

ASH WEDNESDAY



What is Lent?

Story by Teresa Sayles / Pictures by Erik Swenson

WHAT IS LENT?

Adam and Taya sat between their mom on the sofa. “Remember how we took some time getting ready for Christmas?” she asked them. “We decorated the tree, wrapped presents, read special Bible stories –”

“And made cookies!” Adam added.

“Exactly,” their mom said. “That’s called Advent. It’s the weeks before Christmas when we get ready to celebrate Christmas. Well, today is the start of something called Lent. Lent is the time between Ash Wednesday, that’s today, and Easter Sunday. We take extra time to think about Jesus and remember how much He loves us and what He did for us. We’re getting ready to celebrate Easter.”

“Do we get to decorate a tree or make cookies?” Taya asked.

“Not exactly. During Lent, people try to spend more time talking with God. Some give up something they really like such as chocolate or movies so they can spend more time thinking about Jesus or focusing on special Bible verses. Or they choose to do something special to serve and help others.”

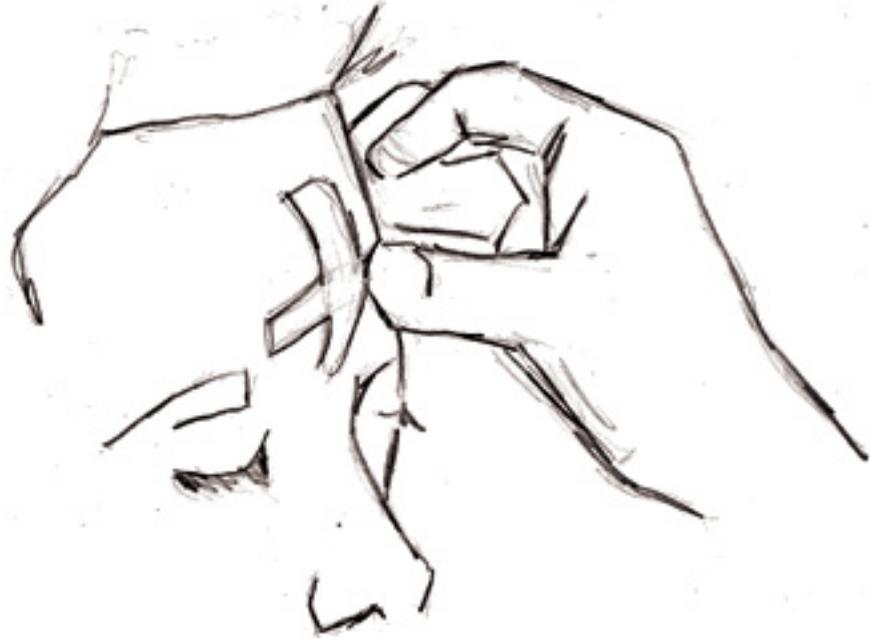
“What are we going to do?” Adam asked.

“We’re going to a special Ash Wednesday service tonight at church, and we’ll sing some songs, pray, and think about how God might want us to remember Jesus during Lent.”

“Why is it called ‘Ash Wednesday,’” Taya asked.

SIMPLICITY

STAMP
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Their mom put her thumb on Taya's forehead and began tracing a sort of "t" shape on it. "At some churches, they take ashes and mark a cross on your forehead."

"Like the cross that Jesus died on?" Adam said.

"Yep. It's to help you remember the sacrifice Jesus made and how much He loves you."

Taya squirmed a bit in her seat at the idea. "Do I have to have that on me?"

"No," their mom assured her. "Only if you want to. And, don't worry, it washes right off, and it doesn't hurt. Now, let's get our shoes on – It's time to go!"

When Adam, Taya, and their mom arrived at the Simplicity Station, Adam and Taya made sure to get their booklets stamped by the teenager at the table.

"This is the Simplicity Station," their mom said. "Simplicity here means figuring out if there's anything that might be getting in the way of you spending time with Jesus."

"What do you mean?" Adam asked.

"Remember last week you didn't get your homework done before dinner because you kept playing your video game? That got in the way of you doing something that was more important. Sometimes, we let things get in the way of spending time with Jesus, too, but we can choose to set those things aside for Lent and spend more time with Jesus."

Adam frowned. "So we have to give up something?"

"You don't have to," their mom said, "but I would like you to think about it. You could also choose to do something special to help others."

"Are you going to give something up for Lent?" Taya asked her mom.

"I'm going to give up things like Facebook. Whenever I feel like opening that app, I'll spend time praying or listening to worship songs or reading my Bible instead."

Adam and Taya were quiet a long moment. "Maybe I can give up playing Mario Kart for Lent," Adam said.

“Are you sure?” his mom asked. “It could be really hard to give up.”

“Yeah, I can do it. I want to spend more time with Jesus instead.”

“That’s an awesome decision, buddy! I’m really proud of you!”

Taya stepped forward, a serious look on her face. “Mom, I’m going to give up broccoli for Lent.”

Adam rolled his eyes. “You’re supposed to give up something you like, not something you hate.”

