

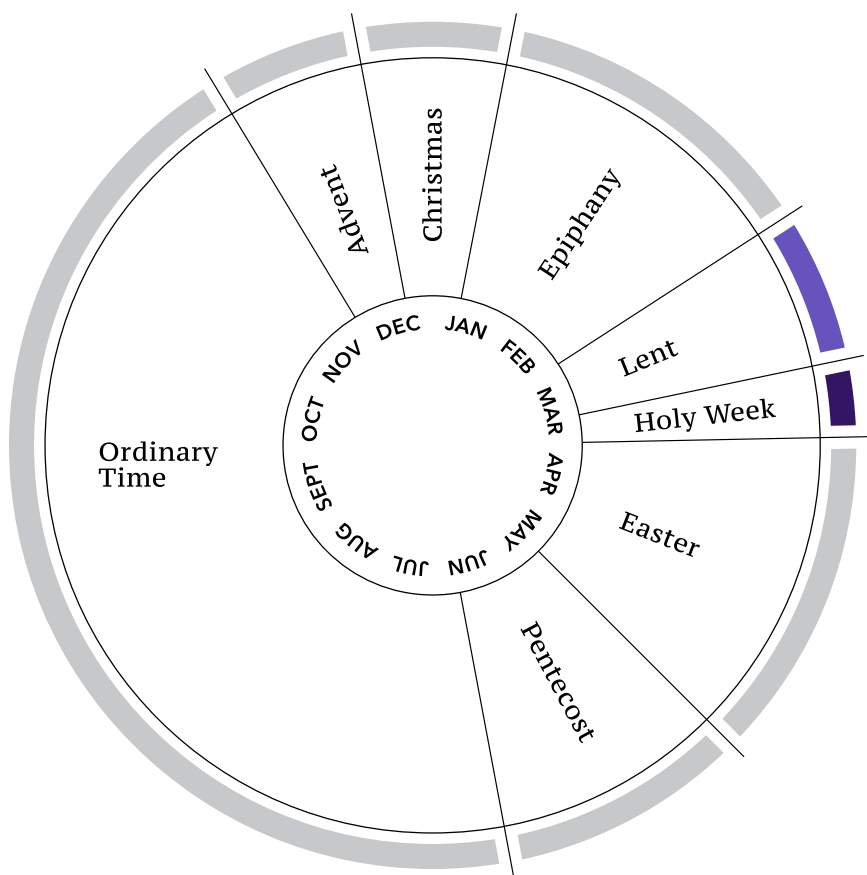
LENT DEVOTIONAL

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INTRODUCTION



WHAT IS LENT?

Lent is a season devoted to the awareness of our sin and the practice of turning our hearts toward Christ in humble repentance. The 40 days of Lent between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday mirror Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, lasting 40 days (Matt. 4:1-11). Lent invites Christians everywhere to slow down and focus on Jesus' ministry each day—specifically his sacrificial death, which we celebrate on Good Friday. Therefore, Lent is often marked by fasting, prayer, and reflection on our need for Christ's atoning sacrifice. The season of Lent culminates on Easter, when we celebrate the hope of the resurrection life that comes through faith in Jesus!

HISTORY + TRADITIONS

Lent is not specifically in Scripture, but we must not overlook its importance. This great tradition dates as far back as the 4th century AD and continues to be a vital rhythm in the church calendar across many denominations all over the world. In many ways, Lent is a retelling of the gospel story with our own lives through the practices observed. These formational practices remind us that the gospel isn't only *for us*, but it is also a reality we *participate in*—both with Christ himself and with the global Church. In this tradition, we imitate our great God and Savior (1 Peter 2:21; Eph. 5:1).

There are two main practices that accompany the season of Lent: fasting and confession. *Fasting* has long been practiced by Christians during Lent. In his Lenten devotional, *Journey to The Cross*, Will Walker notes that fasting is, “a tangible, physical activity that points to our spiritual longing to be rooted in Jesus alone and find our true comfort and joy in him.” In other words, our physical hunger brings about a deeper awareness of our spiritual hunger, which only Christ can satisfy. It's about saying no to lesser things (even good things) in order to say yes to greater things.

