

Lent is hard for us as adults, and even more so for children. Easter is hard, too, for other reasons. So how do we faithfully navigate our way through this season with our children in tow, so that, when it's over, there's a growing awareness of God's presence, and not just a sugar high from all the candy?

1. Don't skip the God talk. Even if you don't know what to say, say SOMETHING. If you don't frame the season in a spiritual context, the world will happily frame it in bunnies, eggs, and baskets of candy.
2. Our church recognizes Lent as part of the Christian calendar. Explain lent to your child. If you don't know something, ASK; we're all learning together!
3. If you observe Lent, explain why and how. Some traditions "give up something" (chocolate or sweets or tv or . . . ) for Lent, and some add a spiritual practice (additional time of prayer or Bible reading or quite time to listen to God and examine self or . . . ). If you do either of these things, explain what you're doing and why.
4. If you do observe Lent with one of the above practices, invite your child to join you in a way that might be meaningful to them. Some families give up eating out during the season and when Easter arrives, they have a celebration of donating the money they would have spent to causes that could use the help (lots of organizations and individuals receive help at Christmas, and, while the needs still exist, receive very little during other seasons).
5. Explain what your children might be seeing. If there are crosses and lilies and shrouds on crosses, explain what they mean. If you don't know, ASK; again, we're all learning!
6. Story books are good places to start. Some good ones are: *The Story of Easter* (Patricia A. Pingry), which is available in slim paperback and board book versions; *Usborne Bible Stories The Easter Story* (retold by Heather Amery), which has alternate text for different ages. Remember, though, that story books are just a starting point.
7. Read the Bible's accounts of Holy Week (the time from Palm Sunday to Easter). Depending on your child's age, you may need to edit what you say. Some families skip the crucifixion and move straight to the resurrection. Children will know there's a gap! (How or why did Jesus get in the tomb?)
8. Figure out how and when to read the stories or scripture together. It's heavy stuff, so right before bedtime might not be the best.
9. Just like Christmas, telling the stories through the season helps develop a familiarity that will last beyond the chocolate bunnies. Children thrive on hearing things repeated (I have no idea how many times I've read *Penelope's Purple Plastic Purse*, among others!). Bible stories are no different.
10. Make plans to celebrate the empty tomb on Easter morning. An empty egg in their basket. Holding baskets until after church, so the rejoicing comes before the loot. Reading the Bible stories about the empty tomb before opening baskets.

There are lots of ways to move through the season as a family. I'd love to hear your ideas, too!