

The word *Lent* comes from the Latin *lencten*, which refers to the lengthening of days of springtime. Just as the days grow longer and the flowers begin to grow, so we are called to grow in spirit and in truth during this season.

We observe Lent by special practices. We set aside time for prayer or journaling, we fast, and we do other acts that help us to discipline our souls and our minds and remind ourselves that “we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” We read more from the Holy Scriptures so that we can encounter God in God’s word. We deny ourselves chocolate and treats and other luxuries to remind us that it is God that we really depend on. We practice acts of mission and outreach so that we can grow in acts of charity and love toward others.

Lent is a special time. In one of the readings, we hear of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, and we are reminded of the first temptation in Eden. But in Eden, the first Adam succumbed to temptation. In the wilderness, Jesus resisted and sent the tempter away. Paradise lost is becoming Paradise regained.



The Episcopal Thread

Our *Book of Common Prayer* incorporates the Lenten observance into all of its services. For example, during Lent we begin our Morning Prayer with a special statement or Antiphon: “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

For the services of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist, the Lenten acclamation is changed to “Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins; His mercy endures for ever.”

Lent begins with the service of Ash Wednesday (*BCP*, p. 264). All, including children, are strongly urged to attend the Ash Wednesday service, a beautiful liturgy which helps us to focus on the coming forty days and what they will mean for us.

Because Holy Week and Easter are the foundational times of our Christian year, the season of Lent also takes on special significance as the preparation for those times. The rite of Holy Eucharist changes, and we preface that service with a recitation of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), along with a Penitential Order (see *BCP*, pp. 350-352). We also often use a different Eucharistic Prayer that expresses more the penitential nature of our days. The Great Litany (*BCP*, pp. 148-155) may be chanted, said or sung at the beginning of one of our Sunday Eucharists.

Thus the tone of our worship changes from the solemn joy of Epiphany to the spirit of repentance in Lent. This spirit pervades not only our worship services but also our daily living as we mark this season by the Ash Wednesday call to “the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (*BCP*, p. 265).

Each parish has its traditional Lenten observances—the collecting of Lenten mite boxes, outreach projects, Lenten educational programs, special services and prayers—to center us in repentance of our faithlessness to God and to strengthen our commitment to God.



Gathering

As the children enter the classroom, engage them in a simple activity that relates

to today's lesson. Today have the children do an activity that incorporates one of the disciplines of Lent: acts of mercy and kindness for others.

For a simple outreach project, provide paper and markers or crayons and let children draw pictures that can be used as "hello" cards for the homebound in your church. Have older children write a short note of greeting (*With love from the third grade class at St. Stephens*), and have all the children sign each card.

For a fancier card, enclose a copy of a prayer or scripture verse and a piece of wrapped candy. While making these cards, intermediate children may also enjoy visiting with each other.

For a fun greeting card, make or buy a paper doll and decorate it. Cut out the doll and add a heart sticker and a note, such as *Thinking of you with love*. Tape a piece of wrapped candy to one hand and a comforting scripture verse to the other. If you want to make a cut-out doll, use the pattern on page 9 at the end of this lesson.

When all the children have arrived and had a few minutes of activity and fellowship time, gather them together for an opening prayer, such as:

- We thank you, Lord, for your church, for your church family, and especially for all of us gathered here today. Please bless all of us here, that we may find this time fruitful for us and and we may use this time to your honor and glory. And please bless those of us who are absent, and let them know that we miss them. We ask all this in Jesus' name. *Amen.*



Telling the Story

Share with the children what the season of Lent is about and explain how we observe it.

What Lent is about: On Ash Wednesday, the celebrant tells us that Lent is customarily a time for us to prepare for the days of our Lord's death and resurrection by a season of penitence and fasting. During this season, converts to Christianity are also prepared for Holy Baptism. In general, Lent is a time for us to be reminded of the pardon and forgiveness given to us by God and of how we need to renew our faith in God.

Jesus' temptations: Remind children of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness after his baptism. From his example, we can learn to resist doing wrong and practice what is right.