Confession is a reminder of our deep need for Jesus as our Savior. Every day we face testing and temptation—being confronted by the reality of sin that plagues our lives and world. Yet, Christ went into the wilderness as our representative (Matt. 4). He faced temptation and left the wilderness victorious, without the corruption of sin and filled with the Holy Spirit. On the cross, Jesus again went as our representative, allowing all sin and death to be absorbed into himself so our bondage to sin and death would be undone. We practice confession precisely because we cannot (and did not) overcome sin ourselves. Rather, Jesus did on our behalf. Each time we confess our sins to Christ and one another, we slowly step into New Creation—who we were intended to be in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Until we enter glory, we need to confess our private sins *and* collective injustices toward others (1 Jn 1:8-10).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The beauty of Lent is there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. As a church family, we will observe Lent together on Sundays. But we encourage you to go through this guide on your own, with your family, or with your community group, to slow down and intentionally “journey to the cross” with Jesus. There are guided prayers to work through as well as a passage of Scripture for each day. Each *Weekly Focus* is a passage that thematically relates to Lent and functions as a “verse of the week” for kids and families

and/or a jumping off point for groups. Holy Week will have a slightly different format, which will help us slow down for the anticipation of the Easter celebration. This guide is structured so that it can be used for personal, group, and family use.

FOR PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL TIME:

Personal devotions can be intimidating and one might ask, “*where do I start?*” so each week provides a liturgical flow for you to follow. Feel free to adapt it to fit your personal rhythm.

FOR GROUPS:

G Lent is not intended to be a solo journey. Rather, it’s a spiritual pilgrimage that the whole Church takes together as the family of God. Along with personal use, we encourage you to use the guide with a few friends in your closest community. These can be members in your River Group, Men’s Group, Community Group, or even your roommates. You can work through the prayer flow together, then use the Weekly Focus passage for discussion. Then, find the Groups (**G**) icon and work through those questions.

FOR FAMILIES:

F The questions under the group section can also be used as family devotionals—whether that’s between spouses or the whole family. But for families with little ones, look for the Families (**F**) icon that will provide supplemental readings and prayers better suited to younger children.

WHAT ABOUT SUNDAYS?

If you did the math, then you probably realized there are forty-*six* days of Lent. This is because Sundays are known as “Feast Days” where people often break their fast one day of the week and celebrate with friends and family. This is encouraged since Sundays are a *celebration* as God’s people gather to worship Jesus and remember the new life we have in him! Use Sundays as a day to celebrate in this season.

A FINAL WORD

This is all by *invitation*. There is no requirement as disciples of Jesus to observe Lent. However, we will go through these practices as a community and while we seek a deeper hunger for God to move in our church, we invite you to journey along with us!

START HERE:

LENTEN FASTING RHYTHM

For the season of Lent, we invite you into this particular rhythm of fasting: a *weekly* fast and a *seasonal* fast.

WEEKLY FAST: Pick one weekday (we recommend Friday) to fast from eating one meal (we recommend lunch). Every time you feel the pang of hunger, give that moment to intentional prayer, asking God for a deeper hunger and satisfaction in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. If you've never fasted before, we encourage you to give this a try! But one important note: *pay attention to your body!* If you are unable to fast from food for health reasons, try abstaining from something else.

SEASONAL FAST: Perhaps what you most associate with the season of Lent is being asked what you intend to “give up.” Although Lent is much deeper than just “giving up” something, abstaining from particular pleasures is a rich practice during this season. Typically, people give up alcohol, red meat (or certain foods), media and entertainment, and shopping in order to live simply for the season. In the space below, write one thing you intend to fast from for the entirety of Lent (Feb 18 – March 30, except Sundays):

For Lent 2024, by God's grace and in the Spirit's power,

I intend give up _____.

And I intend to replace it with the spiritual practice of

_____.

F Consider participating in “Rice and Beans Month” through Lahash Ministries. Simplify some of your meals to rice and beans and donate the money you save to increase the impact of food-focused projects across East Africa. For more information go to lahash.org/project/rice-and-beans.

