



The Diocese of New Jersey

A FAITH-AT-HOME GUIDE TO HOLY WEEK

Activities adapted from

*“Holy Week At Home: Family Practices For The Triduum” by Jerusalem Greer on buildfaith.org
and “Interactive Holy Week for Children” by Anne-Marie Miller on buildfaith.org*

Many of us want to make Holy Week (the days between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday) more meaningful for our families. These are among the most important days in the church calendar, yet schedules, young children, and length of services might prevent us from attending worship services. Here are a few ideas for families of all sizes and ages to connect to these holy days with just a few minutes each evening. If you find that three nights of activities are too many, simply pick the one activity that resonates the most with you and start there!

MAUNDY THURSDAY—WE PREPARE

Stripping of the Icons

*Materials: Bible or Prayer Book, storage box/bin,
dark cloth, cleaning supplies*

Stripping of the altar (removing all ornaments, linens, candles, plants, flowers, etc.) is an ancient custom of the Church. Congregations mark the way Christ’s life was stripped from him by stripping the altar of all signs of life and beauty during a special service. This almost-bare worship space reminds us of the bareness of life without the hope of Christ that we have through His resurrection.



This beautiful and powerful ritual can also be practiced in the home, as our homes are also places of worship.

- Read Psalm 22 together (or just the first two verses, if attention spans are short).
- Explain the ancient custom of stripping and washing the altar, what it symbolizes (see above), and how your family will now do a similar stripping in your home—focusing on icons and symbols of your faith.

- Send your family through the house to gather all icons and religious symbols that can be easily moved (crosses, statues, candles, prayer beads, etc.). Ask everyone to work silently as a sign of respect for the task. Pack these items away in the storage bin.
- Use the dark cloth to drape any other items that are too large or permanent to pack away (wall art, door wreaths and so forth).
- Finally, remove all items from your dining or kitchen table and together wash the table thoroughly.
- Leave the table completely bare (except for during meals) until Easter morning.
- After all the icons have been packed away or covered, and the table has been washed, take a moment to notice how your home looks and feels. Help kids make the connection between a home without these beautiful and meaningful items and a life without Christ.
- Saturday night, after everyone is in bed, do your best to unpack and uncover all of the religious items, so that when the family wakes up on Easter morning there will be more than just Easter baskets to celebrate!

Other Ideas for a Family Maundy Thursday:

Have a family foot washing. Jesus washed the feet of his friends as an act of love, service, and preparation. Take turns washing one another's feet as an act of love and service, in preparation for the journey you will take from Maundy Thursday to Easter morning.

Create a prayer garden at home, outside in the yard if the weather permits, or inside in a terrarium or plate. Gather items (rocks, twigs, moss, early flowers, shells, etc.) from the yard, or found on family walks. Add a small candle (battery operated is fine!), and perhaps a cup, bowl, or small terra-cotta pot laid sideways to represent Jesus's tomb. Sit in quiet prayer as Jesus did in the garden at Gethsemane.

GOOD FRIDAY—WE ENTER IN

Technology Darkness

Good Friday church services often end in total darkness, leaving worshippers to imagine their lives in the wake of the dark hours after Christ's crucifixion. While functioning as a family in total darkness might not be practical, there is a way to practice living in darkness: go dark with your technology.



- “Unplug” from noon on Good Friday until noon on Holy Saturday.
- Turn off (and put away) all cell phones, tablets, game consoles, televisions, radios, and computers for 24 hours. Challenge yourselves and be willing to tolerate discomfort, but you can use your judgement to shorten the time for your family if necessary.

- Reflect together on how disjointed, disconnected, lost, anxious, helpless or frustrated each family member feels without their devices, especially in this particular season of self-isolation and social distancing. On that first Good Friday, many lives were turned upside down by Christ's death: Mary, Martha, James, John, Peter, Andrew, just to name a few. For these people and the other followers of Christ, Good Friday was more than just sad. It was a day of feeling anxious, lost, disconnected, frustrated, and helpless.
- Ask questions: How different would our worlds be if the story of God had stopped on Good Friday? What would life be like if grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness were not available to us?

Making a Paschal Candle

Materials: a jarred candle, craft scraps, glue

In churches, a new Paschal Candle is lit either at the Great Easter Vigil or on Easter morning. It represents Christ and the light His resurrection brings to the world. Traditionally, the candle is lit and placed in a prominent place near the altar, where it remains lit from Easter until the end of the Easter season. The candle is then moved away from the altar and is lit again on baptisms and at funerals as a resurrection symbol.



On Good Friday, while your kids are unplugged, gather everyone together to make a family Paschal Candle.

- Find a candle in a glass jar, available at most dollar stores.
- Cut fabric scraps or even paper to fit around the jar (keeping away from any flames) and glue to the outside of the jar.
- Glue buttons, sequins, gems, or any small craft material to create a cross on the outside of the jar.
- Set the candle in a place of prominence in your home, such as the kitchen table (on Easter), where it will be noticed and remembered daily.
- Light the candle first on Easter Day, and then during meals, special events, and times of prayer. The lighting of the candle can become part of the dinner routine. This is a tactile way to remind ourselves to seek Christ daily. To help your children understand the significance, you can repeat the words, “Come Jesus, come” as you light the candle.

This act of inviting Christ into your home solidifies the idea that we do welcome Him, and He joins us, even in the most simple of daily activities such as breakfast or dinner.

Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are usually images of Jesus's journey to the cross. They help us enter into the story both visually and emotionally. Many Stations are available online—one particularly suitable for children is found at illustratedministry.com. There is a suggested guideline for doing the Stations at home in a separate handout.

HOLY SATURDAY—WE WAIT

Wax Crayon Eggs

Materials: 1 dozen hard-boiled eggs, egg dye kit, wax or white crayons

Many families enjoy dyeing eggs in preparation for Easter. One method of decorating is to use a wax or white crayon on the egg before dyeing. Even as you decorate your egg, you can't see what the finished design will look like. Holy Saturday is like wax crayon eggs. It is a day of waiting. We know we have something precious and beautiful, but we cannot yet see what the completed picture is. And so we must wait, as Mary waited, and the disciples waited. **If you are being careful with food resources during this time of self-isolation, color eggs on paper, or use tissue paper, fabric scraps, yarn or other decorative items to decorate eggs on paper!*



- Use a pale-colored or white crayon and draw or write on your egg. The only evidence that you have done anything will be bits of wax clumped on your egg's smooth surface.
- Dye your egg according to package directions.
- Wait. Wait some more. Eventually enough time passes to go back to your egg dye.
- Pull your egg out of the dye. Those invisible wax images are now clearly white, surrounded by brilliant egg dye. There is the flower you drew, imperfect but lovely. There is the name you wrote, a little wobbly but still your name.



Holy Saturday brings us, at last, to glorious rekindling of the Light of the World and the Paschal Candle. Careful activities during this holy pause have prepared us to share Christ's Light with one another and the world. Alleluia!