



On your marks

The season of Lent begins and ends with the cross. On Ash Wednesday there is the tradition of receiving the cross of ashes on the forehead to mark the beginning of a six week period of prayer and reflection before Easter; and on Good Friday, we finally come to the cross of history on the hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus died.

The following outlines - apart from the first - are all based around crosses that are found in the Barnabas book [A-cross the World](#). These could be used in a variety of ways:
as material for a Sunday group session with children during Lent;
as a resource for a special event with children and adults during the Lent period;
as a focus for a special Lenten display.

These outlines also contain ideas for a Bible Focus using parables that connect to the story and meaning of each particular cross. Each child could make the crosses individually or perhaps there could be one large version made co-operatively by the children and which can then be brought into church for display, building up to the events of Holy Week and Easter morning.

Get set

You will need to obtain a copy of [A-cross the World](#). This book has information and creative ideas based on 40 different crosses from around the world. It also includes ideas for all-age worship, study sessions, games, outlines for special events, collective worship in school and also for R.E. lessons.

Go!

1. **Ash Wednesday** marks the beginning of Lent. The key theme of course is *repentance*.
In the week before you could prepare your group for the whole series on the cross by telling them about the custom of the cross of ashes given to worshippers on this day.
Under supervision you might then burn some of the palm crosses from last year to create some ash. At the end of your session together you could use this ash to make cross marks as the 't's of the first and last letters of the phrase ' **T**he season of Len **T** '. Each child can make a copy of this to begin the series.
In Baptism we are signed with a cross on our foreheads, though of course this is done in water. It marks our new beginning in Christ. The cross of ashes on our foreheads marks our decision to say sorry for what we have done wrong and to get ready to make a fresh start with Jesus again.

A Bible parable for this day would be that of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-24), focusing particularly on the younger son. It is about repentance and coming back to God. His journey home - during which he rehearses his special repentance speech for his father - is a picture of the journey we make through Lent. There is a reflective story version of this in the style of Godly Play available [here on this website](#) (1895)

2. **Lent 1-** the Taizé Cross

Key Theme: *Welcoming*

Use the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 in [A-cross the World](#).

The story of the Taizé Cross reminds us of the welcome that God gives to everyone as part of his new family because of the cross of Christ. The craft idea for this cross is on page 74 of [A-cross the World](#).

The Bible parable for this is that of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15 -24), in which Jesus tells of a great party thrown for guests, who make excuses about coming. However the master of the feast then opens it up to all who want to come. Heaven is being likened to a party, which is open to all.

I wonder what sort of menu the children would draw up for their ideal party? I wonder what sort of food would be needed on the table for it to be appropriate for people from all over the world and from all sorts of backgrounds? I wonder what surprises we might discover on the guest list in God's heavenly banquet?

3. **Lent 2-** the Holding Cross

Key Theme: *Deciding*

Use the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 in [A-cross the World](#).

The story of the Holding Cross is in part about having to make a decision to take a firm hold on Jesus by faith. The craft idea for this cross is on page 93 of [A-cross the World](#).

The Bible parable for this is that of 'The Tower Builder and the Army General' (Luke 14: 27-31). Jesus is saying that we can not just drift in and out of following him but that we need to make a definite decision to put God first. He wants us to see that following him and choosing God's way is a serious decision that we all need to make.

I wonder what have been the big decisions that the children have had to face so far in their lives? I wonder how they have gone about making those decisions? I wonder why Jesus was so concerned that we should think hard about whether to follow him or not? Can the children decide on what are the best ways to go about making big decisions?

N.B. The Holding Cross is particularly used in prayer. I wonder how this relates to this story?

4. **Lent 3-** an Irish Cross

Key Theme: *Forgiving*

Use the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 in [A-cross the World](#).

The story of St Bridget's cross reminds us of how much we need both to forgive others and to give to others, if we are to truly follow Jesus. The craft idea for this cross is on page 76 of [A-cross the World](#).

