

Offerings and Blessings

The Practice of Christian Faith



A guide for devotion and discipleship
during the season of Lent

by Chip Reeves

First Baptist Church
Augusta, Georgia

Lent 2017

About Lent...

Many congregations—even Baptist ones!—observe the season of Lent. Time is set aside to **prepare**. We are getting ready for Easter. Rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the earliest celebration honored by believers. At church there will be all kinds of preparing. The choir will prepare special music. Special sermons will be written. Special moments will be added to worship services. All of this is a part of our celebrating together that God’s love cannot be overcome.

During Lent, we should prepare ourselves, readying our hearts to celebrate the resurrection. We pay attention. We think about what it means to follow Jesus. This is a good time to focus on how we are growing in our faith.

We recognize that we fall short of God’s expectations for us. Part of our preparation is our **penitence**. Our lives are not as pure as they could be. We confess our sins, and we recognize that God has provided the solution to this problem. During Lent, we remember that Jesus died for our sins. We repent of our sins, turning away from them, and thank God for forgiving us through Jesus. We remember Jesus’ death on Good Friday, but we come together again on Easter because Jesus dying is not the end of the story. He rose again and is still “God with us”.

Lent^{1/0} is a season of preparation and penitence observed during the 40 days which come before Easter. One of its earliest uses was to help get new Christians ready for their baptisms. Honoring this season can still help us get ready to renew our baptismal confessions that Jesus Christ is Lord and to be immersed into the life of faith he provides.

^{1/0} *The 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays. We worship on Sundays because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, so every Sunday is considered a little Easter.*

Devotional Resources for Lent

Lent is a season in which we focus on our discipleship, walking with Jesus along the way. It is a pathway to joy with Easter as its outcome. As we walk, though, we become aware that Easter did not happen without Good Friday. Jesus invites us to follow him and calls us to take up our crosses to go with him.

In church, a lot can happen during Lent. It can even become quite busy as we get closer to Easter. It is important during this season to do our part to take care of our connection with God. Take time during Lent to pause, reflect, read, pray, meditate and listen. Be intentional about your *daily spiritual practices*. There are a number of resources available to compliment your discipleship during Lent.

d365.org is a good devotional web site. During Lent, it is focused to encourage your “Journey to the Cross”.

Lent is a good time to read through the Gospels. You can make the story of Jesus, from his birth to the cross to his resurrection, a part of how you follow him through Lent. 2-3 chapters a day will carry you through all 4 Gospels, and you can still take a break on Sundays. A reading plan is available online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/reading-plans/lent>.

There are plenty of daily devotionals in print and online. Choose a good one and spend time with God each day.

Offerings and Blessings: a Different Kind of Fast

The Lenten fast is commonly referred to as “giving up something for Lent”. Sometimes, people consider Lent a burdensome chore because they feel like they have to go 40 days without something they like, and those days drag on because their focus stays on what they are doing without. That’s not what Lent is about. This is a time to focus on Jesus and follow him.

This booklet is a guide to a different kind of fast. The idea is that we can observe Lent helped by our participation in worship.

When we worship, it is easy to anticipate that we will receive something. We will be blessed. We also anticipate that we have something to give. This different kind of fast will be an exercise in giving and receiving.

Use this booklet to help you bring an offering and carry home a blessing each time we worship together during Lent. Here are some instructions.

For our school age children who participate in Inside Out on Wednesday evenings, look for the I/O marker^{I/O} showing where this booklet talks about some of what you are learning.

Read through this booklet. Some of the offerings call on us to be prepared ahead of time.

Plan to be here every time we gather for worship.

Two pages of this booklet accompany each meeting. One invites you to bring something, an offering, with you to the worship service. The other gives you directions about taking something home, a blessing to consider, grow from and share.

Ash Wednesday^{1/0}

March 1, 2017

*If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9

Offering: Confession.

Confession seems to be an unusual offering to bring. During our Ash Wednesday service there will be time for us to confess our sins. Sin separates us from God. To reconnect with God, we need to be forgiven. So, we also confess our complete need for God.

Jesus began his ministry with a simple yet profound, short sermon, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

To follow Jesus, we must turn away from sin. He invites us to a new way of living—to be a part of the Kingdom. This new way is only possible because of God’s grace.

