

# Join the Witness

The Easter message means going forward, letting go of the past and embracing the future. Today's Ascension Sunday texts reflect empowering relationships with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, through prayer, and the study of scripture. How are we witnesses today?



**Focus scripture**  
Acts 1:15–17,  
21–26

**Additional scriptures**  
Psalm 1

1 John 5:9–13  
John 17:6–19

## Focus scripture: Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

Acts 1:15–17, 21–26 Writing in the second half of the first century, the author of Luke-Acts shows that God's purpose is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of faithful followers. The first chapter sets the stage for Pentecost, as believers witness Jesus ascension and gather to wait and pray.

Thinking that Jesus would restore the kingdom of Israel, they moved to replace Judas with another "apostle" – which means "sent out" or "sending." Peter announces the qualifications for apostleship that become the bedrock of testimony about Jesus: must have been with Jesus since Jesus' baptism by John, and have witnessed the Resurrection. They proceeded through prayer to invite God to choose between two qualified men by casting lots (maybe by putting names in a vessel and shaking it until one fell out). "The lot fell on Matthias" (1:26). Interestingly, there is no mention of Matthias after this event. The Christian message quickly expanded beyond the original witnesses, but always referred to the events of Jesus' life.

**Psalm 1** is a wisdom psalm and establishes the importance of knowing and observing scripture in the way our lives speak. The tree image (see also Jeremiah 17:8, Psalm 92:13–15 and Psalm 52:10) compares the righteous to the trees planted in the temple precincts. The godly who meditate on and observe the law will thrive.

**1 John 5:9–13** Writing around the end of the second century CE, the elder means to establish norms for faith, conduct, and fellowship among new Christians. Particularly disturbing was the tendency (especially in John's gospel) among some Christians to focus on Jesus' divinity while denying Jesus' humanity and the importance of his death and resurrection. Logic and reason are not enough to bring persons into the final truth of the incarnation. The concluding verses of the letter establish faith through the Holy Spirit as the means to truth. "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in Christ" (v. 11).

**John 17:6–19** Recorded during the late first century, the prayer reinforced the relationship between the disciples, Jesus, and God. God has chosen them; they are worthy and not abandoned. Jesus prays for them to be one, unified with God in Christ, and with each other. Jesus prays that the disciples will have joy; and third, he prays that God will protect them as he sends them into an unwelcoming world.

• • • • •

The Jesus story continues in the lives of his followers who are sustained by the indwelling Holy Spirit, the instruction of scripture within the community of faith, and through a prayerful relationship with God. In what ways are you sustained in your life of faith?

**Loving God, thank you for all those past and present who have shared their testimony with us. We are grateful for the ways your grace has found us this past week. Help us live as faithful witnesses in our time and reflect your redemptive love. Spirit of God fall afresh on us today. Amen.**

## Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most children in your group can probably think of times they have been chosen to do a special job. Many have also had the experience of being chosen for sports teams and no child wants to be the last one chosen in a game. As children mature they recognize that part of decision-making involves choosing people who are qualified for the task. They discover that some choices are more difficult than others and that for some decisions there is no right choice, such as choosing one companion over another for an outing.

In this session children will hear a story from the early Christian community about making choices and decisions.

Older children in the group may have had experience in selecting leaders from their peers, for class president or team leader. Pray that the children will recognize their own leadership skills as they explore the ways in which leaders are called and supported by the church today.

**Note:** Next week's session is designed for all ages, from three-year-olds to Adults, to come together to explore the story of Pentecost.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Acts 1:15–17, 21–26, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 95).
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with a gold or yellow cloth, white pillar candle, gold spiral and tealights (see resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)," p. 111).
- ❑ Bring matches, taper, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p.111); save copies for next Sunday.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "*Somlandela/ We Will Follow*" (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Choosing a New Leader](#)" and 20 paper doll figures (see pattern in the *Virtual Resources Booklet* in the Library at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca)); print each name mentioned on the resource sheet on small sticky labels, using "Jesus' brothers" on two labels.

