

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY[®] Canada

Following Jesus

THROUGH HOLY WEEK



PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR
Easter and beyond





This devotional should be suitable for children ages 8 and up, but we encourage parents to read through each day's Scriptures and reflections before you share them to make sure they're appropriate for your family.

written by **SUBBY SZTERSZKY** | designed by **SHUWEN CHANG**

© 2023 Focus on the Family (Canada) Association. All rights reserved.





Palm Sunday:

ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Scripture:

For adults: Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44

Read aloud for children: Mark 11:1-11

In the ancient world, victorious rulers would make a triumphal entry into the new cities they had conquered, seated on a powerful warhorse to symbolize their military might. Jesus, however, flipped this tradition on its head – and at the same time fulfilled Old Testament prophecy – by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a symbol of humility and service.

The crowds welcomed him with palm branches strewn across the road and shouts of hosanna, to the chagrin of the Pharisees, who urged him to rebuke his followers. Nevertheless, Jesus accepted the praise and messianic fervour of the crowd as an appropriate response to his arrival.

Yet he also wept for Jerusalem because it didn't understand who he was, and he prophesied the judgment that would fall on the city and the nation at the hands of the Romans 40 years later. Jesus was indeed the messianic ruler promised in the Old Testament. But he was not the kind of Messiah the people wanted, a warrior king who would free them from Roman oppression. Within a few days, the same crowd that was singing his praises would be shouting for his crucifixion.



Palm



Questions for reflection:

Can you think of a time when you were disappointed because you were expecting God to be different than he is?

.....

.....

.....

Jesus turned everything on its head by being a servant-leader instead of a warrior king. What ways can we do the unexpected by serving others with kindness?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the true Messiah and your ways are far above what we could imagine or expect. Forgive us for our impatience and short-sightedness when we forget who you really are. Help us to remember that you are sovereign over everything and you are working even when we don't see it. In your holy name, Amen.

Sunday



Holy Monday:

AT THE TEMPLE

Scripture:

For adults: Matthew 21:12-17; 22:15-23:39; Mark 12:38-44

Read aloud for children: Matthew 21:12-17; 22:15-22; Mark 12:41-44

The day after arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple and confronted those who'd turned it from a house of worship into a marketplace. He flipped over their tables and chairs and physically threw them out of the building. It was a display of righteous anger, both human and divine.

Even so, the common people flocked to Jesus at the temple. He healed their diseases and taught them about the Kingdom of God, and he took special note of people like the poor widow who gave everything she had for God's service. Children ran freely through the temple singing his praises, with his approval.

In contrast, the various religious factions came at him in waves, with questions designed to trap him so they might condemn him. Jesus countered their trick questions and delivered a harsh condemnation of the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, blind fools and a brood of snakes. He turned the tables on them with a question of his own, about David calling the Messiah Lord, showing that the Messiah was not only a descendant of David, but also the Son of God. After that, the religious leaders stopped asking Jesus questions and began plotting how they might arrest and kill him.



Holy



Questions for reflection:

Why do you think so many people were drawn to Jesus, even when he had harsh words for religious leaders?

.....

.....

.....

In Mark 12:41-44, we read about a widow whose small gift meant so much more than rich people's large amounts. What can we learn about how God values the quality of our sacrifices more than the quantity?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are both just and merciful, filled with righteous anger and abounding in steadfast love. Forgive me for the times when I take for granted all that you have done and all that you will do. Help me to show your love and mercy to those who need it most. In your name I pray, Amen.

Monday



Holy Tuesday:

ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Scripture:

For adults: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25; 13:1-37

Read aloud for children: Mark 11:11-33

Whenever Jesus and his disciples visited Jerusalem, they would stay with their friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, in the village of Bethany near the Mount of Olives. Throughout Holy Week, Jesus spent his days teaching and healing at the temple, then retiring to Bethany for the evenings.

The commutes were eventful teaching moments, as well. On one occasion, he cursed a barren fig tree, which then withered and died. While difficult to hear, this object lesson highlights the importance of bearing spiritual fruit and God's warning to those who don't. On another commute, Jesus brought his disciples up the Mount of Olives, to a spot with a view of the temple, and spoke to them about his return at the end of the age, warning his followers to be ready, because it would come at a time when they least expect it.

Even during this final week before his death, Jesus maintained a healthy cycle of activity and rest, what we might call work-life balance. His days were intense, arguably the busiest of his entire three-year ministry, filled with concentrated teaching, healing and confronting his enemies. His evenings were reserved for rest and refreshment, enjoying the company of his disciples and his friends.



Holy



Questions for reflection:

What does it mean to “be ready” for the return of Jesus? How can we make sure our hearts are always prepared to see God?

.....

.....

.....

Do you ever get too busy for God? What can we do to practise the same rhythms of rest that Jesus did?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us how to serve in God’s Kingdom. Forgive me for all the times I distract myself with busyness rather than spending quiet time in your presence. Help me to be a godly friend to those around me as Martha, Mary and Lazarus were to you. In your precious name, Amen.