Prayer: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.* Psalm 51:1-2

Ash Wednesday ^{1/0}

March 1, 2017

You are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:19b

Blessing: Ashes

Ashes are the first blessing we will take home during Lent. This is unusual and awkward.

During the Ash Wednesday service, we were marked with ashes. It is a visible sign. Some of us felt people looking at us afterwards. They noticed the dark smudges on our foreheads. We felt conspicuous. Perhaps we wanted to hide, but we dared not wipe off our ashes.

We received the ashes along with some words, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." They can tell us that we are far from perfect. They can tell us that we cannot save or forgive ourselves. We are reminded that we are sinners who fall short of God's glory.

But look up. See that smudgy forehead in the mirror? The ashes form a cross. Because of Jesus Christ, we haven't heard words of condemnation but words of blessing. From now until we return to the dust, he blesses us to live redeemed lives.

Think about what it means to be human. What does it mean to be created by God's hand and saved by God's Son? We are blessed. Talk about this at home this week.

Prayer: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.* Psalm 51:10

^{1/0} Ash Wednesday is the first day in Lent. The color for the day is black, reminding us that we come from dust and to dust we will return.

First Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2017

*Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer
by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*

Daniel 9:3

Offering: Wear purple

During Lent we notice dark colors. Mainly we see **black** and **purple**^{1/0}. The color black was used on Ash Wednesday and it will be used again on Good Friday. The traditional color displayed in Lent is purple. It's dark, but it's not black.

Dark colors are a sign of mourning. Shakespeare called them "nighted colors". This is a season in which we remember that Jesus died for us. We mourn as we think about the pain and suffering of Jesus' crucifixion. There is darkness to consider as we remember Jesus died for our sins.

It's dark, but it's not black. Purple is also the color of royalty. Jesus died for our sins, but he also rose again proving he is God with us. Jesus is our king! We celebrate this every time we come together for worship.

During Lent, this time of mourning is accompanied by unmatched joy because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Prayer: *Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.* Psalm 51:12

^{1/0} *Some of what Inside Out kids learn are the seasons, symbols and colors of the church year. In this season, they are learning about Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, candles, palm branches, black and purple.*

First Sunday* in Lent

March 5, 2017

*When the days drew near for him to be taken up,
he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

Luke 9:51

Blessing: The cross draped in purple

Lent is a season of preparation. We are getting ready for Easter. On our way there, we consider what Jesus went through for all of us.

Jesus walked toward Jerusalem. He knew what waited for him there. He would be arrested, put on trial and crucified. He still took one step after another toward this destination.

What if we were walking toward Jerusalem and we knew what would happen? If we were strong enough to keep walking, it would be easy to imagine our posture. Every step would seem like a chore. Our eyes would probably be fixed down on the road as we trudged along.

Jesus looked up. He saw the lepers and the blind man who called out to him. He healed them. He saw Zacchaeus perched up his tree. He saved him. With his head up, Jesus kept walking toward salvation for us all.

Think about Jesus' long walk to Jerusalem. Look through Luke 10-19 to think about and discuss some of the stories of healing and grace that took place along the way.

Prayer: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!* Luke 18:38

*Our Prayer Ministry Team hosts First Sunday Prayer on the first Sunday of the month from 5:00-6:00 p.m. in the Crusader Class, Room 203 in the Daniel Building.

Second Sunday in Lent

March 12, 2017

*Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping;
and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?"*
Matthew 26:40

Offering: Time

Daylight Savings Time begins today. The biggest complaint among many on the day that we are supposed to "spring forward" is that we lose an hour. More specifically, we complain about losing an hour of sleep when we move our clocks ahead.

Time really can't be lost, but it can be wasted. We don't lose an hour of sleep if we go to bed earlier. We have often awoken earlier in the day to leave for a trip or make it to a business appointment. We make time for the things we want to do or need to do.

Consider giving an offering of your time. To what would you commit some of your time this week? There are many possibilities. There are missions opportunities, times to pray and times to study the Bible. You could visit homebound church members or even help your neighbor do some yard work. Of course, you don't have to stop with only one of these suggestions.

Make a commitment of your time this week. Think about ways you can serve the Lord with your time.