- ❑ **Bible detectives group:** copies of resource sheet "[Twelve Questions](#)"
- ❑ **Church leaders group:** flip chart or chart paper, sticky notes, pens/markers of different colours

### Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Community zone:** invite several church volunteers as guests; ask them to bring a symbolic item of their work, such as a tin from a food pantry program, a music book from choir.
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** different colours of craft sticks, small muslin gift bags
- ❑ **Game zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Discipleship Cube](#)"
- ❑ **Craft zone:** large round balloon, tissue paper, church magazines, white glue thinned with water, paintbrushes
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** construction paper, art and craft supplies, copies of "Prayer lines" and "Thank-you hand cards" directions from resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p. 111)
- ❑ **Easter zone:** invite several members of an adult study group to discuss questions collected during the season.

### Bless

- ❑ Bring the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "Look Up, Look Down" (pp. 24–25 in *Seasons Songbook*; #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).



# Join the Witness

## Scripture

Acts 1:15–17,  
21–26

**FOCUS** To explore prayer and leadership with the early Christian community

## Gather

**Welcome** the children and introduce newcomers.

### Opening ritual

**Call to gather** Invite children to gather in the worship space and lead them in the traditional Easter greeting:

**Leader:** Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**Children:** Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

**Easter ritual** Invite a child to read the "Gathering prayer" on the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p. 111), with the rest of the group

responding with "Alleluia!" after each line. Invite another child to light the Christ candle and use a taper to light all six tealights in the spiral. Spend a few moments in silent contemplation of the spiral of light created.

**Sing**, if possible, the song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)

Receive the offering and extinguish the candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

## Connecting with the focus

Invite the children to name some of the choices they have had to make during the past week.

### ■ What choices are easy to make? When is it hard to choose?

Explain that the Bible story today is about choosing a new person to be part of the disciples' leadership team.

## Engage

### Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open to the focus passage in Acts. Recall that this book is a collection of stories about Jesus' followers, who are now called "apostles." This week's story takes place just days after Jesus left his followers to be with God. Read **Acts 1:8–9**.

### The Bible story

Distribute 20 paper doll figures among the group and invite children to choose one of the name tags for each figure and stick it on. Use the resource sheet "[Choosing a New Leader](#)" to tell this week's story based on **Acts 1:15–17, 21–26**. Invite children to place their figures as indicated during the story. After the story discuss the following questions:

### ■ Who seems to be the leader of the group of apostles?

### ■ What two things did the apostles do to help them make their choice?

### Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

**Bible detectives group** The children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about the original group of disciples. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Twelve Questions](#)" and Bibles and invite children to form pairs to explore the questions on the sheet.

**Church leaders group** The children in this group will have an opportunity to think about the leaders in their own church. Draw a large circle on the flip chart with lines radiating from the centre, like spokes on a wheel. Use a variety colours. Imagine that this is an image of all the lead-

ers in Christian communities. Invite the children to name all the leaders they can think of in your church, both volunteer and staff. Write these on sticky notes and attach along the radiating lines on the flip chart.

**Reporting** Invite the detectives group to share what they learned about the disciples and the poster group to show all the names of leaders in your church.

## The Bible story and us

When we live God's way and help others to live in God's way we show that we are members of our Christian community.

### ■ What are some ways that children can be leaders in the church?

## Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

#### ❑ **Community zone: Church leaders**

Like the first apostles, many people share their leadership skills in our churches today. Invite guests to talk about their involvement, asking the children to first guess what that work might be based on the symbolic objects. Talk together about how children might help in some of these ministries.



❑ **Prayer zone: Prayer sticks** The disciples knew the importance of prayer in their daily lives. Provide craft sticks and invite children to write words on each stick as prayer reminders (such as parents, pet's name, teacher, friends, grandparents, creation, neighbours). Have them place their prayer sticks in the bags. Encourage them to choose these one at a time as a focus for prayer times.

❑ **Game zone: Discipleship cubes** We are also called to follow in Jesus' way as disciples. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Discipleship Cube](#)." Invite children to write their responses on each side and decorate with markers or coloured pencils before folding into cubes. Form pairs to roll the cubes like dice and share ideas of ways to serve and be served as disciples of Jesus. Encourage children to take these home as reminders to follow in Jesus' way.

