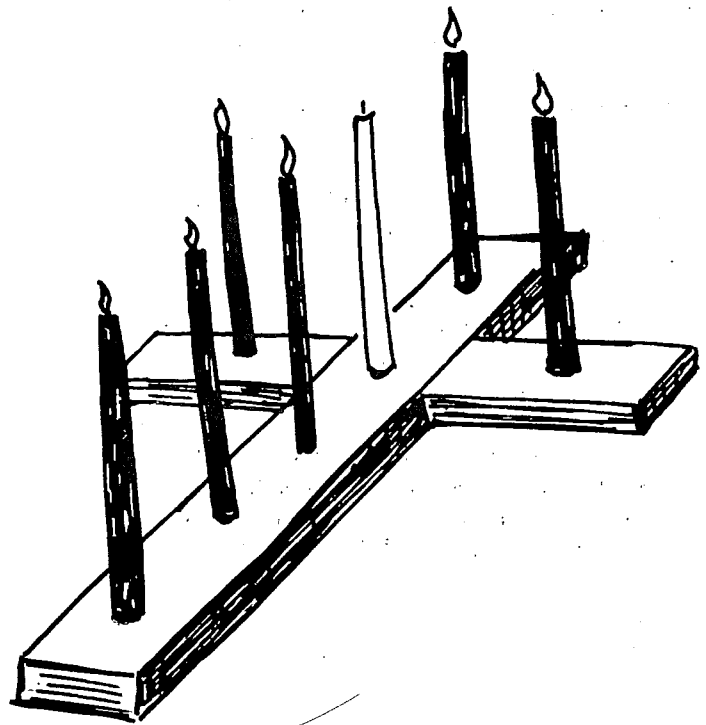


# THE LENTEN CROSS

by Colleen Britton



Just as the Advent Wreath with its four candles helps us remember the significance of Advent, the Lenten Cross with its six candles helps us remember and understand the meaning of Lent. Originally, the Lenten Cross was made from the wood of the Christmas tree. Thus it served as a reminder that the same Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas was later crucified on the cross as a man. Six purple candles represent the six weeks of Lent and a white Christ candle in the center symbolizes Easter. Purple is a color which denotes royalty. It also symbolizes repentance and a time of preparation. The white Christ candle symbolizes purity, and joy.

Before each candle is lit, a brief meditation or lesson adds to our understanding of what Lent means. The Lenten Cross can become a learning tradition for your congregation both during worship services and around the family table. Below are meditation suggestions for each of the six weeks. These can be used with children during worship services, church school, children's church, or youth group worship services. There are hundreds of other possibilities to make each week of Lent a meaningful time of Christian growth.

## **FIRST SUNDAY: LENT: A TRADITIONAL TIME OF PRE- PARATION FOR EASTER**

What is Lent? The word "Lent" comes from the Latin word meaning "springtime" or the "lengthening of days". It's a period of 40 days (excluding Sundays) prior to Easter. (40 days because Moses, Jesus and other Biblical characters went into the wilderness for 40 days to prepare for various tasks.)

Lent is a Christian tradition, a time to PREPARE, to get ready for Easter. What is a tradition? It is the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction. A TRADITION IS A WAY OF LEARNING BY DOING.

So Lent is a way of learning, a way of becoming a better Christian by doing and practicing certain things. Each week of Lent we are going to talk briefly about something Lent means and something you can DO to help you grow as a Christian:

This week everyone will receive a list of 40 THINGS TO DO DURING LENT. Each activity will help you prepare for Easter and will help you grow as a Christian. Pass out Lenten calendar's with 40 activities for them to do, one each day of Lent. (See page 34)

Light the first candle on the Lenten Cross (bottom one) as we remember that LENT IS A TIME OF PREPARATION AND GROWTH, AS WE LEARN BY DOING.

## **SECOND SUNDAY: DO GOOD DEEDS/SHOW KINDNESS**

What is a good deed? Think of some examples. Jesus teaches us to love one another and to be kind to one another. He and his disciples spent their lives serving others, caring for the sick and comforting the lonely and those in sorrow. The Bible tells us to "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). This means that since we know Jesus' teachings about loving and caring for one another, we ought to PRACTICE CARING, HELPING, SHARING -- doing good deeds and showing kindness, just as Jesus did. Pass out cross lapel pins to be worn upside down until they do a good deed, then they turn them right side up.