Prayer: *Teach us, Lord, to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.* Psalm 90:12

Second Sunday in Lent

March 12, 2017

*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,
not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:7*

Blessing: a green envelope

In addition to our traditional tithes and offerings, First Baptist Church also collects an offering for our Missions Development Fund. It is probably more commonly understood as “giving through the green envelope”.

Money collected through the green envelope is distributed to support a number of good causes. Among them are our benevolence ministry, missions work in the United States and internationally, the Bridge Ministry, the Sizemores on mission in Honduras, and a number of local organizations which serve our community. The green envelope is one way in which we are able to bless others.

Please take a green envelope home. Keep it somewhere visible. During the rest of Lent, collect an offering to bring back to church for the Mission Development Fund. Plan to return your green envelope on Easter Sunday.

Prayer: *Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts. Psalm 96:8*

Third Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2017

*“Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none;
and whoever has food must do likewise.”*

Luke 3:11

Offering: food pantry items

We have the blessing of food to share. Each Tuesday morning, First Baptist Church helps around 30 families in our community through our food pantry.

We purchase some of our food from Golden Harvest Food Bank. The rest of the food we share with our neighbors comes from the donations our church members bring each month.

Today is a third Sunday in the month. We regularly enjoy a Third Sunday Luncheon together. This is the week we regularly have a food drive to collect needed items for our food pantry. Food items are collected all over campus.

Please plan to bring some non-perishable food items for this month’s food drive. Check *The Interpreter* for a list of items we need. Look for the grocery carts and you can leave your gifts there. Please also keep in mind that we have a food drive every month.

Prayer: *Give us this day our daily bread.* Matthew 6:11

Third Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2017

*Therefore confess your sins to one another,
and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*

James 5:16

Blessing: Prayer

When we gather for worship, we pray together. There can be four to five moments during a Sunday service when we are invited to bow our heads and join in a time of prayer. There probably are several other moments when people offer their own silent prayers as music is played or the Scriptures are being read. We pray.

Take a worship folder home. Make note of the times we pray together. There are different kinds of prayers and there are different people who lead us as we pray.

During the upcoming week, collect prayer requests. It could be as simple as asking others, "How may I pray for you this week?" Write down the requests. Pray for them. Be ready to bring them with you next Sunday.

Prayer: *Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray.* Psalm 5:1-2

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 26, 2017

But whenever you pray, go into your room...
from Matthew 6:6

Offering: prayer requests

We have spent the week collecting prayer requests. We have prayed for our friends and loved ones in our own times of prayer and meditation at home. Today would be a good day for us to bring an offering of prayer to church.

Certainly, we will bow our heads and open our hearts during moments when we are led in specific prayers. We also have opportunities to pray in special places.

We have prayer rooms which are near the places where we worship: the Sanctuary Prayer Room and the MAC Prayer Room. There are prayer rooms close to the places where we study together: the Cason Bruker Prayer Room downstairs in the Adult Building and the Chelsea Collins Prayer Room upstairs in the Walton Building. We are welcomed to spend time praying together in these special locations.

This week, bring your prayer requests to the MAC Prayer Room or the Sanctuary Prayer Room. Spend time there praying for the requests you brought as well as for other requests that will be there.

Of course we are also reminded the most important “prayer room” we each have is our heart. We can and should always go there to pray, and God sees us when we do.

Prayer: *...and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
Matthew 6:6

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 26, 2017

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Luke 4:4

Blessing: Scripture

Think about how often we use the Bible in worship. Of course, there is a Scripture passage our preacher will use for the text of the sermon. There are also other moments in the service when the words we hear or read come straight from the Bible. Scripture verses might be used as the lines of a hymn or a praise chorus. Portions of the Bible might be read as part of a responsive reading. We might hear a comforting verse used in a prayer. The sermon might be based in a specific text, but our preacher could also reference several other passages to illustrate his point.

It is an easy observation to make. The Bible is important in our life together as a community of faith. We rely on the Bible in our times of worship. We come together in small groups to study the Bible. Our school age children memorize verses on Wednesday evenings in Inside Out^{1/0}.

Take your worship folder home this week and notice how we use Scripture. Look up this Sunday's passages in your Bible. Read them together and talk about them at home.