Taya shrugged. “Oh. Then maybe I’ll help mom with the laundry instead.”

Their mom laughed and gave her daughter a quick hug. “That would be so great!”



How about you? Is there something you could give up until Easter that would remind you to spend more time with Jesus? Perhaps its video games or eating candy or watching TV. Or maybe you want to do something special to help others.

Take some time now to think about what that thing might be and then draw a picture below of what you could give up for Lent to give yourself more time to spend with Jesus or what you might do to help others.



PRAYER

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Adam and Taya arrived at the Prayer Station with their mom and made sure to have their booklets stamped by the teenager helping at the table.

“What do we do here, Mom?” Taya asked.

“We’re going to take some time to pray,” their mom said, “and it looks like they want us to focus on love.”

“Love?” Adam said. “How do we pray about love?”

“There are a lot of ways. God loves us, right?”

“Yeah,” Taya answered.

“Well,” their mom said, “you can pray and ask God to help you remember how much He loves you this Lenten season.”

“Oh - I get it!” Adam said. “And God wants us to love others, so we can pray for other people, too.”

“That’s right,” their mom said. “You can pray for people you know, people you don’t know, and even people you have a hard time liking.”

“Why would I pray for them if I don’t like them?” Taya asked.

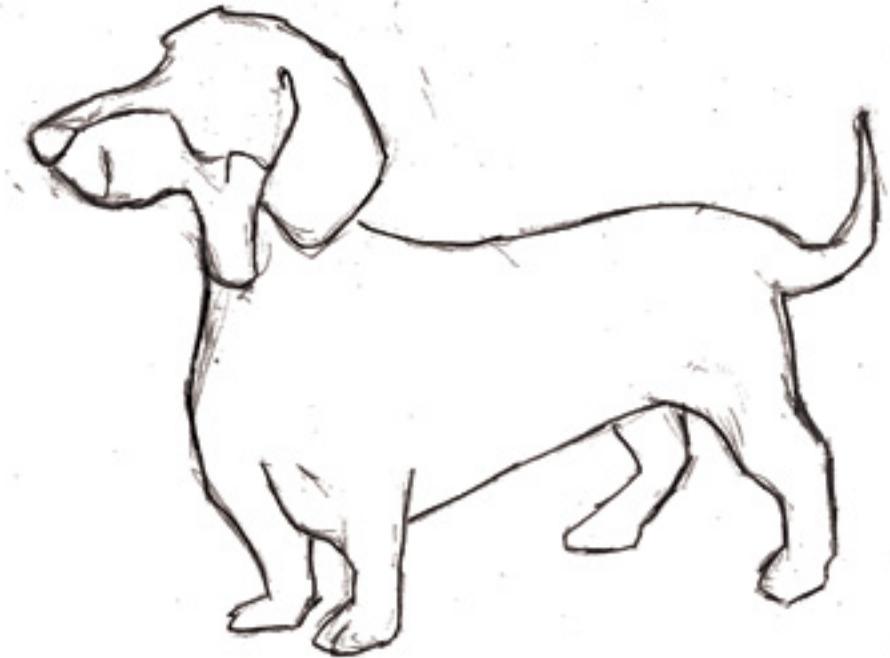
Her mom put an arm around her shoulder. “Because Jesus loves all of us and came to save everyone, which means we are to love everyone, too, whether we like them or not.”

“What about other things?” Adam asked. “Can I pray for Rusty?”