Light the second candle: DO GOOD DEEDS/ SHOW KINDNESS.

## **THIRD SUNDAY: GIVING/ SACRIFICE**

How many like presents? Do you ever give presents to people? Whenever we give a present to someone, it costs us something -- either money if we buy it, or time and energy if we make it. Whenever someone does something nice for you, buys you a present, cooks you dinner, takes you out to eat, remember that the gift is a sacrifice -- it cost the person something, either money, time, or energy, or all three.

God gave us his Son, Jesus, as a gift to show us the greatness of his love. That gift of love cost Jesus his life, a sacrifice he willingly made. We can learn what sacrifice means by giving up something we have or want in order to make someone else happy.

This morning we're going to give each one of you a dollar. The only catch is, that you use it to MAKE SOMEONE ELSE HAPPY. Next week you can share with us some of the things you did.

Light the third candle of GIVING AND SACRIFICE.

## **FOURTH SUNDAY: FORGIVENESS**

Have you ever done anything that you knew you shouldn't? We all have at one time or another. How did you feel? Was it hard for you to tell your parents or friend that you were sorry? How did they respond? Then how did you both feel? (BETTER! Things were back to normal)

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us that God will forgive us for the things we do that are wrong in the same way that we forgive others for the things that they do wrong to us.

This week remember to forgive others, and ask God to forgive you for the wrongs you do. Don't be afraid to say, "I am sorry."

Let's say the Lord's Prayer together and then we'll light the fourth candle: FORGIVENESS.

## **FIFTH SUNDAY: PRAYER**

What is Prayer? When do we pray? Are there only special times we can pray, or is God always in? Prayer is a two way communication. We need to listen as well as talk.

What do we pray for? to give thanks, praise, to pray for others including our enemies, to pray for God's presence and guidance throughout the day, not just things.

Through prayer we learn more about God and about ourselves. We learn to rely more on God and our own inner resources. We receive spiritual strength.

Pass out "Jesus Prays and Teaches Us to Pray"<sup>1</sup> booklets and encourage them to read through the booklet with their parents. Think about what Jesus says and teaches us about prayer.

Light fifth candle: PRAYER.

## **SIXTH SUNDAY: COMMITMENT (Palm Sunday)**

This is a very special Sunday in Lent which is the beginning of Holy Week. Do you know what this Sunday is called? What happened on this Sunday?

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he was making a commitment which is a promise or a pledge to do something in the future. He was announcing to the world that he was indeed the Christ, the One sent from God. And he had made a commitment to follow God's plan all the way to the cross if necessary.

As we enter this final week of Lent think about a commitment, a promise you can make to God and to yourself to do something special for God this week. Maybe you can attend a special Maundy Thursday Service, make an Easter card or gift for a shut-in, visit someone who is lonely. We are each one God's Children, his sons and daughters; make a promise this week to act more like a child of God.

Light Sixth candle: COMMITMENT.

## **EASTER: RESURRECTION SUNDAY/RENEWAL**

REPLACE ALL THE CANDLES ON THE CROSS WITH WHITE CANDLES.

Easter is a celebration of New Life, and Eternal Life that is ours because of Jesus. We remember that after he was crucified, he was buried in the tomb and on the third day he rose from the dead in a way that we don't fully understand, but we accept as true. This is the most important celebration in the church year because it illustrates that the love and the power of God are stronger than even death.

The Easter egg is a familiar symbol that reminds us of the rock that was rolled over the tomb because its hard shell looks like a rock, and it seems to have no life within. But it does contain new life which bursts out of the shell and reminds us of Jesus coming out of the tomb, and living again.

Just as God gave Jesus new life after death, and gives life to the baby chick inside the hard shell, so he can work through our hard problems and suffering to give us a new and eternal life.

Pass out Easter eggs to the Children and light the Christ Candle.

<sup>1</sup> *JESUS PRAYS AND TEACHES US TO PRAY*, American Bible Society, 1966.