Lenten disciplines: In our Ash Wednesday worship service, we are invited to observe "a holy Lent" by "self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word." This is the spirit in which people often "give up something for Lent" such as sweets.

There are other things we can do during Lent besides giving up something we like. (It doesn't help us to give up something we *don't* like, like liver and onions!) We can make sure that we have a time for prayer each day and time for reading the Bible.

Lent is also a time for us to reconcile with others. For example, we can reach out to someone with whom we are angry, or forgive someone who has wronged us.

We can also do acts of kindness for those in need, like collecting food for the local Food Bank, raising funds for a distant disaster relief fund, do a fund-raising project for an agency such as Habitat for Humanity or Heifer Project International. We can also write greeting cards for our own homebound in

our church. We can make something to sell and give the proceeds to an outreach agency. (On page 13 in the activity section at the end of this lesson, you'll find a pretzel recipe that your class can use to make pretzels to sell to your congregation.)

It is also important to attend church regularly during this season.

As we practice these special acts, hopefully they will become habits for us—things that we do regularly to follow God.

Here are other topics that you may include:

- *The color of Lent:* The liturgical color is purple, the color of penitence and expectation. Purple is used on Sundays in Lent as well as on weekdays.
- *The Lenten season:* Lent lasts for 40 days, because Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days. This number also reminds us of the years that Israel spent in the wilderness after the Exodus. Sundays are not included in Lent. We say “The First Sunday in Lent,” not “the First Sunday of Lent.” Sundays are always feast days, “little Easters,” so they are not part of our time of fasting or penitence. Count the days and see!

You may also give a brief summary of the stories that are told in church during the season of Lent, explaining how they reflect the moods of repentance and anticipation. To locate the readings for the season, you will need to ask the church staff for the readings of the liturgical year. The readings can also be found in *The Book of Common Prayer* under The Lectionary on pages 889-931.

You'll find more information on Lent in the Overview on Lent found on the Website.

After telling the children about the season of Lent, proceed to Prayer, saving any discussion for later, while having snacks or doing an activity.



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your classroom.

Materials

- small table with a cloth to cover it
- two candles or a single large Christ candle
- matches
- Bible
- cross
- optional:* flowers (real, fake or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles.

Read one or two verses from the lectionary reading for this Sunday. This will help the children connect the story that they just heard with the Bible. If working with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses, though we recommend keeping the reading short.

Note: The church staff will be able to provide you with the lectionary reading for today, the First Sunday in Lent. The reading can also be found in *The Book of Common Prayer* under The Lectionary on pages 889-931.

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the book of (*name of the book*): (*Read the selected passage.*)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Invite prayers of thanks for the work that God has done for us during the past week. Allow children to share the ways in which they have been guided by God or felt God's presence in their lives.
- Welcome any prayers of concern or petition that children may have at this time. Children may offer prayers for themselves or for others in need or trouble.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special times.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as:

- For the good food which God has given us, and for the hands that prepared it, let us give thanks to God. *Amen.*

Or allow the children to share a grace from home or camp.

While children are having their snacks, invite them to share some ideas on how they might observe this season.



Memorization

There is no memorization for this lesson.



Weaving Our Faith

Before your closing prayer, help the children pull the strands of this lesson together by asking questions such as:

- What was today's lesson about?
- What story did we hear today? What did we learn from it?
- What special things do we do during Lent? Why?

To help the children recall the main points of the lesson, you may prompt them with key words, such as: *penitence or repent, sins, fasting, prayer, temptation.*



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into

the church worship service or back to their homes wrapped in the love of Christ. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Loving God, as we begin this season called Lent, help us to use these forty days to learn to know you and to love you better and better each day. And show us each day how we can love others, too. We pray to you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord *Amen.*

End the class with a dismissal that we say in church, such as:

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The children respond:

- And also with you.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

GREEK LENTEN CALENDARS

for Preschool, Primary, Elementary

Children learn the history of, and then make Greek Lenten calendars.

