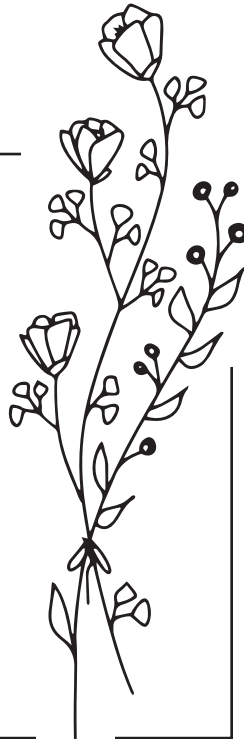


EASTER IS A START

.....

Easter is a start, not a finish. It is a triumphant day - a triumphant fifty days, actually, Easter to Pentecost - but only in the sense that in Easter we can catch a glimpse of God's greater triumph to come. It is a foretaste, a promise, an encouraging word, a sign of what's around the corner. Jesus rising means: he is not dead, he is with us still, and he has triumphed and will triumph with us and in us and for us in the end. His rising is the "first fruits," the decisive but still only the inaugural sign of the great transformation now underway. Easter points beyond itself to the end, precisely to provide us strength and hope for the road ahead.

NOTES



INTRODUCTION

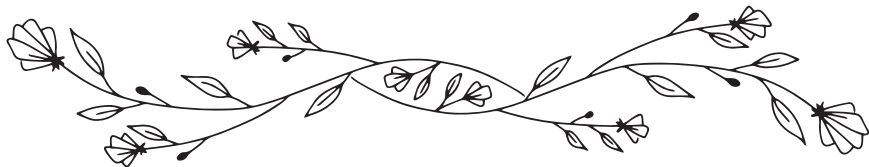


Tenebrae means “shadows,” and for centuries, Christians have held tenebrae services to explore the mysteries of Holy Week. Lights are gradually extinguished in the sanctuary, and shadows slowly gather - a powerful symbol of both the world’s brokenness and the dreadful night before Easter’s beautiful dawn.

At the same time, an Advent wreath is a time-honored practice of worshiping at home, lighting candles of hope, peace, joy, and love as Christmas approaches.

This devotional brings these two streams of Christian tradition together. The goal is to help explore the deeper meanings of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. And in a time of global pandemic, when individuals and families all over the world will spend Holy Week at home or in the hospital, simple practices like this one can help us connect with each other as we engage the key themes of the season.

For this year, the depths of Good Friday and hope of Easter Sunday may be more vivid, more tangible, more essential, and ultimately more life-giving than ever.



ALLELUIA!

What’s the good news of the Gospel on Easter Sunday? For those who despair that death-dealing powers have the upper hand - *fear not*. Easter means God ultimately is and will be victorious over the powers of death. For those who are feeling isolated and lonely - *fear not*. Easter means we are all together in the risen Body of Christ, even if we’re physically unable to gather together. For those who despair that our guilt is too great for God to forgive - *fear not*. Easter means God has cleared all accounts, liberating humanity from shame, reconciling us to God and each other as beloved children of God. For those who despair over a world filled with hate, violence, and scapegoating - *be encouraged*. In Christ’s passion, God has taken the place of the scapegoat in order to expose humanity’s violent ways - and Easter means God one day will overcome violence. Indeed, Easter means that God has taken one of the worst things in the world (the Roman cross) and remade it into one of the best (the Tree of Life), a sword into a ploughshare - and if the worst, then also the entire creation in the end! Like the cross, the empty tomb is a great divine mystery, a rising sun dispelling shadows in multiple directions. *Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*



"CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY"

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
All creation join to say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, O heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!


OTHER SONG IDEAS:

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"
"Now the Green Blade Rises"
"This Little Light of Mine"



USING THE DEVOTIONAL

.....
Each day follows a simple order of service:

 PRAY
READ
LIGHT AND SHADOW
REFLECT
PRAY AND SING

The week begins by lighting all the candles in the Holy Week Wreath as we hear the "hosannas" of the Palm Sunday story. Then, as the days go by, the candles are extinguished, one by one, until the wreath is shrouded on Holy Saturday. On Easter Sunday morning, the shroud is lifted and the wreath is decked out in light, beauty, and joy.

MAKING THE WREATH

.....
A traditional Advent wreath can certainly work, and using one might even help deepen the poetic tie between the "Madonna and Child" and the "Pieta." But anything arranged in the shape of a circle will do - evergreens, bare branches, thorny stems (evoking the Crown of Thorns), or whatever you have on hand. Just end up with a circle of four candles surrounding a fifth in the center.

For the "shroud" on Holy Saturday, try a simple rectangular cloth (tea towels work great!), and for Easter Sunday morning, add flowers (are there crocuses or daffodils in your yard?), sprigs of green (any pussywillow branches or forsythia in bloom?), and/or your favorite Easter sweets - whatever most clearly says to you, "Alleluia! Taste and see that God is good!"

PALM SUNDAY

Begin by lighting the candle in the center of the wreath, the "Paschal Candle" (which means, "Passover Candle") that symbolizes Jesus, the Light of the World. Then read the prayer. If more than one person is participating, take turns as the service unfolds.

