

EASTER

Learn why Jesus died and rose again

BIBLE BACKGROUND FOR YOU

For groups meeting weekly - especially those who meet on Sunday - the Easter story presents challenges. We jump from Jesus entering Jerusalem to his resurrection. As leaders we have other ways of engaging with the story during Holy Week, and should make the most of them, but we may need to find ways to help our groups understand the whole story.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem tells us a lot; he is the King of Israel, but not the sort of king most expected. It sets the tone for the whole Easter narrative, raising profound questions about who Jesus is, what he came to do and how we understand him. As we move on to the scene in the garden we see Jesus in a different situation, facing dark times. Not everyone in Jerusalem was as enthusiastic as the Palm Sunday crowd. We find ourselves

asking where we stand. Are we among the enthusiastic supporters, the opponents, the easily swayed inhabitants of Jerusalem or the fearful disciples?

Luke's account offers us some unique insights into the resurrection, especially with the story of the two on the road to Emmaus. We cannot ignore the confusion and questions that the disciples had, but nor can we doubt the reality of the resurrection as a physical event located firmly in history. These events lie at the heart of our faith and transform our lives. Do we move beyond our celebration of the resurrection to experience the new life of Jesus in us? How do we respond to what Jesus says to his disciples about their responsibility to take the good news of his resurrection to all people?

For your small group with a wide age range

Easter is a time for celebration! We want to highlight the real, amazing reason for our celebration - that Jesus died for us and then came alive. Our younger children may not be familiar with the events leading up to Easter Day (which are very different from other stories about Jesus when he appeared to be in control of events). Be sensitive to this and help them see that he was trusting God. Help older children to realise that Jesus knew what he was doing and had decided to follow God's plan, whatever the cost.

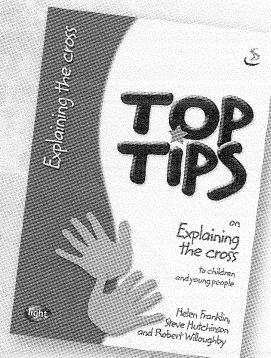
Resources for ministry

Top Tips on Explaining the Cross

Practical advice and inspirational stories for anyone wanting children and young people to understand and respond to the cross. Includes clearly presented biblical ways to explain the meaning and effect of Jesus' death and resurrection:

- Jesus takes our place
- Jesus triumphs over evil
- Jesus as a reconciler
- Jesus' dramatic rescue bid

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Highlights from *LightLive*

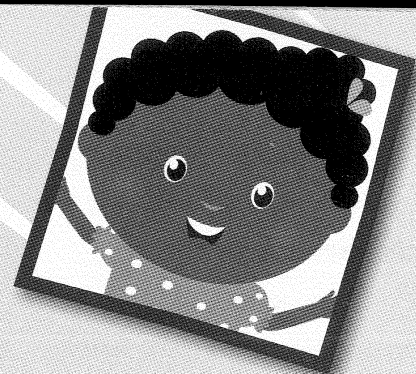
Go to the 'Search *LightLive*' tab at www.lightlive.org and enter this session's Bible reference to find:

- 'Bible story picture': a regular activity for 2-7s
- 'Audio Bible story': a regular mp3 download for 3-7s
- 'Learn and remember': a PowerPoint of a Bible verse to learn, for 5-11s (see also pages 53 and 67)
- 'Presentation': an activity with animation for 11-14s

SERIES 2 EASTER

SESSION 1

The king's decision



Bible:

Luke 19:28-40

Aim: To see how Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing he would suffer and die there

CORE PROGRAMME

For 3-14s

Story with props

Why: to see how Jesus went to Jerusalem, knowing he would suffer and die there

With: SU Bible Timeline, sheets of green paper, bag or pillowcase, rope, coat, paper palm leaf, cardboard crown, large stone

1 Prepare

Before the session, attach numbers to each of the props: 1 rope, 2 coat, 3 paper palm leaf, 4 cardboard crown, 5 large stone. Place them in a bag or pillowcase. Make a palm leaf by folding a sheet of green paper in half lengthways and then tearing around the edges to make an oval leaf shape. Tear a few slits to make fronds.