(In some parts of Europe, Lent lasts for seven weeks, rather than five weeks, as it does for us. Before there were printed calendars, the people of Greece hung a Lenten countdown counter on a wall to keep track of the weeks before Easter. This homemade calendar was a paper cutout of a nun with folded arms and seven feet. She had no mouth, which reminded people of their fasting. Every Saturday, the nun lost a foot, marking the passing of a week.)

Materials:

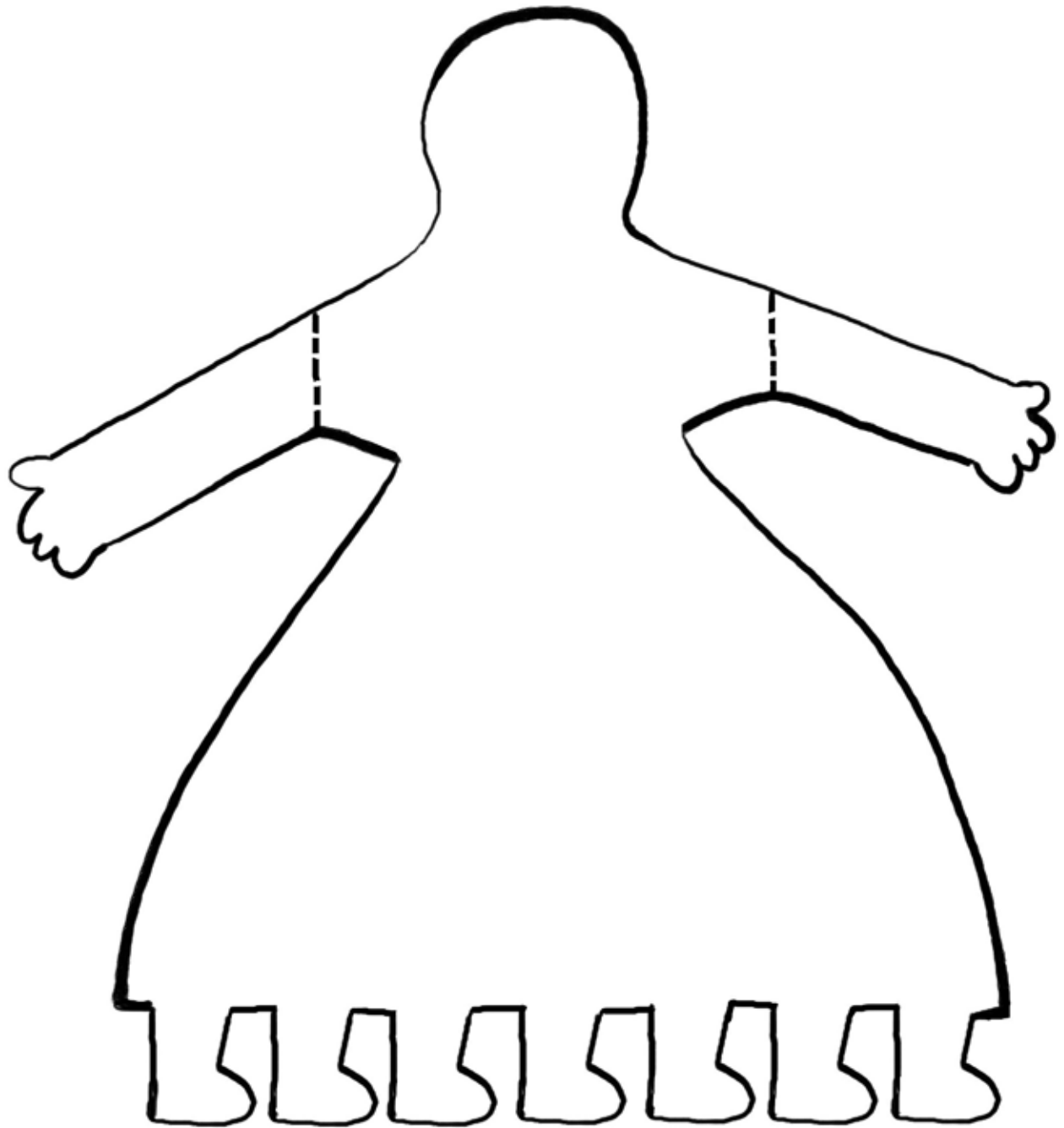
doll pattern (p. 9)
markers or crayons
scissors
pencils or pens
optional: decorative items, such as sequins
glue
stickers

Preparation:

Make copies of the doll pattern. You may wish to cut out the dolls for younger children.