Prayer: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Psalm 119:105

^{1/0} *The Inside Out kids' memory verse this month is Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." That Bible verse helps us all understand how to be good followers of Jesus Christ. Isn't that what Lent is about?*

Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 2*, 2017

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

Offering: Your Bible

Baptists have been called “people of the book”. It is a fitting compliment considering that we believe the Bible is important. A little more strongly worded, we believe in the authority of Scripture under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

As we grow in faith, we pay attention to what the Bible tells us. We follow Jesus, and he shows us how we should live by the word of God. Those instructions are summarized quite well in what Jesus taught were the greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor.

Bring your Bible with you to the worship service today. Be reminded of the authority of God’s word. Commit to reading the Bible more to see its inspiration and guidance put to good use in your life.

Prayer: *I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.* Psalm 119:11

*Our Prayer Ministry Team hosts First Sunday Prayer on the first Sunday of the month from 5:00-6:00 p.m. in the Crusader Class, Room 203 in the Daniel Building.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 2, 2017

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Psalm 122:1

Blessing: The Call to Worship

We like to be invited places. We are happy when we feel welcomed. We even offer that hospitality to others, welcoming them as our guests. We might even go as far as to say, "Make yourself at home."

When we come together to worship, God welcomes us and invites us in. Because of God's gracious hospitality, we are children of God invited in and welcomed home.

Of course, we are expected to share such a good gift with each other. Our worship leaders invite us in to participate in the Sunday service. Pay close attention to how this happens. It might be as simple as someone saying, "Welcome." We might hear it in the playing of three bells bidding our attention. We participate in reading a written call to worship. The overarching theme communicated is that this time of worship is set. It is time for us to be present to each other and to God.

Use a call to worship this week in your time of daily devotion.

Prayer: *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."* Isaiah 6:3

Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017

As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

Luke 19:36

Offering: Yourself

Luke didn't write about the palm branches^{1/0}. He noticed people laid their outer garments in the road. They took off their jackets to create a carpet for Jesus' arrival.

For people in Jesus' time, their cloak was an essential piece of clothing. It protected them from the wind, the cold, the hot sun. It was more than a jacket, perhaps even relied on for shelter. If you owed someone money, they could hold your cloak until you were able to pay them back—and you wanted your cloak back as quickly as possible.

The symbol here is one of deep commitment. Without their cloaks, people were quite vulnerable.

When we welcome Jesus into our lives, he is not interested in our cloaks—the things we hide behind. He wants to meet the real us, the real you, the real me.

Bring the real you to worship today. Take some time to quietly pray, meditate and think using a simple phrase like, "Here I am." What does that mean today? What does it mean to introduce Jesus to the real you?

Prayer: *"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"* Mark 11:9-10

Palm Sunday

April 9, 2017

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Blessing: Doxology

The middle of our traditional worship service is punctuated with doxology. It's a big word that literally means "glory words".

We all stand up and sing together about God's glory:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Palm Sunday scripture lessons are about Jesus' triumphal entry. As this week turns toward Good Friday we gain a different perspective. We call it "good" because Jesus died to save us. The greatest triumph came through the worst defeat. True glory shines out of the deepest darkness. We have the best reason to sing!

Sing the doxology daily this week. It could be a good blessing to sing before meals. Make time to sing words of glory about our God who redeems us.

Prayer: *Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!* Psalm 118:25

Maundy Thursday

April 13, 2017

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

John 15:15

Offering: Bring a Friend

On Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus' final night with his disciples. John dedicates 5 chapters (13-17) to tell the intimate story of Jesus' farewell to his closest followers. The upper room scene is quite touching as it recounts what Jesus said and did. He washed their feet. He taught them. He encouraged them. He prayed for them. He fed their stomachs and he fed their souls.

Jesus offered the best explanation for his words and deeds. This was for his friends. He also challenged the disciples to embrace what friendship with him should look like. He said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus calls us friends. He blesses us to be friends—the kind of friend he has been to us.

Invite a friend to join you for our special services this week.

Prayer: "What a friend we have in Jesus!"

Maundy Thursday

April 13, 2017

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

Blessing: The Mandate

Why do we call it “Maundy Thursday”?

It would be easy to imagine all sorts of things. “Maundy” almost sounds like a dreary word. It sounds like “Monday”, and a lot of us dread that day.

We know the touching scene of friendship in the upper room will soon shift to the garden where Jesus will pray in agony and then be arrested. The night will then take on stories of Jesus’ trial and his being mocked and beaten. The next day will begin with his crucifixion and lead to his death. If “Maundy” were a dreadful word, we could certainly understand.

