

Mardi Gras— Preparing for Lent



On Mardi Gras, preferably in the evening, gather as a family around a place designated for the Lenten prayer space. Together create the prayer space using symbols such as the Bible, cross, purple cloth, candle.

1. Talking about Lent

Spend some time together talking about Lent. Have family members complete the sentence: *Lent is...*

Then share the list below. Let children ask questions, and talk about Lent.

Lent is a season for....

- making time and space to remember what it means to be Christian, by remembering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in a special way.
- remembering the life and message of Jesus—recommitting to living as followers of Jesus in today’s world.
- giving up the negative in our lives to make room for more positive.
- being open to change of heart and habit—to deepening our relationship with Jesus and with each other.
- taking time out from the usual daily routine to focus on what is most important in our lives.

- acknowledging the parts of our lives that need forgiveness and changing, and working to make them right again.
- clearing out some space in our lives so God can enter and fill it; and taking time to discover where God has always been.

2. Sharing Stories of Lent

Share stories of Lenten practices in your family.

- What have you done in the past?
- What are the family’s ideas for this Lent?

Our Lenten commitments are not only about sacrifice, but also a way for us to “clear out” some space in our lives that will help us remember what life is really about. It is a season when we focus on “self-discipline” to become better “disciples” in following Jesus. And a time to ask God’s forgiveness for the times we have forgotten or failed to live as Christians.

3. Making Family Lenten Commitments

Your family will make a list of the kinds of things the members of the family could “practice” during Lent that would help them become a better Christian. These might be things one would “give up” in order to make time and space to follow Jesus’ example—like giving up a TV show to read the Bible or spend time playing with a younger sibling—or giving up a movie or candy bar in order to donate the money to the rice bowl collection. Or they might be things a person could begin or continue “to do”—such as helping with extra chores without complaining, spending time with an elderly neighbor, welcoming a new student at school, or being more understanding when parents get stressed.

Let a family member record the family group ideas on a sheet of paper. Roll this sheet of paper up as a scroll. Tie with ribbon or yarn.

Materials needed for this activity

- Pieces of paper and pens for each family member
- Yarn or ribbon

4. Making Personal Commitments

There are four major areas in our lives that we could choose to focus on during this Lenten season. The areas are: home, school, church and the surrounding community. We are called to be Christian people in all these places by sharing our gifts and being Jesus to

others. Ask family members to identify for themselves which of these four areas they want to focus on during this Lenten season. Then ask them to identify what it is they hope to do during Lent to follow Jesus’ example better. It may be something that was listed earlier, or something different. Parents will need to guide younger children through thinking about simple, concrete things the children can do in each of the areas identified.

Next, family members write down or draw symbols related to what they are going to focus on during Lent. If they are written statements, they can begin with *During Lent I will....* Younger children can draw simple pictures. Then have family members roll these sheets of paper up as scrolls. Tie with ribbon or yarn.

Materials needed for this activity

- Pieces of paper and pens for each family member, crayons for the children
- Yarn or ribbon

5. Family Prayer

Gather the group near the prayer table. Light the candle on the table.

Leader

God, you created us out of love. And you sent your son Jesus who lived, suffered and died for us out of that same love. Our family prepares to begin our Lenten journey. We come to you offering our hopes, our failures and our intentions—knowing that through your love and the example of Jesus we can continue to grow as a family of faith who bring your love to those around us.

Reading

God sent his son to be the savior of the world. We saw his son and are now telling others about him.

We know what love is because Jesus gave his life for us. This is why we must give our lives for each other. If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person, or else we cannot say we love God. Children, you show love for others by truly helping them, and not merely by talking about it. God wants us to have faith in Jesus Christ and to love each other. This is also what Jesus taught us to do. (1 John 4:14, 3:16-18, 23)

Response

Family members quietly put their scrolls with their Lenten commitments in the basket on the prayer space. Be sure the family commitments are also placed in the basket.

Lenten Petitions

Pass the petitions around, allowing those who can read to participate. Continue passing the petitions until they have all been read.

Leader

Jesus, we want to follow your example, but sometimes it's not easy. You said you will always be with us, so we ask you now to be with us during this Lenten season and help us to grow in faith and action as Christians.

Response to the prayer petitions: *Help us, Lord.*

Reader 1

For the times we make fun of others because they seem different than us—

please help us to be accepting of all people. We pray....

Reader 2

For the times we are selfish with our time and possessions—please help us to willingly share what we have with others. We pray....

