cut sponge cake into the shape of several small fishes. Let everyone decorate their "fish" with icing and candies.

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