Tuesday



Holy Wednesday:

WITH HIS FRIENDS IN BETHANY

Scripture:

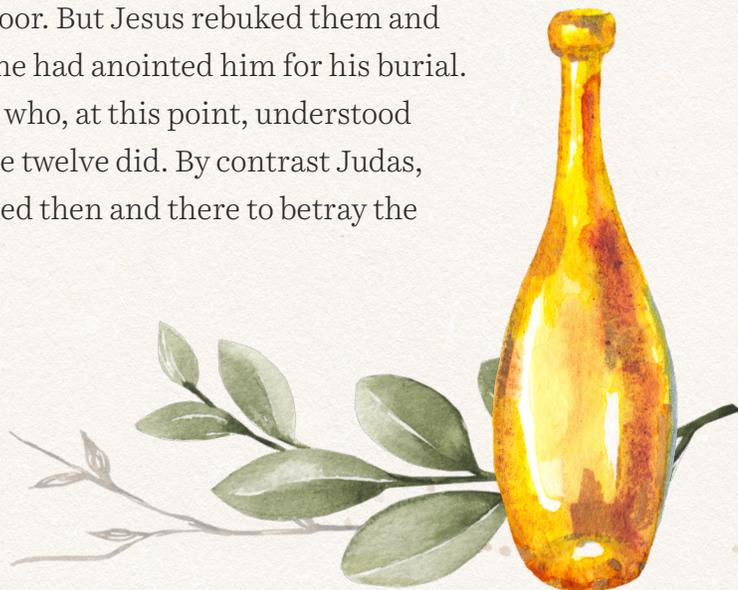
For adults: Mark 14:3-11; John 12:1-11

Read aloud for children: John 12:1-9

On one evening during the week, Jesus' friends at Bethany gave a dinner party in his honour. Martha, as was her custom, supervised the event and served the food. Meanwhile Lazarus, who Jesus had raised from the dead, reclined at the table in the place of honour next to the Lord.

During the meal, Mary came up behind Jesus, brought out an elegant alabaster jar of expensive perfume – worth about a year's wages – and poured it over Jesus' head and feet, wiping them with her hair. The value of the perfume suggests that Mary and Martha and their brother were a family of substantial means, and it was an extravagant act of public devotion to Jesus on Mary's part.

The disciples grumbled that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. But Jesus rebuked them and defended Mary, explaining she had anointed him for his burial. She was an attentive disciple who, at this point, understood Jesus' mission better than the twelve did. By contrast Judas, offended at the rebuke, decided then and there to betray the Lord to the authorities.



Holy



Questions for reflection:

Can you think of a time when, like the disciples, you put more value in something temporary than you did in God?

.....

.....

.....

What sacrifices could you make in your life, even little ones, to show the same devotion as Mary?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the anointed King of everything. You deserve everything I have to give. Forgive me for times when I hold back or prioritize things of this world over you. Lead me and guide me as your disciple and help me to remember you are worthy of all praise. In your sovereign name, Amen.

Wednesday



Holy Thursday:

IN THE UPPER ROOM AND IN THE GARDEN

Scripture:

For adults: Mark 14:12-52; John 17:1-18:11

Read aloud for children: Mark 14:12-41

As the end drew near, Jesus celebrated a final Passover meal with his disciples in the upper room. While they ate, he took bread and wine and explained to them that it was now a symbol of the New Covenant, in which his body would be broken and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sinners.

After supper, on the way to Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for all his followers from all time – including us – that we would share in the joy and glory he had with his Father since before creation. In the garden, Jesus’ humanity was on full, raw display. He confided to his friends that his soul was in anguish and asked them to stay with him while he prayed to his Father.

By the time Judas arrived with the arresting mob, Jesus had regained his composure. At first, the mob stepped back and fell to the ground when he told them “I am he” – an echo of the divine name – but then he submitted to them. He told the mob, as well as his followers, that this was God’s plan and a fulfillment of Scripture and asked that his disciples be let go. At that point, they deserted him and fled.



Holy



Questions for reflection:

Does it surprise you that Jesus was in anguish? How can knowing even Christ himself was in deep distress help you the next time you go through a difficult season?

.....

.....

.....

If you have ever taken communion, it can be easy to go through the motions. When you really think about it, what does it mean to you?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you experienced the pain and weakness of being fully human, but as fully God, you gave us the most precious gift of your love and forgiveness. Forgive me for the times I forget the depth of your sacrifice and give me courage to share the good news of your salvation. In your eternal name, Amen.

Thursday



Good Friday:

BEFORE THE AUTHORITIES AND ON THE CROSS

Scripture:

For adults: Mark 14:53-15:41; Luke 22:54-23:49; John 18:12-19:30

Read aloud for children: Luke 23:34-43; John 19:23-30

Throughout the night and into the morning, Jesus was passed between the Jewish authorities and Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. The Roman soldiers beat Jesus and knelt before him in mock worship. They had no idea they were kneeling before the Sovereign Lord of the universe, their Creator who held their life in his hands.