WEEK ONE | FEB 18-24

OPENING PRAYER

I praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Fill me and renew me during my time with you. Amen.

WEEKLY FOCUS: The Curse of Sin — Genesis 3:15,19

CONFESSION

Most merciful God and Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, yet without sin,
I confess to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,
by the things I have done, and by the things I have failed to do.
I have not loved you or my neighbor with my whole heart.
I have hungered after that which does not satisfy;
I have compromised with evil, through my flesh,
and I have doubted your power to protect me.
Forgive my lack of faith; have mercy on my weakness.
Restore in me such love and trust that I may walk in your ways
and delight in doing your will.
Amen.

MEDITATE ON YOUR FORGIVENESS

Spend a moment meditating on this Scripture to joyfully receive the forgiveness that is already yours in Jesus Christ!

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

READING PLAN

☐ MONDAY

Psalm 23

☐ TUESDAY

Ezekiel 34:11-16

☐ WEDNESDAY

Joel 2:12-17

☐ THURSDAY

Jeremiah 23

☐ FRIDAY (FAST DAY)

2 Corinthians 4

☐ SATURDAY

Reflect and catch up

☐ SUNDAY

Rest and feast!



Read together from The
Jesus Storybook Bible (JSB),
“The Terrible Lie.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What is the purpose of Lent?
What does it mean to confess and why is it important?

G **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What are some observations in the
weekly focus passage? Is the Lord leading you to give up something
for Lent? If so, what and why? Is the Lord leading you to add a spiritual
practice to your life during Lent? If so, what and why?

WEEK TWO | FEB 25 - MARCH 2

OPENING PRAYER

I praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Turn my affections
toward you as I seek your presence. Fill me and renew me during my time
with you. Amen.

WEEKLY FOCUS: The Betrayal — Mark 14:43-46

CONFESSION

Most merciful God and Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, yet without sin,
I confess to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,
by the things I have done, and by the things I have failed to do.
I have not loved you or my neighbor with my whole heart.
I have hungered after that which does not satisfy;
I have compromised with evil, through my flesh,
and I have doubted your power to protect me.
Forgive my lack of faith; have mercy on my weakness.
Restore in me such love and trust that I may walk in your ways
and delight in doing your will.
Amen.

F FAMILY PRAYER: Father, teach us what it looks like to give our whole hearts to you. Reveal our sin and turn our eyes to you. We love you Lord and thank you that you can use all things for good. Amen.

MEDITATE ON YOUR FORGIVENESS

Spend a moment meditating on this Scripture to joyfully receive the forgiveness that is already yours in Jesus Christ!

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

READING PLAN

☐ **MONDAY**

Psalm 51

☐ **TUESDAY**

2 Samuel 22:1-20

☐ **WEDNESDAY**

Matthew 3

☐ **THURSDAY**

Matthew 4:1-11

☐ **FRIDAY (FAST DAY)**

Ephesians 2:1-10

☐ **SATURDAY**

Reflect and catch up

☐ **SUNDAY**

Rest and feast!

F Read together from The Jesus Storybook Bible (JSB), “How to Pray.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins,

as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

G DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What personal observations do you see in the weekly focus passage? How does this passage reveal our need for Christ? How does this passage point to the good news of Jesus Christ?

WEEK THREE | MARCH 3-9

OPENING PRAYER

I praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Fill me and renew me during my time with you. Amen.

WEEKLY FOCUS: The Passover — Matthew 26:17-25

CONFESSION

Most merciful God and Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, yet without sin,
I confess to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,
by the things I have done, and by the things I have failed to do.
I have not loved you or my neighbor with my whole heart.
I have hungered after that which does not satisfy;
I have compromised with evil, through my flesh,
and I have doubted your power to protect me.
Forgive my lack of faith; have mercy on my weakness.
Restore in me such love and trust that I may walk in your ways
and delight in doing your will.
Amen.

F FAMILY PRAYER: Lord, we know we sin against you when we think, say or do things that dishonor you. We are sorry for not following you and following our own desires instead. We are grateful that we can be forgiven through Jesus our Savior. So, forgive us and draw us close to you, Lord. Amen.