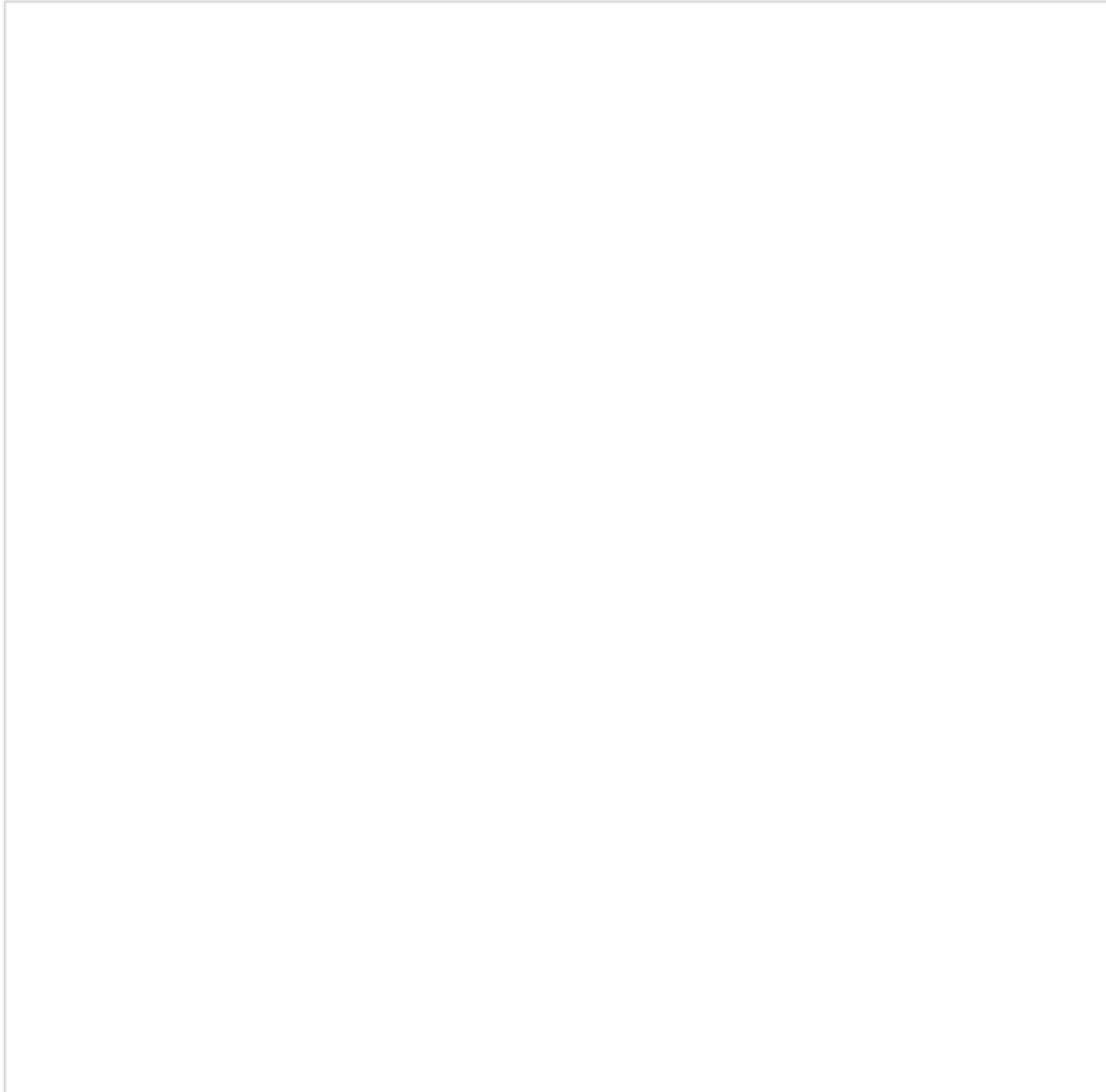
Taya laughed. “Why would you pray for him? He’s our dog!”

“Actually,” their mom said, “you can pray for Rusty. Every good thing we have or see around us is a gift from God and that includes puppies like Rusty. So, yeah, you can thank God for him and for other things in the world around us.”

Taya smiled wide. “Then I’m going to pray for Sadie’s pet hamster Ricky. He’s a good hamster.”



Take a moment to think about yourself, other people, and the world around you. Who or what comes to your mind? Draw a picture or two below of people or things in this world you want to pray for – You can include yourself if you want.



RELEASE

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Adam and Taya hurried to have the teenager at the Release Station stamp their booklet.

“This is the Release Station,” their mom said as she read over the table’s directions. “It looks like they want us to think about how God can take our unwise, unloving choices – those are called sin – and, instead, help us to choose to be more loving and wise like Him from now on.” Their mom took up a marker from the table and held it out in her hand. “Let’s pretend I dropped this marker in a giant patch of mud. If you took it out, what would it look like?”

“It’d be all yucky and gross with mud,” Taya answered.

“Right,” their mom said, turning the marker over in her hand, “but what if we got a bucket of nice clean water and gave it a bath.”

“Then it would be clean again,” Adam said.

“Exactly. When we ask God to forgive us for those wrong, unloving choices we make, He forgives us and makes our hearts clean and new again, just like we would do with this marker.”

“God makes us all better!” Taya said.

“Not only does He make us better,” their mom continued, “but He can help us to

make better, more loving choices from now on. He can also help us to forgive others who might do something hurtful toward us.”

“You mean like when Victor called me a name on the playground yesterday?” Adam asked. “I have to forgive him?”

“God forgives us, and He wants us to show that same love and forgiveness toward others. It’s not always easy, but living with anger toward others in your heart is never a good thing, and so God wants to help us get rid of it through forgiveness.”

Adam looked at his mom a moment. “Can you help me pray to forgive Victor?”

“And can you help me pray for God to forgive me for not telling you the truth this morning about where my homework was?” Taya asked, her eyes looking at the floor.

Their mom put an arm around each of them and gave them a squeeze. “I’d love to – Let’s pray.”



Take a few minutes to think about things you might need to ask God to forgive in your life. Maybe you’ve said angry words to a parent or brother or sister lately. Or it could be you took something that wasn’t yours. Or perhaps you have anger in your heart toward someone else for something they did to hurt you.

Ask God to forgive you for your unwise and unloving choices or ask Him to help you forgive someone else, and be sure to thank God for His help in making you more like Him. Below, draw a picture of what it might look like to make the kind of wise, loving choices God wants us to make each day. It could be you choosing to share with a friend, give a hug to someone you’ve forgiven, or read your Bible.



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