The Bible parable for this is that of 'The Unforgiving Servant' (Matthew 18:23 - 35). Jesus is quite clear that we can't ourselves experience God's forgiving love if we refuse to pass this on to others; but it isn't easy. Peter's question that prompts this story is a very real one. He asks in effect: surely there must be a limit to how many times we forgive other people? But Jesus is clear. Showing forgiveness is absolutely crucial (=of the cross!) to becoming the sort of people he wants us to be. Unforgiveness makes us much less than our best.

I wonder if the children have people who they find hard to forgive? I wonder where the power comes from to forgive again and again? I wonder if it is really possible to forgive people who have done terrible things to us or to others? Is Jesus asking the impossible?

The truth is that, unless we open our hands to give and be forgiven, we can't really receive the blessings God has for us (e.g. try opening a wrapped sweet with clenched fists!).

5. **Lent 4-** the Jerusalem Cross

Key Theme: *Caring*

This is also Mothering Sunday.

Use the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 of [A-cross the World](#).

N.B. There are also further ideas for some crafts that could serve as Mothering Sunday gifts on page 120 -122 of [A-cross the World](#).

The story of the Jerusalem Cross reminds us of the 'mother diocese' of the Christian Church worldwide, namely that of Jerusalem and the Middle-East. This is where the story of Jesus started and spread. See the information and craft ideas for this cross on pages 38-39 of [A-cross the World](#).

The Bible parable for this is that of the 'Sheep and the Goats' (Matthew 25:31 - 46). This particular parable of Jesus must surely have shocked those who first heard it. He insists that how we treat others - whoever they may be - is the benchmark for how we have truly responded to God.

On a day when we remember how mothers and others have cared for us, we are challenged to care for all people in the same way, as followers of Jesus Christ.

I wonder who are the really needy people today for whom we should care like this? I wonder if the children might like to re-write this story including examples of people in trouble or in need about whom they know. Who is it today, for whom we should be caring as the way to serve God?

6. **Lent 5-** the Sudanese Cross

Key Theme: *Risking Everything*

This is also Passion Sunday

Use the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 of [A-cross the World](#).

The story of the Sudanese Cross (pages 24 -25 of *A-cross the World*) is one of amazing faith in the face of terrible suffering. The country of Sudan has suffered terribly through civil war, which has resulted in thousands of deaths, slavery and millions of displaced people. Even though at the present moment there is a degree of peace particularly in the south, there is still much silent suffering in refugee camps to the west of the country. However, despite all this, the church has continued to grow and hold on to its faith because of the cross of Christ. See the suggested craft activity on page 25.

The Bible parable for this is that of the 'Wicked Tenants' (Luke 20: 9 -18). Jesus told this story not long before his death. It seems impossible not to understand that he was talking about himself but it was only his enemies and not his friends who realised this. This story lends itself to becoming a piece of mime-drama, which can then lead to some discussion as a group.

I wonder what Jesus was really talking about? I wonder why the vineyard owner was prepared



to risk sending his own son? I wonder how Jesus himself felt as he told this parable?

This story, as well as the story of Christian faith in Sudan, gives us new insights into the real meaning of Holy Week and the events of Good Friday.

7. **Lent 6-** a Palm Cross

Key Theme: *Dying*

Make use of the ideas for games and icebreakers on the cross from pages 107 -112 in [A-cross the World](#).

The story of the Palm Cross is of course ideal for today which is Palm Sunday. You can find this along with craft ideas on page 34 -35 of [A-cross the World](#).

The Bible parable for this theme is that of the seed that must die (John 12:20 -26) Jesus tells this short story on Palm Sunday. The idea that death is the only way to new life is the mystery at the heart of the Easter.

Why not make this parable visual by literally planting a seed deep in the soil and then placing alongside it examples of a tiny shoot, a growing plant and a fully-grown flower.

I wonder what this teaches us about the real meaning of Easter? How does each stage of the sowing and growing relate to the events of the week to come?

On this Sunday you might also like to show the children how to make a cross of their own from one piece of A4 paper, simply by folding and cutting - which can also be a picture of the dying of the seed. See the instructions for this on page 83 of [A-cross the World](#).

Finally for each of these sessions there are a number of possible ideas for prayers, both formal and creative, in [A-cross the World](#) - see pages 113 -119 and pages 123 -128.