But it’s not! Thank God it’s not!

“Maundy” simply comes to us from the Latin word *mandatum*. We get our English word “mandate” from it. Most of our Bibles use the word “commandment” as in, “I give you a new commandment.”

The mandate, the commandment, is about love. Think about and talk about and pray about this new commandment Jesus gave us. He showed us how to keep it.

Prayer: “Yes, Jesus loves me!”

Good Friday
April 14, 2017

*Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.*
Psalm 46:10

Offering: Stillness and Silence

We light candles^{1/0} in church to remind us of Jesus, the light of the world. As we enter the service this evening, the candles are lit. We might remember our Advent services and how we lit a new candle each week. Our celebration of Christmas began as we lit the Christ candle in the center of the Advent wreath. The Light of the World has come!

This evening is very different. Lit candles are straining against the darkness. In the Tenebrae service, the light will be extinguished. The color is black^{1/0} again, but this time it is not about our own mortality. It's about death. It's about Jesus' death.

Tonight we consider these things. We know the darkness won't win, but it will have its moment.

Focus on moments when you can be silent and still. Be intentional about this especially before and after the Tenebrae service. Consider what God did on this day.

Pray: *O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.* Psalm 43:3

Good Friday

April 14, 2017

*From noon on, darkness came over the whole land
until three in the afternoon.*

Matthew 27:45

Blessing: Shadows

“Tenebrae” is a Latin word for shadows or darkness. It is a fitting description of the depths we associate with the death of Jesus. Darkness has won for the moment.

We all have our moments when it seems like the darkness prevails. We have experienced pain, disappointment, anguish and even death. We have felt forsaken. We are not strangers to the darkness.

Tonight we have been given the blessing of the shadows. A blessing? Jesus has walked where we walked and experienced the darkness we all feel and even much more than that. “God with us” means God with us in everything. “Truly, this man was the Son of God.” And he saved us all.

Welcome the shadows. Be reminded of the desolate places in life. We all, at one time or another, walk there, and Jesus walks with us. Over the next few hours, or perhaps even until Easter Sunday morning, be intentional to not chase away the shadows with artificial light. Take a short fast from electronic devices and give your attention to how Good Friday’s shadows lead us to remember how the Light of the World overcame all darkness.

Prayer: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.*

Isaiah 9:2

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,
"I have seen the Lord";
and she told them that he had said these things to her.
John 20:18*

Offering: Celebration!

And don't forget to bring your green envelope offering.

The greatest day in history
Death is beaten, You have rescued me.
Sing it out, Jesus is alive.
The empty cross, the empty grave
Life eternal, You have won the day.
Shout it out, Jesus is alive.
He's alive!

-from "Happy Day" by Tim Hughes

Bring your celebration to church with you today. Jesus is alive!
Cast off those "nighted colors".
Dress brightly and praise the Lord.

Prayer: "My Teacher!" John 20:16

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2017

Praise the Lord!

*Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*

Psalm 149:1

Blessing: Alleluias

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once He died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

-from "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" by Charles Wesley

In many Christian traditions worshipers do not sing any alleluias during Lent. That different kind of fast is broken on Easter morning—and in a tremendous way! The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

One lesson taught in this booklet has been about taking worship home with us. We can anticipate blessings to take home with us. Of course, blessings are meant to be shared. We know no greater blessing than the truth that Jesus is alive. Alleluia!

Carry your alleluias home with you. Think about what this means. Because of Jesus Christ, in every moment we have, we can praise the Lord.

Prayer: *Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!* Psalm 150:6

Worship Services during Lent 2017
First Baptist Church of Augusta

Ash Wednesday Service
March 1, 6:00 p.m.
Storey Chapel

Worship
Sundays during Lent

REACH, 8:30 a.m.
Mission Activities Center

Traditional Worship
11:00 a.m.
Sanctuary

Maundy Thursday Service
April 13, 7:00 p.m.
Mission Activities Center

Tenebrae Service
Good Friday
April 14, 7:00 p.m.
Sanctuary

Celebrate Easter with us!

REACH, 8:30 a.m.
Mission Activities Center

Traditional Worship
11:00 a.m.
Sanctuary