PRAY

Prince of Peace who arrives on a humble donkey, give us your hope, your peace, your joy, and your love for the journey to come. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ

Matthew 21:1-11

Light the wreath's other four candles, drawing the light from the central Paschal Candle. Each time you light a candle, read a line from the litany below:

- First candle: "A candle of hope."
- Second: "A candle of peace."
- Third: "A candle of joy."
- Fourth: "A candle of love."


REFLECT

Jesus comes to us as a light shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. What signs of hope, peace, joy, and love, no matter how small, do you see today?

.....

**BLESSED IS THE ONE
WHO COMES IN THE
NAME OF THE LORD!**

+ Matthew 21:9



EASTER SUNDAY

Rejoice and be glad: death has been put to death! Remove the shroud, light every candle in the Holy Week Wreath (and add some more!), bring inside signs of God's eternal springtime, sprinkle onto the table something sweet so you can taste and see that God is good.

PRAY

Alleluia! Thank you, God, for this new and dawning day. Thank you for your steadfast faith in us, for forgiving and loving and remaking the world, lifting us up, again and again and again. In Jesus' name, Alleluia, Amen!

READ

Matthew 28:1-10

REFLECT

Easter Sunday is the beginning of fifty days of Eastertide, just as Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a new era of resurrection, hope, peace, joy, and love. In your life, where do you see signs of new life springing forth?


PRAY AND SING

Dear God, in the weeks and months and years ahead, let us take part in your healing of creation. Let us be living signs of hope, peace, joy, and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

.....

**HE IS NOT HERE:
FOR HE HAS BEEN RAISED.**

+ Matthew 28:6



“WERE YOU THERE”

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (x2)
Ooooh - sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Verse 2: Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Verse 3: Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

OTHER SONG IDEAS:

- “What Wondrous Love Is This”
- “When Jesus Wept”
- “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”
- “Jesus Walked That Lonesome Valley”

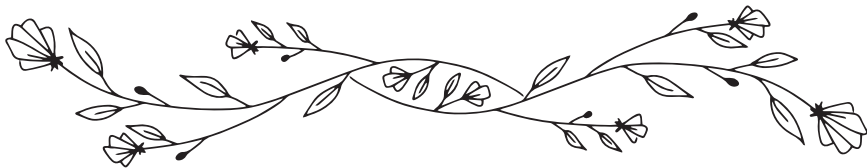


HOLY SATURDAY

To symbolize the sorrow and uncertainty of the day, suspended between life and death, hope and fear - leave the wreath alone and unlit. Shroud it with a cloth.

PRAY

Dear God, be with us as we wait and watch and rest in the tomb with Jesus tonight. Mend our broken hearts. Help us hope against hope. Stay with us. Have mercy. Amen.



PRAY AND SING

Dear God, make us signs of your hope, instruments of your peace, expressions of your joy, and examples of your love and justice in the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

“JOYFUL. JOYFUL. WE ADORE THEE”

Joyful, joyful we adore thee
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee
Opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness
Drive our fear and doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day!



OTHER SONG IDEAS:

- “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord,” from Godspell
- “All Glory, Laud, and Honor”

MAUNDY THURSDAY

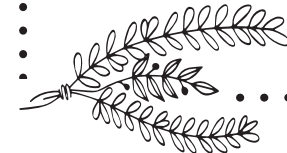
Begin by lighting all five candles in the wreath.

PRAY

God of love, help us to love one another as you have loved us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I GIVE YOU A NEW
COMMANDMENT. THAT
YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

+ John 13:34



READ

John 13:1-9, 31b-35

After the reading, extinguish one of the wreath's candles, the candle of love.

Matthew 26:36-46

Extinguish a second of the wreath's candles, the candle of joy.

REFLECT

In your experience, where is love most needed today? In what ways are we "asleep, and taking our rest"? How do we need to wake up?

PRAY AND SING

Dear God, we pray for places and people in the shadows of hate, indifference, and sorrow. We pray for your love and joy! In Jesus' name, Amen.

"THE DOXOLOGY"

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God above ye heavenly host
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost! Amen.

OTHER SONG IDEAS:

"Let Us Break Bread Together"
"Joy to the World" (sing slowly and meditatively)
"Stay Here and Keep Watch With Me" or
"Stay With Me," from Taize



ARE YOU STILL SLEEPING
AND TAKING YOUR REST?

+ Matthew 26:45



GOOD FRIDAY

Begin by lighting the Paschal Candle and two outer candles in the wreath, the candles of peace and hope.

PRAY

God of grace, in the midst of violence, give us your peace. In the midst of despair, give us your hope. In Jesus' name, Amen.

READ

John 18:1-14

Extinguish the candle of peace.

John 18:15-27

Extinguish the candle of hope.

John 18:27-19:30

Extinguish the Paschal Candle, and then read John 19:31-42.

THEN HE HANDED
HIM OVER TO
THEM TO BE
CRUCIFIED.

+ John 19:16



REFLECT

In your experience, where are peace and hope most needed today? Where do you see shadows of conflict and despair?

PRAY AND SING

Dear God, we pray for places and people in the shadows of conflict, violence, illness, and despair. We pray for your peace and hope! In Jesus' name, Amen.