2 Introduction

Say that today we remember Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem where the crowds welcomed him waving palm branches. Show your palm leaf to the children. Get everyone to look at the Bible Timeline and point out

that today's story took place a few days before Jesus' death on the cross.

3 Story

Bring the rope out of the bag and point out the number 1. Explain that it is the first clue in the story. Tell the story in your own words, bringing out the relevant props at each stage.

1 rope: Jesus and his disciples were at the Mount of Olives. He sent two disciples ahead to the next village to look for a young donkey that was tied up. It had never been ridden. The owners were astonished to see some men untying their donkey, but the disciples explained, 'The Master needs it', just as Jesus had told them to. The owners allowed the disciples to take the donkey.

2 coat: The disciples took off their cloaks and put them over the donkey to make a saddle. They helped Jesus on to the donkey's back. As Jesus rode towards the city, a crowd gathered and threw their cloaks on the ground to show their love for Jesus and to make a soft path for the donkey.

3 palm leaf: Others in the crowd broke off palm branches and waved them to welcome Jesus.

4 crown: The people shouted, 'God bless King Jesus' and 'Glory to God'. Many called Jesus 'King' and wanted him to become their new ruler. But

Jesus knew that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem. He was not the kind of king people were looking for. He would not raise an army and fight their enemies. His death would mean they could be forgiven and become friends with God.

5 a stone: The Pharisees were annoyed when they heard the people praising Jesus because they wanted all the honour and respect for themselves. 'Command your followers to be quiet!' they shouted, but Jesus said, 'If they keep quiet, the stones in the street will start shouting!'

4 Response

Give each child a sheet of green paper and help them to tear it into a palm leaf. Then, in a moment of quiet, ask the children to hold the leaf and imagine that they are part of the crowd in Jerusalem. Quietly, ask the children to answer these questions in their hearts: 'How do you feel as you see Jesus riding along? Are you excited, pleased, or a bit nervous? Do you wave your palm branch? Perhaps you take off your coat and lay it on the road. What do you call out to Jesus?' Invite the children to write their response to the questions you have asked on the palm leaf.

CORE PROGRAMME CONTINUED

Palm branch praise

⑤ - ⑩ minutes

Why: to welcome Jesus and praise him

With: small branches, flags, ribbons or 'palm branches' made from paper

1 Chat with the children about what happens when someone important arrives somewhere, such as royalty or a winning sports team.

2 Remind the children that as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey the people waved palm branches to welcome him. Practise waving the branches you have brought in. Alternatively, allow the children to use flags or ribbons, or cut out their own palm branches from large sheets of paper.

3 Invite the children to choose some praise songs they know that say how great Jesus is. Encourage them to sing the songs and wave their branches or flags (or ribbons) to praise Jesus just like the children in today's story did.

Game

⑤ - ⑩ minutes

Why: to think of ways in which we can 'cheer' Jesus

With: large signs saying 'cheer' and 'jeer'

1 Ask everyone to stand in the middle of the room between the two signs.

2 Explain that you will tell the children about something that they might do this week at home or at school or when they are with their friends. They have to decide whether it's as if they are 'cheering' Jesus or 'jeering' him. Then they go to that side of the room. The last person to arrive each time is 'out' and could help you suggest other cheering or jeering situations.

3 Situations could include talking to someone at school who is always on their own, pretending you don't go to church, using bad language, not arguing with your brother or sister, saying 'It's not my turn' when asked to help at home, and so on.

4 Challenge the children to behave as if they are cheering Jesus, whatever they are doing.

Creative prayer montage

⑤ - ⑩ minutes

Why: to respond to the Bible story

With: a large sheet of card or paper, old magazines, clothes catalogues, travel brochures

1 Encourage the children to find and cut out pictures of different people and paste them on the card or paper background. As they work, emphasise that God loves each one of us more than we could ever imagine – so much that Jesus was prepared to go to Jerusalem, even though he knew what would happen to him there.

