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Preparing Children for Lent

As the calendar moves toward Ash Wednesday, many churches prepare Lenten programs or curriculum. But what about the Sunday **before** Lent? Here is what I do with children in Sunday School (or children’s chapel) to help them understand the upcoming season.

The following talking points could serve as a Sunday school lesson, or the content of a children’s chapel. You’ll need some materials such as:

- Something purple
- Pretzels
- Ashes
- Alleluias written on paper
- A box (to put the alleluias in)

1. The Church Gets Ready for a New Season

My goal is to remind children that Lent is a season, and that the church ‘marks’ this season in a particular way.

“Today we are going to get ready for Lent. Lent is the time of 40 days plus six Sundays during which we get ready for Easter. During Lent we use the church color for getting ready. What is the church’s color for getting ready? Purple! Yes. Let’s talk about other ways our church gets ready for Lent...”

2. Pretzels Remind Us of Prayer

At our church we make pretzels, but you could also hold up a pretzel. Then give each child a pretzel (home-made or store-bought).

“After church we will make pretzels. Cross your arms over your chest like this – what shape is it? A pretzel, yes! A long time ago people would fold their arms in prayer like this. They also didn’t eat eggs or butter during Lent, so they made a special treat that doesn’t use eggs or butter that is shaped like arms folded in prayer to remember to be prayerful during Lent.”

3. Ashes Connect Us All

I always remind children that Ash Wednesday is coming up, and that they are invited. I make sure to have some real ashes to show them, so they can have an up-close look.

“Wednesday is the first day of Lent, called Ash Wednesday. Everyone, even kids, can come to this worship service. We take last year’s palm leaves and burn them to make the ashes. Last Sunday one of you said, we are all made of matter! That is right. All living things are made of the same stuff. On Ash Wednesday we put ashes on our foreheads to remember that we, and all things, are made of the same dust. Do you want to see the ashes?” (Let children take a peek at the container of ashes.)

4. We Put Away the Alleluia

Children are very interested in ‘special rules,’ and they also love words. So it’s always fun to remind them that we do not say Alleluia in Lent.

“The last thing we do for Lent is put away a very special word. When we are really joyful and excited in church we say the word Alleluia! Shout it with me – Alleluia!! During Lent we do not say Alleluia in church. That way, when we use it again, it will be extra special. So, everyone help me, we are going to pack up the Alleluias in this box. (Kids find the alleluias written on paper, hidden in the room.) Before I shut the lid, let’s give one more huge Alleluia!!”

Closing Prayer

This is the prayer I say for children as we conclude our time together:

“Gracious God, Help us prepare our hearts, minds and bodies for the serious season of Lent, knowing that the joy of Easter is not far away.”

Check out Christine's 5 week children's plan for Lent [here](#).

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