

# INTRODUCTION

**T**he practice of preparing oneself for Easter stretches back to the earliest centuries of the church. Lent—a 40-day observance (not including Sundays)—has traditionally been a time of penitence and fasting, modeled after Jesus’ 40-day fast in the wilderness. Some Christians observe Lent while others don’t, yet we find common ground in marking Palm Sunday, observing Good Friday, and celebrating Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

This resource is an invitation to journey toward the Cross and to consider God as we meet him there. What does the Cross reveal to us about who God is? How might we encounter God and come to know him more intimately through our contemplation of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection?

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

**To use this devotional during Lent**, start with Week 1 on Ash Wednesday (February 14). Then reflect on one reading each week throughout Lent. On Palm Sunday (March 25), begin the daily devotions for Holy Week, culminating in a final reading for Easter Sunday. Alternately, you can read these articles **at your own pace** during the weeks leading up to or following Easter.

Each weekly reading in this guide is followed by Bible study and reflection questions for use during your personal time with God or for discussion in a small-group setting. Our **Ideas for Families** and **Groups** offer creative suggestions, fun projects, and discussion starters to enrich your spiritual growth as you draw near to the Cross together.



*Kelli B. Trujillo*

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Editor

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

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## IDEAS FOR FAMILIES



*Grow in faith as a family by journeying toward the Cross together. Select a few of the ideas below that best fit the ages and interests of your children.*

- Use colorful oven-bake polymer clay or air-drying modeling clay to make crosses together. Set them up as decorations in your home during this season.
- Teach younger children about fasting by doing a “favorites fast” together. Write “Favorites” on a large cardboard box, then have each family member put a favorite item (such as a toy, stuffed animal, book, and so on) in the box for the duration of your fast. Use the opportunity to discuss the purpose of fasting in an age-appropriate way.
- If you have older children and teens, do a media fast as a family. For a designated period of time, turn off television, social media, and other forms of electronic entertainment. Enjoy other family experiences together instead, such as walks outdoors, games, art, and so on.
- Yeast pretzels and hot cross buns both have traditional ties to Lent and Easter. Research their symbolism, then make a batch to enjoy together.





## THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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JEREMY TREAT

**T**he first time my daughter opened her eyes was inside an ambulance racing through downtown Chicago. As I held her tight, her blue eyes looked straight into mine, and I knew she was going to be fine. We already had a special bond because I had just delivered her in the front seat of our Honda Civic. It was one of the most glorious moments of my life.

And yet, suffering personified—that is, my wife—was lying next to us on a stretcher. She embodied the pain through which such glory had come. I had witnessed firsthand glory through suffering. Every time I recall the moment, I realize that glory through suffering isn't unique to my daughter's birth. According to the gospel, it's the story of the world.

Suffering is inevitable and unavoidable. Surrounded by cancer, mental illness, infertility, depression, loss, and ultimately death, we ask how God's glory could shine through such tragic circumstances. For most of us, glory and suffering seem incompatible, just like something cannot be simultaneously hot and cold, wet and dry. But Christ's journey from the cradle to the grave reveals a pattern that is stitched throughout the fabric of Scripture. For Christ, Christians, and all creation, the way of glory is the way of the Cross.

When we look at Scripture, we might conclude that suffering and glory compose a two-step movement: Glory comes *after* suffering. Certainly at many points, Scripture presents suffering and glory as a linear progression (Acts 2:33–36, Phil. 2:6–9, 1 Pet. 1:10–11, Heb. 2:9–10). But it also reveals a more organic and overlapping relation between the two: glory *through* suffering (John 12:23–33, Rev. 5:5–6).

As Jesus approached his death, he said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). At first, it seems that Jesus is talking about his coming entrance into heaven. But the following verse explains that Jesus is referring to his crucifixion: “He said this to show what kind of death he was going to die.” John’s gospel builds toward the climactic hour when Jesus’ being “lifted up” on the cross is the moment he is enthroned in glory (John 12:23–32, 3:14, 8:28). The Cross becomes the throne from which Christ rules the world.

The Cross also becomes the fulcrum upon which the logic of the world is turned upside down. Shame is transformed into glory, foolishness into wisdom, and humiliation into exaltation. The glory of the Cross shines throughout the rest of the New Testament. Paul says, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). And according to the Book of Hebrews,

God is restoring his original design for creation through the death of his Son, who was “crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death” (2:9). From the bruised heel of Genesis 3:15 to the reigning lamb of Revelation 22, the Bible tells the story of a crucified Messiah who is glorified through suffering.

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JOHN 12:23, 32–33

## THE COMING OF THE KING

Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.’” (Matt. 21:1–2). They “brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.”

(v. 7). However trivial this errand may have seemed, it was full of biblical and theological significance. The prophet, Zechariah, had said: “See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9).

When Jesus mounted the donkey—not just any donkey, but specifically a purebred colt, as Zechariah promised—he was presenting himself as Israel’s promised king. Many would have remembered the words of Zechariah and recognized what Jesus was doing. Some may have even remembered that when Solomon became Israel’s king, he was presented on the donkey of his father David (1 Kings 1:38–39). When they saw Jesus riding on the foal of a donkey, they said, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matt. 21:9) By using that title, they were acclaiming Jesus to be their rightful king.

There is an even older prophecy that explains why Jesus rode a donkey. Long before Zechariah, Jacob pronounced this blessing on his son Judah: “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the

ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch” (Gen. 49:10–11). Jacob’s prophecy meant that Israel’s true king would come from the tribe of Judah and that

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MATTHEW 21:4–5

Jesus said in John 11:25–26, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Jesus asks us, as he asked Martha, “Do you believe this?” If so, you can answer, “I am happy” and “I am deeply grateful.”

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## FOR REFLECTION

- Ken Shigematsu begins by discussing the painful loss of his dad. When have you experienced the sorrow of loss?
- Shigematsu says, “Easter means that death—whether it’s our own or the passing of a loved one—is an occasion for profound sadness, but also deep gratitude—even a time when we can say, ‘I am happy.’” Does this assertion relate to your own experience of loss? Why or why not?
- Read **John 11:1–44**, focusing especially on verses 25–26. What do you imagine Martha felt or thought as Jesus said this to her? How would you explain the significance of Jesus’ claim in your own words?
- Reflect on **John 20:1–18**. Consider, also, Paul’s insights into the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in **Colossians 2:13–15** and **1 Corinthians 15:20–21, 54–56**. How do these passages add to your understanding of Jesus’ identity as “the resurrection and the life”?
- Shigematsu asserts “The true message of Easter is that there is a world to come beyond death . . . He will not only make us new, but he will also renew this earth.” Contemplate **Revelation 21:1–4** and reflect: How is the renewal of the created world tied to Jesus’ assertion, “I am the resurrection”? In your view, how is it tied to the meaning of Easter?
- Pray, praising the resurrected Christ for his victory over sin and death.