Directions:

1. Distribute a doll pattern to each child and invite them to make a Greek Lenten calendar. Help the younger children as needed.
2. Instruct the children to cut out the doll, then draw a face with no mouth.
3. Allow the children to decorate the skirt as they wish, using crayons, markers or other decorative items, such as sequins or, for younger children, stickers.
4. Fold the arms so the hands overlap.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

LENTEN CROSSES AND CANDLES for Elementary, Intermediate

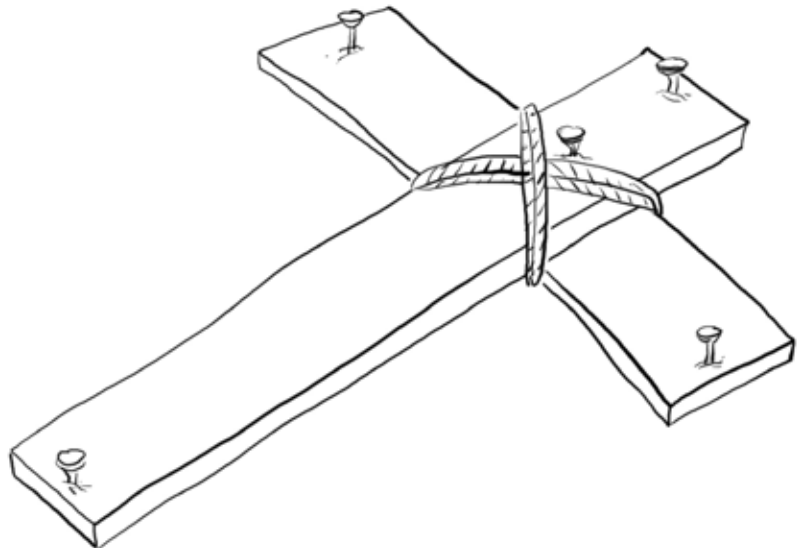
Children make Lenten crosses, with candles for lighting.

Materials:

- 2 pieces of wood per child
- 5 finishing nails (or other nail type with small head) per child
- 5 tea-light candles per child
- twine
- hammers
- purple paper
- pencils, pens or markers
- white glue
- scissors

Directions:

1. Show the children how to tie the pieces of wood together with twine to make a cross.
2. Hammer the nails to the cross, one in the center and the other four at the four ends. These nails represent the weeks in Lent.
3. Give each child five tea lights. They can place and secure these on the cross next to the nails with small dabs of glue. These are to be lit each Sunday in Lent; one is lit on the first Sunday, two on the second Sunday, etc.
4. Have each child cut five smaller pieces of paper from a sheet of purple paper. On each piece, they can write something they might do during Lent to observe the holy season, for example, *pray and read the Bible* or *help someone*. Encourage children to come up with their own ideas, but offer suggestions if you need to. Push these onto the nails to secure them (as far away as possible from the candle wicks to avoid burning).





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

LENTEN CHAINS

for Preschool, Primary

Children make Lenten paper chains that count down the days to Easter.