From the cross, Jesus continued to care for those around him. He prayed that the Roman soldiers would be forgiven. When one of the criminals crucified with him turned to him in faith, Jesus assured him they'd be together that day in paradise. And upon seeing his mother and his disciple John standing by the cross, he instructed them to care for each other as a mother and son would.

At the height of his suffering, Jesus shouted, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Although he knew he would rise on the third day, he was overwhelmed by the horrible thought of separation from his Father as he bore the full weight of God's judgment on the sins of the world. Once his redemptive mission was accomplished, he cried "It is finished" and committed his spirit into the hands of his Father.



Good



Questions for reflection:

What does Jesus' forgiveness, even in the worst moment of his life, show us about the heart of God?

.....

.....

.....

Can you think of someone you need to forgive? If it's not safe to forgive them in person, how can forgiving them in your heart help with your anger and bitterness?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are Creator of all and yet you care for each of us. You are God of the universe and Lord of our hearts. When life overwhelms me and I feel forsaken by you, remind me of your presence, your comfort and your goodness. In your powerful name, Amen.

Friday



Holy Saturday:

IN THE TOMB

Scripture:

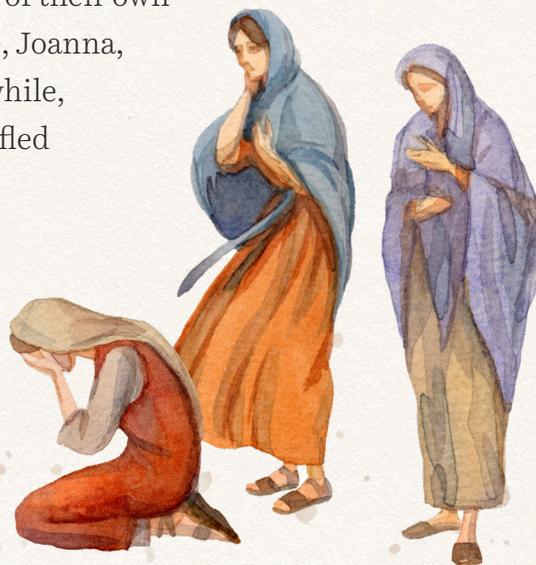
For adults: Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; John 19:31-42

Read aloud for children: John 19:38-42

In the evening as the Sabbath approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish ruling council and a secret disciple of Jesus, mustered his courage and asked Pilate to release Jesus' body for burial. After the soldiers had ascertained that Jesus was dead, Pilate released the body and Joseph buried him in his own new tomb, sealing it with a massive stone.

The Gospels don't have a lot to say about the day Jesus spent in the tomb. We're told the tomb was secured with an imperial seal and guarded by a detachment of Roman soldiers, because the Jewish authorities were concerned that the disciples might try to steal Jesus' body.

They needn't have worried. Through this whole time, at the cross and at the tomb, there was a group of women who stayed with Jesus and watched over him. These were the same women who had followed the Lord from Galilee to Jerusalem and supported his ministry out of their own means. The group included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Salome, and several others. Meanwhile, except for John, the rest of the disciples had fled and were nowhere to be seen.



Holy



Questions for reflection:

Can you think of a time when you stayed faithful to God even when others pressured you not to?

.....

.....

.....

Going forward, how can we find the courage of people like Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Magdalene to stand firm in the truth of who God is?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are more powerful than the ruling authorities in our world and yet we so often forget and allow fear and terror to grip our hearts. Give us courage to stay faithful to you even when others stray. Help us stand firm in the power of your name, Amen.

Saturday



Easter Sunday:

OUTSIDE THE TOMB AND BEYOND

Scripture:

For adults: Matthew 28:1-20; Luke 24:1:53; Acts 1:9-11; John 20:1-31

Read aloud for children: Matthew 28:1-20; Luke 24:35-53

On Easter Morning, the women were the first ones to see the risen Lord, and Mary Magdalene was the first person to speak with Jesus after his resurrection. The women reported everything they'd seen, yet even though they were faithful, prominent disciples who'd financed Jesus' ministry from the start, the men didn't believe them and dismissed their report.

Before long, Jesus began appearing to others as well. On that same day, he joined a pair of disciples on the road to Emmaus. That evening, he appeared and greeted the disciples in the upper room, inviting them to examine the wounds in his hands and feet, proving he was alive and had conquered death. He then opened their minds to understand that everything in Scripture was about him.

After 40 days and numerous other appearances, Jesus led his disciples to the Mount of Olives near Bethany, where he blessed them and disappeared into the clouds. While the disciples stared up into the sky, a pair of angels appeared to assure them – and us – that Jesus would return one day, the same way he had departed. For followers of Jesus, this is our expectant hope and joy, not just at Easter, but every day beyond.



Easter



Questions for reflection:

What would it have been like to be one of the women who first realized Jesus had risen?

.....

.....

.....

Has there been a time when you had good news you couldn't wait to share? How can you do the same with the Good News of Jesus' resurrection?

.....

.....

.....

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are our victorious Saviour who defeated death so that we may live. You are patient with us, and you show us the way when we ask. Help us to be ready for your final return. We wait with hope and joy to be by your side. In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Sunday