❑ **Craft zone: Sphere collage** There are many kinds of church leaders in the world today. Distribute church magazines and invite children to cut out pictures of church leaders in action. Blow up a large round balloon and cover with a layer of thinned glue, then several layers of tissue paper, and another layer of glue. Help children place the photographs on the balloon, attaching them by painting over with the glue mixture until the balloon is covered. Display in the church hall when dry.

❑ **Outreach zone: Thank-you cards** Many people offer leadership in churches today. Provide construction paper, art and craft materials, copies of the section "[Prayer lines](#)" (on p. 111) and instructions for making "[Thank-you hand cards](#)" (p. 111). Invite children to each choose one or more people from the names listed by the "Church leaders group" in Engage and make thank-you cards for them. Younger children can make cards in the shape of hands and choose a prayer line to glue onto their cards. Older children can design their own cards and choose to use one of the prayer lines or write their own message. Make arrangements for distribution of cards.

❑ **Easter zone: Question box** Spend time together with your guest(s) discussing the questions collected in the "Question box" made on April 11. Encourage children and guests to explore additional questions together if there is time. Consider repeating this idea in future seasons.

---

## Bless

---

**Gather** around the worship table and invite a child to light the candles.

**Pray** this prayer, or one of your own:

Dear God,  
thank you for this community of friends.  
We ask for your blessing on all the communities  
of Jesus' followers around the world. Amen.

**Sing** the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or "Look Up, Look Down" (pp. 24–25 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #9 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

**Blessing** Send each child out saying, "(Name), go out go out to live as followers of Jesus Christ."

---

## Reflect

---

If this is your final session as a group for this season, reflect on your experiences during the past weeks. What were the highlights? Please take time to fill out the evaluation form at the end of this resource (also available in the Library on the [Seasons website](#)).



# Choosing a New Leader

based on Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

**Choosing which name to use for each story figure introduces the theme of making choices.**

**A**fter Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus' friends knew it was important to continue the work Jesus had started. Jesus had asked them to help people everywhere and teach people how to live in God's way. Jesus' friends began to meet in small groups to make their plans. *(Invite children to group their figures together with two or three others.)*

Word spread and soon more and more people wanted to join the community of believers. Soon there was more work than the leaders could manage. The leaders were 11 of Jesus' closest friends, and one was named Peter. *(Invite the child with the Peter figure to place it in the middle of the Church Leadership circle created in Engage.)* Peter called an important meeting and 120 people came. Some of their names are written down in the Bible. *(Invite children to place their figures in the circle as the names are called.)* Besides Peter, the other men were called John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon, and Judas the son of James. Mary the mother of Jesus was there too. So were Jesus' brothers. Other women were probably there also: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome.

Peter stood up and said, "You all know that Jesus chose 12 of his disciples to be leaders. One of these leaders has gone and now we are only 11. We need to choose someone else to help us. The person we choose needs to be someone who has been with us from the time John baptized Jesus until this day."

Everyone looked around the room. Who had been with Jesus from the beginning? "Justus," called a voice from the back of the room.

"Matthias," said someone near the door.

Justus and Matthias were both good people. "How can we choose between them?" asked Peter. "How would Jesus have decided?"

Everyone remembered that Jesus had prayed to God whenever there was a decision to make, big or small. So Jesus' followers decided to pray to God too and to ask for God's help. Then, knowing that God was in charge, they cast lots, which is something like rolling dice. From this, Matthias was chosen to be the new leader. *(Move Matthias into the circle.)*

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Justus, but we know he was already a follower of Jesus. So he probably kept on helping the rest of Jesus' friends to spread the good news of God's love. *(Move Justus into the circle too.)*