Materials:

sun pattern (p. 12)
strips of paper for each child:
5 red strips
1 white strip
1 black strip
39 purple strips
staplers, tape or glue
crayons or markers
bags
scissors

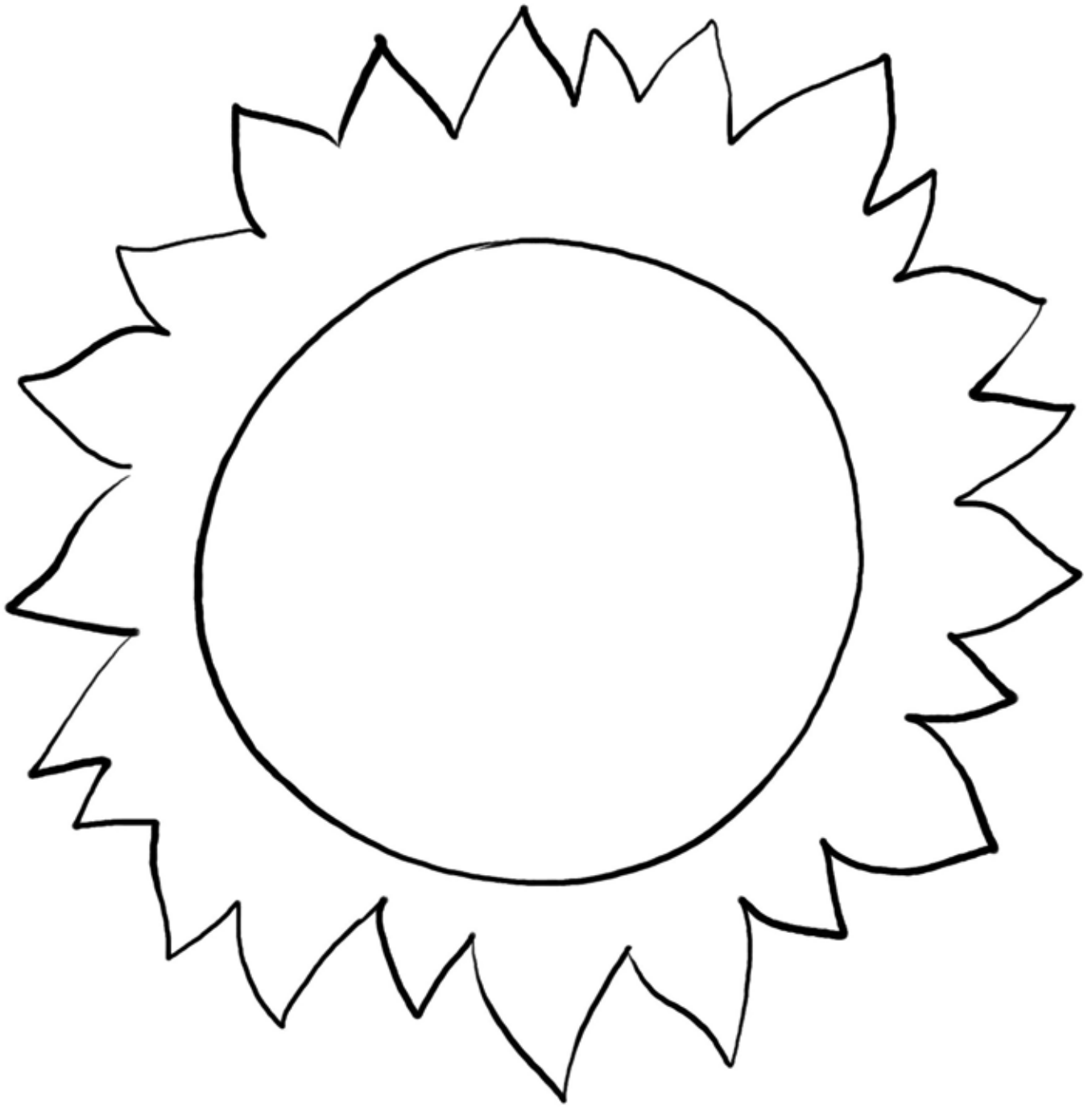
Preparation:

Make copies of the sun pattern and cut out, one for every child. Cut the strips of paper and count out the correct number for each child. Put these in a bag, along with the sun, so you won't have to count them again in class. You may also want to label the special strips (for Holy Week and Ash Wednesday) ahead of time.