MEDITATE ON YOUR FORGIVENESS

Spend a moment meditating on this Scripture to joyfully receive the forgiveness that is already yours in Jesus Christ!

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

READING PLAN

☐ MONDAY

Psalm 77

☐ TUESDAY

Jeremiah 30:12-22

☐ WEDNESDAY

Isaiah 40

☐ THURSDAY

Matthew 3

☐ FRIDAY (FAST DAY)

Matthew 4:1-11

☐ SATURDAY

Reflect and catch up

☐ **SUNDAY**
Rest and feast!

F Read together from The
JSB, “Let’s Go!”

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

G **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What personal observations do you see in the weekly focus passage? What does “betraying Jesus” look like for us today? How does this passage point to the good news of Jesus Christ?

WEEK FOUR | MARCH 10-16

OPENING PRAYER

I praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Fill me and renew me during my time with you. Amen.

WEEKLY FOCUS: The Abandonment of Jesus — Matthew 26:69-75

CONFESSION

Most merciful God and Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, yet without sin,
I confess to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,
by the things I have done, and by the things I have failed to do.
I have not loved you or my neighbor with my whole heart.
I have hungered after that which does not satisfy;
I have compromised with evil, through my flesh,
and I have doubted your power to protect me.
Forgive my lack of faith; have mercy on my weakness.
Restore in me such love and trust that I may walk in your ways
and delight in doing your will.
Amen.

F FAMILY PRAYER: Lord Jesus, forgive us for the ways we deny you and fail to stand up for what we know is right. Give us courage to follow you even when it is hard. Thank you for forgiving and redeeming our mistakes. We love you Lord! Amen.

MEDITATE ON YOUR FORGIVENESS

Spend a moment meditating on this Scripture to joyfully receive the forgiveness that is already yours in Jesus Christ!

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

READING PLAN

☐ **MONDAY**

Psalm 51

☐ **TUESDAY**

Isaiah 53

☐ **WEDNESDAY**

John 3:14-21

☐ **THURSDAY**

Psalm 2

☐ **FRIDAY (FAST DAY)**

Psalm 22

☐ **SATURDAY**

Reflect and catch up

☐ **SUNDAY**

Rest and feast!

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What does it mean to have new life in Jesus and be a new creation? How does following Jesus look different than following the crowd?

G DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: What personal observations do you see in the weekly focus passage? What does this passage say about the nature of our trust in Christ? How does this passage point to the good news of Jesus Christ?

WEEK FIVE | MARCH 17-23

OPENING PRAYER

I praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Fill me and renew me during my time with you. Amen.

WEEKLY FOCUS: The Unjust Trial — Mark 15:1-15

CONFESSION

Most merciful God and Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ was tempted in every way, yet without sin,
I confess to you that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,
by the things I have done, and by the things I have failed to do.
I have not loved you or my neighbor with my whole heart.
I have hungered after that which does not satisfy;
I have compromised with evil, through my flesh,
and I have doubted your power to protect me.
Forgive my lack of faith; have mercy on my weakness.
Restore in me such love and trust that I may walk in your ways
and delight in doing your will.
Amen.

F FAMILY PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, You have given us new life in Jesus and are in the process of making all things new. Forgive us for the times when we chase after the things that the world tells us are important instead of listening to you. Help us to live as the new creations we are because of you. Amen.

MEDITATE ON YOUR FORGIVENESS

Spend a moment meditating on this Scripture to joyfully receive the forgiveness that is already yours in Jesus Christ!

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

READING PLAN

☐ MONDAY

Mark 11:1-11

☐ TUESDAY

Matthew 21:12-17

☐ WEDNESDAY

John 12:1-11

☐ THURSDAY

John 13:21-30

☐ **FRIDAY (FAST DAY)**
Matthew 27:32-56, Luke 23:55-56

F Read together from The
JSB, “Filled Full”

☐ **SATURDAY**
Reflect and catch up

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Why do you think Jesus allowed the disciples to participate in the miracle of feeding the 5,000? What do the leftover baskets of food indicate about Jesus?