# Twelve Questions

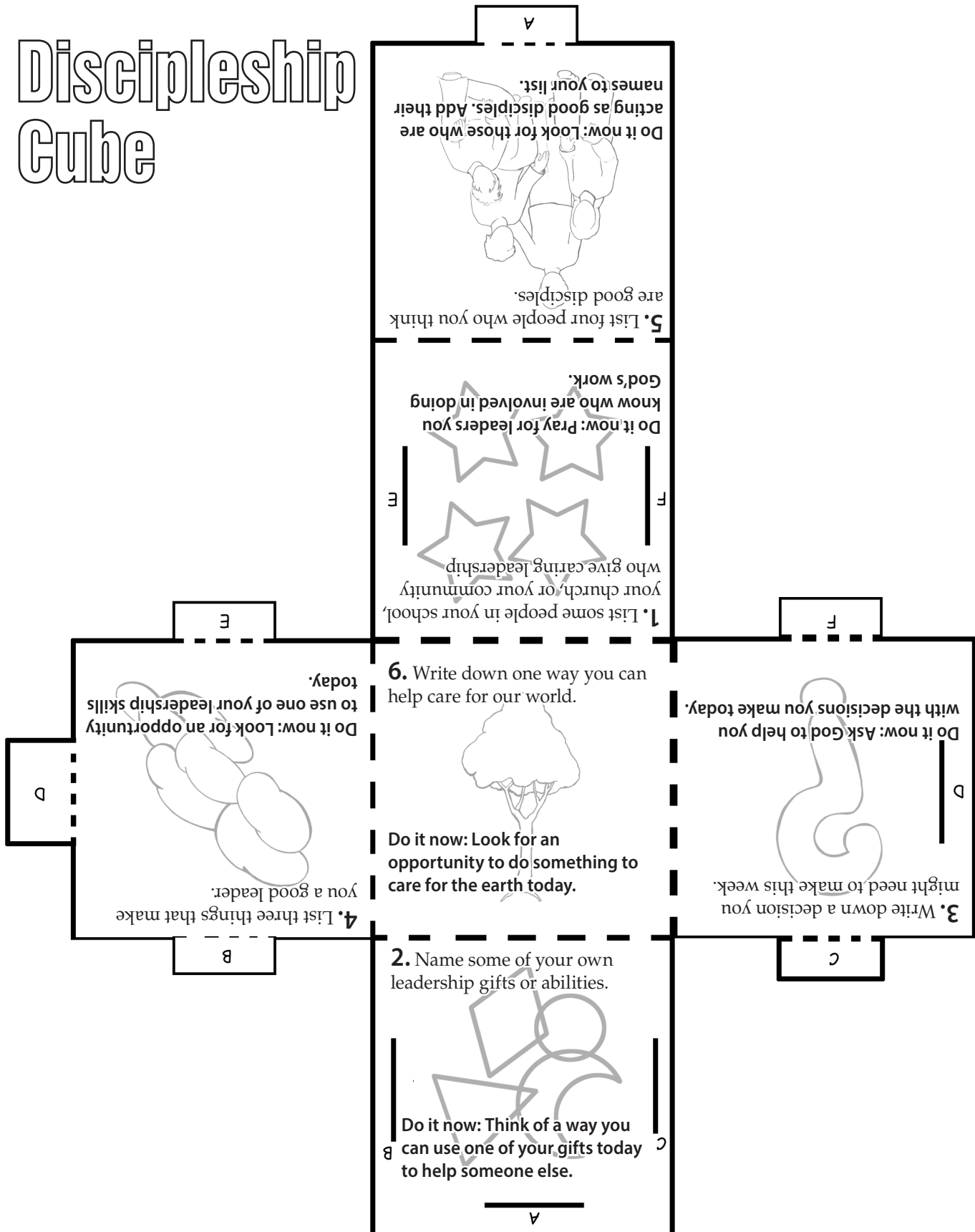
- 1 Who exactly were the “twelve disciples”? Matthew 10:2–4 lists twelve names. But Luke 6:14–16 has a different list. What names are different between the two lists?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 (John 1:45–49) Hey, wait a minute! What about this guy? He seems to have been a pretty important disciple, but he isn’t on any of the lists of twelve disciples in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. What’s his name?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 (Matthew 9:9) Matthew the tax collector gets added to the group of disciples. But now read Luke 5:27. Wait a minute! I wonder why the tax collector is called \_\_\_\_\_ in this gospel?
- 4 In Mark 10:46–52, \_\_\_\_\_ becomes a disciple of Jesus. But he’s not on the official list either.
- 5 Well, maybe there were more than twelve disciples. The writer of Luke offers this explanation \_\_\_\_\_ (Luke 6:13)
- 6 John’s gospel does not have a list of twelve disciples or apostles. The writer offers a different understanding of who the disciples were: “anyone who \_\_\_\_\_ is a disciple.” (John 8:31)
- 7 All the way through John’s gospel there is an unnamed mystery disciple whom John simply calls “\_\_\_\_\_.” Read John 21:20–24. I wonder who it was?
- 8 In John 20:16 \_\_\_\_\_ calls Jesus “Rabbouni.” This is the Hebrew word that means “\_\_\_\_\_.” It is the word disciples used to address the one who was their teacher and leader. So this person is also a disciple. In fact, she’s the first person to see Jesus alive after the crucifixion and definitely meets the criteria for a disciple in the Book of Acts (“a witness to the resurrection and follower of Jesus”). Give a possible explanation why this person wasn’t one of those suggested to replace Judas.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 9 Why do you think no women were suggested to replace Judas in the story from Acts 1? It’s not that there weren’t women around. John 12:1–3 tells the story of two sisters, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, who were very close friends of Jesus.
- 10 (Mark 15:40–41) Mark’s gospel names three women who were disciples of Jesus; these and other unnamed women waited with Jesus at the cross while the men, including Peter, ran away. What are their names? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- 11 (Luke 8:1–3) Luke also talks about women who were followers of Jesus. They had money, it seems, because they helped to pay for Jesus’ ministry out of their own pockets. Who were they? \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- 12 Who was the new apostle chosen to replace Judas? (see Acts 1:26)  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. Judas son of James and Thaddaeus; 2. Nathanael; 3. Levi; 4. Bartimaeus; 5. There were more than twelve disciples but Jesus chose only 12 of them to be apostles; 6. believes in him; 7. the one whom Jesus loved; 8. Mary Magdalene; 9. Mary and Martha; 10. Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome; 11. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanna

**Answers:**



# Discipleship Cube



# Rituals for Lent

## Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

## Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

### Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

### Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

**May God’s love surround you.**

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

## Lent 1

**One:** Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

**Two:** On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”  
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.  
(*Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.*)

**One:** Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

**Two:** God has promised to be with us always.

**All: Thank you, God. Amen.**

## Lent 2

**One:** Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

**Two:** On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”  
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. (*Place a star beside the candle.*)

**One:** Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

**Two:** God has promised to be with us always.

**All: Thank you, God. Amen.**

## Lent 3

**One:** Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

**Two:** On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. (*Place an object from nature beside the candle.*)

**One:** Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

**Two:** God has promised to be with us always.

**All: Thank you, God. Amen.**

## Lent 4

**One:** Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

**Two:** On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”  
for giving us hope when times are hard. (*Place a stone beside the candle.*)

**One:** Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

**Two:** God has promised to be with us always.

**All: Thank you, God. Amen.**

## Lent 5

**One:** Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

**Two:** On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”  
for your love that is deep in our hearts. (*Place a heart beside the candle.*)

**One:** Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

**Two:** God has promised to be with us always.

**All: Thank you, God. Amen.**



# Easter Season Resources

## Prepare an Easter worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold or yellow cloth and place a white pillar candle in the middle.
2. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
3. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
4. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

## Gathering prayer

**Reader:** Loving God, we celebrate this Season of Easter, a time of new life and joy.

**All:** Alleluia!

**Reader:** We are called to be witnesses to the new life in Christ. (*Light the central Christ candle.*)

**All:** Alleluia!

**Reader:** We are called to spread the light of this good news. (*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

**All:** Alleluia!

### Somlandela

Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,  
Somlandela, yonke indawo.  
Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,  
Lapho eyakhona somlandela.

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.  
We will follow, we will follow him.  
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.  
Wherever he will lead us we will follow.

Traditional Zulu song

## Prayer lines (May 20)

**I thank God for your gift of music in our church community.**

**I thank God for your leadership in our church community.**

**I thank God for the way you care for our church building.**

**I thank God for the ways you help lead worship.**

**I thank God for your visits to people who are sick or can't get to church.**

## Thank you hand cards (May 20)

Fold construction paper in half and trace a hand outline.  
(See illustration #1.)

Cut out the shape, leaving the folded side intact to make a card.

Choose a prayer line, cut it out, and glue it inside the card.  
(See illustration #2.)

Write your name below the message.

On the outside of the card, print the name of the person chosen to receive the card.



Illustration #1



Illustration #2