Directions:

Give the bag of precut strips to each child and invite them to make a Lenten chain. Help the younger children as needed:

1. If desired, have children decorate the Ash Wednesday, Holy Week and Sunday strips, and the Easter sun. You may wish to label each strip appropriately.
2. Make chain links from the strips and staple them together *in this order*, with the sun at the top:
 - sun (for Easter day)
 - 1 red strip (for Holy Saturday, the day before Easter)
 - 1 black strip (for Good Friday)
 - 1 white strip (for Maundy Thursday, celebrating the institution of the Eucharist)
 - 4 red strips (for Palm Sunday, Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and Holy Wednesday (These last three are the Monday through Wednesday of Holy Week.))
 - All 39 purple strips (for Lent, including Ash Wednesday and Sundays)
3. Instruct the children to cut off each link as the day ends, counting down the days until Easter.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

LENTEN PRETZELS for Intermediate

Children make pretzels, a traditional Lenten food.

(Pretzels are traditional Lenten food because they don't contain any of the ingredients that were forbidden during Lent. In the Middle Ages, pretzels were the food of the poor during Lent; now they're a popular food. Their shape reminds us of praying arms. In fact, the word pretzel comes from a Latin word meaning folded arms.)

Materials:

- 1 envelope of dry active yeast
- 1½ cups warm water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 4 cups flour
- baking sheets, lightly greased with cooking spray
- coarse salt
- beaten egg or egg white
- mixing bowl
- oven

Directions:

1. Dissolve the yeast in warm water in a mixing bowl. Add the salt and sugar, then blend in the flour to form a dough.
2. Knead the dough until smooth.
3. Cut the dough in small pieces and roll into ropes. Twist the ropes into pretzel shape and place on lightly greased baking sheets.
4. Brush pretzels with beaten egg and sprinkle with coarse salt.
5. Bake in the oven at 425° for 12-15 minutes.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

PRETZELS FOR SELLING

for Preschool, Primary, Elementary, Intermediate

Children make and sell pretzels for a worthy cause.

(These pretzels have been popular when sold for 50 cents each or 3/\$1.00. This batch makes approximately 100 pretzels, depending on how big you cut the dough. If you sell the pretzels to your congregation, you could give the proceeds to an organization that serves the needy.)

Materials:

7-8 lbs. white flour	2 quarts water
¼ cup dry active yeast	¼ cup white sugar
1 cup additional warm water	1½ tablespoons salt
2 egg whites, beaten	coarse salt
several good-size mixing bowls	plastic cling wrap
spoon for stirring	oven
serving trays	<i>optional:</i> dough maker
large baking sheets, lightly greased with nonstick cooking spray	

Preparation:

The dough should be made ahead of time. Let it rise for 1 hour before shaping. You can freeze it until early Sunday morning, then let it rise. To make the pretzels:

1. Turn on the oven to 425°.
2. Pour 2 quarts water into a large bowl. Add the flour and salt.
3. Put the yeast, sugar and additional cup of warm water into a separate bowl and stir.
4. Add the yeast mixture to the flour mixture. Mix until it forms a ball.
5. Knead for at least 10 minutes. If you have a dough maker, you may want to use it, as this dough is heavy.
6. Place in a large bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let rise for one hour.

Directions:

Divide the dough into pieces and give some to each child. Invite them to make pretzels that can be sold to help others. Help the younger children as needed:

1. Show the children how to shape the dough pieces. Shaping the dough to resemble praying arms is traditional, but any shape is fine. Make sure the pieces aren't too large, or they will not thoroughly bake.
2. Place the shaped dough pieces on greased baking sheets.
3. Brush with egg whites and sprinkle with coarse salt. Leave some unsalted, as some customers will prefer this.
4. Bake in the oven at 425° for 12-15minutes.
5. Remove pretzels from the baking sheets immediately and place on trays. Allow the children to eat a pretzel from the first batch. If possible, sell the remaining pretzels, hot and fresh from the oven!