G **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What personal observations do you see in the weekly focus passage? Why do you think the exchange of Barabbas for Jesus is significant? What might this say about our need and the human condition? How does this passage point to the good news of Jesus Christ?

PALM SUNDAY | MARCH 24

OPENING PRAYER

King Jesus, you are the King of Glory; You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I praise you today, and forevermore. Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: The Triumphal Entry — Luke 19:28-40; Psalm 2

F FAMILY PRAYER: Dear Jesus, You are our King and You reign over all of creation. Forgive us for thinking we know better than you do and for failing to recognize that you have a plan that is bigger and better than anything we can imagine. Help us to live a life that celebrates and reflects Your love, Your forgiveness, and the hope that we have in you. Amen.

SILENCE

Spend 2 minutes silently meditating on these passages, focusing your attention on the character of God as revealed in these verses.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us of our sins,
as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

HOLY WEDNESDAY | MARCH 27

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, my Advocate and Helper; help me to keep my eyes fixated on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that in moments of weakness and temptation of betrayal, I may remain steadfast and faithful. Lord, have mercy on me. Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: Into the Darkness — Matthew 26:14-25; Psalm 139

F Read together from The JSB, “The Servant King.”

SILENCE

Spend 2 minutes silently meditating on these passages, focusing your attention on the character of God as revealed in these verses.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Judas acted like a disciple, but his heart was hard toward Jesus. How can this happen in our own lives? How did God use Judas’ betrayal for his good purposes?

MAUNDY THURSDAY | MARCH 28

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, though you are a King, you came into the world as a servant—giving your life as a ransom for many. Teach me, that I may serve another; strengthen me, that I may give my life away. To the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: The Humble Example — John 13

F Read together from The JSB, “A Dark Night in the Garden.”

SILENCE

Spend 2 minutes silently meditating on these passages, focusing your attention on the character of God as revealed in these verses.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** What are ways we “deny” Jesus in our lives? Can you think of a time when you didn’t stand up for your faith in Jesus? Did God give up on Peter? Does God give up on us? Does God delight in forgiving us?

GOOD FRIDAY | MARCH 29

OPENING PRAYER

Father, help me to feel the weight of this day and the weight of my sin, only that I may be drawn into your abundant grace and everlasting forgiveness, which this gruesome day has made possible. Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: The Death of our Savior — Matthew 26:32-61; Psalm 22

F Read together from The JSB, “The Sun Stops Shining.”

SILENCE

Spend 2 minutes silently meditating on these passages, focusing your attention on the character of God as revealed in these verses.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins,
as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

HOLY SATURDAY | MARCH 30

OPENING PRAYER

Father, today I feel the tension of the in-between. The in-between of Christ's death yesterday, and the joyous celebration that comes with his resurrection tomorrow. But, so much of my life is lived in this in-between and waiting. Give me the patience for renewal, for resurrection life, that my hope may be steadfast. Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: The Harrowing of Hell — Luke 23:55-56; Psalm 31

F **FAMILY PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, You are our King and You reign over all of creation. Forgive us for thinking we know better than you do and for failing to see you have a plan that is bigger and better than anything we can imagine. Help us live a life that celebrates and reflects Your love, Your forgiveness, and the hope that we have in you. Amen.

SILENCE

Spend 2 minutes silently meditating on these passages, focusing your attention on the character of God as revealed in these verses.

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

F **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** In a Christian context, what do blessing and abundance mean? What does it mean to sacrifice?

EASTER SUNDAY | MARCH 31

OPENING PRAYER

King Jesus, I owe you my life and allegiance, for you have overcome Sin, triumphed over Evil, and ushered in the Age to Come! Glory to you! Glory to Christ! Glory to you! Amen.

DAILY FOCUS: The Dawn of a New Age — John 20:1-29; Psalm 148

F Read together from The JSB, “A Wonderful Surprise.”

WORSHIP

Sing a song to the Lord Jesus Christ from your heart, sing a hymn, or play your favorite worship song! Spend this time adoring the victorious King Jesus!

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us of our sins,
as we forgive those who have sinned against us.
In moments of temptation, carry us through to the other side,
and deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.