2 When the montage is finished, write a heading in large letters: 'Jesus went to Jerusalem and died for these people...' Across the bottom write '... and he went there for me.' Invite everyone to read it together and say their own name instead of 'me'.

3 Encourage the children to think quietly about all that Jesus went through because he loves us.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Activities for younger children

Praise streamer

⑩ minutes

Why: to praise Jesus as the crowd did in Jerusalem

With: a hair 'scrunchy' or cardboard ring for each child, ribbons or streamers, praise music

1 Give each child a hair scrunchy or cut some cardboard into a ring shape. Help the children tie the ribbons or streamers on the rings to make a praise streamer.

2 Remind the children of how the people praised Jesus. Some people shouted, some people waved branches and some people put coats on the road. You can praise Jesus by dancing too.

3 Show the children how to wave their praise streamers from side to side, up and down and in circular movements in front of them, above their heads and as they turn around. Try putting a combination of two or three simple moves together, perhaps with some praise music.

Bible story picture

⑤ - ⑩ minutes

Why: to welcome Jesus with praise and worship

With: a copy of the picture on page 52 for each child or enlarged copies for group use, art and craft materials

1 Use the picture to help you review the story together. Provide each child with a copy of the story picture and ask them to tell you who it is. Give them plenty of time to colour their picture of Jesus and the donkey.

2 When all the pictures are complete, look at them together and chat about the events of the story.

3 Point out that the pictures all show Jesus and a donkey. Why is Jesus getting on the donkey? Can anyone

remember where he was going to on the donkey? What happened when Jesus rode into Jerusalem? What did the people shout out? What did they wave? Encourage all the children to contribute answers.

4 Look at the pictures again and ask the children to cheer and wave, as the people in the crowd did. Explain that we can feel just as excited today because Jesus is our friend: cheer and wave again!

For older children

Make a prayer cloak

15 - **20** minutes

Why: to make a reminder of the story and have time to respond

With: large sheets of paper, an outline of a cloak, art materials

1 Give out large sheets of paper and art materials and invite the young people to cut out and decorate a 'prayer cloak'. They could do one large one all together to display in your meeting space, or smaller individual ones to take home with them.

2 Decorate the cloak(s) with glitter, foil, sequins or rich colours to express their worship to Jesus, and how much they think he is worth following.

3 Ask the young people to think about their response to what they have heard today. What can they write on their cloak that would sum up their thoughts? It might be something like, 'Jesus, you are the King', or, 'You mean more to me than anything'.

4 If they have made individual cloaks, encourage the young people to take them home and, when they look at them throughout the week, to think about how they can honour Jesus and follow him.

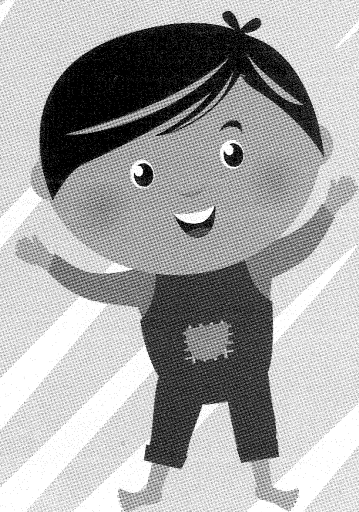
THE LEARN AND REMEMBER VERSE

'My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.'

2 Corinthians 12:9

Give a copy of the verse to each child. Encourage them to ask members of your church if they agree that it is true. Invite them to talk about a time in their life when they were weak but Jesus was strong.

Alternatively, use the song 'My grace' on the *Bitesize Bible Songs* 2 CD. Find a poster of this verse on page 53.



Palm Sunday Jesus rides a donkey
Luke 19:28-40



'My grace is all
you need, for
my power is
greatest when
you are weak.'

2 Corinthians 12:9