Reader 3

For the times we argue in our family—please help us to appreciate our parents, brothers and sisters in a loving manner. We pray....

Reader 4

For the times when we forget about you Lord, and think we don't need you — please help us to take time to pray and listen for you guidance. We pray....

Reader 5

For the times we give in to what is wrong because we're afraid to say no—please give us the courage to stand up for what we know is right. We pray....

Reader 6

For the times we are hurt by others, our friends and family—please give us the grace to forgive as you do. We pray....

Reader 7

For the times we fail, and feel too tired to go on —please give us the strength to try again. We pray....

Leader

Jesus, You are our model of love. Help us to share your love in our lives through

our families, friends and even the strangers we meet. May our lives be a sign of your love in our world today. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our savior and our friend. Amen.

Sign of Peace

Invite family members to offer each other a sign of peace and support for the Lenten journey they are beginning.

The prayer space and the commitment scrolls will serve as a reminder for family members during Lent.

Lenten Scripture Reflections

Week 1	First Letter of John Chapter 3:11-18
Week 2	Gospel of Matthew Chapter 25:34-35, 40
Week 3	Gospel of Luke Chapter 6:36-37
Week 4	Gospel of Matthew Chapter 22:36-39
Week 5	Gospel of John Chapter 11:20-27
Week 6	Gospel of John Chapter 13:4-5, 15

Carnival and Mardi Gras

In New Orleans, the celebration of Mardi Gras actually begins the Friday before Epiphany with a party at which is served a “Kings’ Cake.” A small plastic statue of a baby is hidden within the batter before baking. The special cake is decorated with purple, green and gold frosting. A highlight of the party is the serving of the cake. All the cake is eaten, and whoever finds the plastic statue in their piece hosts the next party which is scheduled the following Friday. These weekly parties continue until Fat Tuesday. Bake a “King’s Cake” for Mardi Gras. A walnut can be used in place of the statue. When you serve the cake, award a small prize to the person who finds the hidden walnut in their piece.

Favorite Foods!

Have every family member name all of the favorite foods they would want to eat before they began a fast. Classify these food into categories—such as vegetables, desserts, breads and pastas, meats, fruits, etc. Then, as a family create Carnival Menus for the weeks before Ash Wednesday by plugging the various foods into the categories and creating meal plans. Every week, share a family meal which combines some of the favorite foods of family members. Include “junk food” favorites here and there during Carnival as treats and special snacks. Close these evenings by playing a favorite family game.

Absolutely NO Work Day

How long has it been since your family has had a day where no one—meaning not one family member—did any work? (Mom, a load of laundry counts as work.) During Carnival, plan an “Absolutely NO Work Day.” Have fun figuring out how to avoid the “work” of cooking, cleaning, and all the other routine chores we fill our lives with every day. Maybe this means escaping from the home for the day just to have fun as a family.



Bake a King's Cake!

Ingredients

½ cup warm water	2 packages dry yeast
2 teaspoons sugar	4 to 5 cups flour
½ cup sugar	2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon nutmeg	1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
½ cup warm milk	½ cup butter melted and cooled
5 egg yolks	½ cup finely chopped candied citron
1 pecan half	purple, green and gold sugar crystals

Glaze

2 cups powdered sugar, sifted 2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon + 2 teaspoons water

Directions

Combine ½ cup warm water, yeast, and 2 teaspoons sugar in a small bowl. Mix well. Let sit for 10 minutes. Combine 4 cups flour, ½ cup sugar, salt, nutmeg and lemon rind, add warm milk, butter, egg yolks and yeast mixture. Beat until smooth. Place dough on lightly floured board and knead in enough of the remaining cup of flour so that dough is no longer sticky. Continue to knead dough until elastic and smooth (about 10 minutes). Place dough in greased bowl, cover with a damp towel, and allow to rise until doubled in bulk (about 1 ½ hours). Place dough on lightly floured surface, punch down. If desired sprinkle on citron and knead until citron is evenly distributed. Shape dough into a 30-inch cylinder. Put a well-greased 2 lb. Coffee can in the center of a buttered baking sheet; form cylinder of dough around the coffee can into a ring. Pinch ends together to seal. Gently press pecan half into the dough from the bottom making sure that it is completely surrounded by dough. Cover and let rise until doubled in bulk (about 45 minutes) then bake at 350 degrees about 30 minutes or until golden brown. Remove coffee can at once and allow cake to cool. When completely cooled make glaze by combining powdered sugar, lemon juice, and water and stirring until smooth. Drizzle over cake and sprinkle with sugar crystals.

