



### Important Dates

**March 1:**  
World Day  
of Prayer

**March 31:**  
Resurrection  
of the Lord/  
Easter Sunday

**March 24:**  
Passion/Palm  
Sunday (Holy  
Week begins)

**May 2:**  
National Day  
of Prayer

**March 28:**  
Maundy  
Thursday

**May 19:**  
Pentecost

**March 29:**  
Good Friday

## What Is Truth?

**P**ilate had a tough job. He was the governor of Rome’s occupied territory, Judea. Obviously, the Jews weren’t happy about that. Pilate by this time had antagonized the Jews by moving the army, hanging shields with images of pagan gods on the city walls of Jerusalem, and taking over the temple Treasury. While the Jews wouldn’t have been happy with any governor, they were so frustrated by Pilate’s actions that they had complained to the emperor twice. After two imperial reprimands, Pilate was walking a fine line between keeping his job and not antagonizing the Jewish leaders any more. So when word came that Caiaphas, the high priest, was sending over a prisoner, Pilate knew he would have to be very careful in dealing with the situation.

After Jesus was defiled by entering Pilate’s home, the two of them got into quite a

discussion about truth. After all he had seen, after all he had done, Pilate couldn’t understand how anyone could still believe in truth. “Truth?” he asked, “What is truth?” If ever there was a question for our post-modern society, it is that one. We have learned to be evil in a society that believes any idea is good as long as it is sincerely believed. A teacher once told a group of parents, “We teach our students that ideas can’t hurt you. There are no bad ideas.” Really? No, there are a lot of bad ideas, and claiming there are none is one of the worst. The challenge is figuring out what are the good ideas and what are the bad ones.

In the middle of their conversation Jesus told Pilate, “I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” That means the truth doesn’t belong to you. You belong to the

truth! Even if you don't like it, or understand it, you still belong to this truth that you have received.

While Pilate was asking about truth, he was staring right at Jesus. The conversation ended with Pilate asking, "What is truth?" It's the last thing that was said. You get the feeling that when he is done, the silence just hangs in the air. As a pastor, I confront that silence a lot.

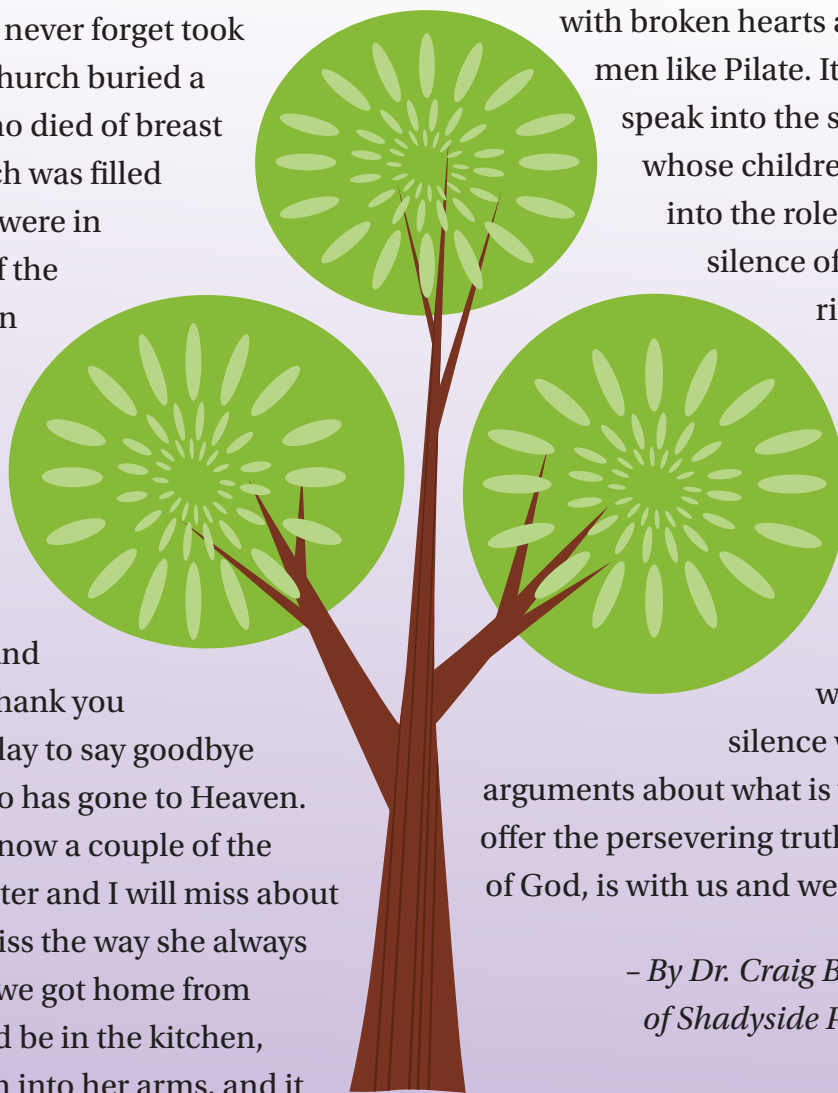
One silence I will never forget took place when our church buried a young mother who died of breast cancer. The church was filled with people who were in deep grief. One of the eulogies was given by the mother's nine-year-old son. I'll never forget seeing him stand at the podium. He held a piece of paper and began to read. "Thank you for being here today to say goodbye to my mother who has gone to Heaven. I wanted you to know a couple of the things that my sister and I will miss about Mommy. We'll miss the way she always greeted us when we got home from school. She would be in the kitchen, and we would run into her arms, and it felt good to be home. And at night when

we had to go to bed, she would race us to our beds and then we'd jump in them, and she would read a story. I'm going to miss that."

It was my turn to speak then, but I couldn't. So we sat there in silence. It is the silence I remember the most. Eventually, of course, I had to speak into the silence.

It has always been the church's mission to speak into the silence created by little boys with broken hearts and despairing men like Pilate. It is our mission to speak into the silence of homes whose children have been forced into the role of soldier. And the silence of inner city streets right after another child has been shot. What will the world hear from us when we speak? Do we dare break the silence with our same tired arguments about what is wrong? Or, do we offer the persevering truth that Jesus, the Son of God, is with us and we belong to Him?

*- By Dr. Craig Barnes, Senior Pastor  
of Shadyside Presbyterian Church,  
Pittsburgh, PA.*



# Easter

## Through the Eyes of Little Children

Adapt these activities for your toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary students. Consider sending them home for families to use together.

### See You in the Funny Papers!

Plan a Palm Sunday celebration complete with costumes and props with nothing but the Sunday newspaper. You will need two large sheets of newspaper for each child. Save your funny papers for a few weeks before the big day if you want a colorful celebration!

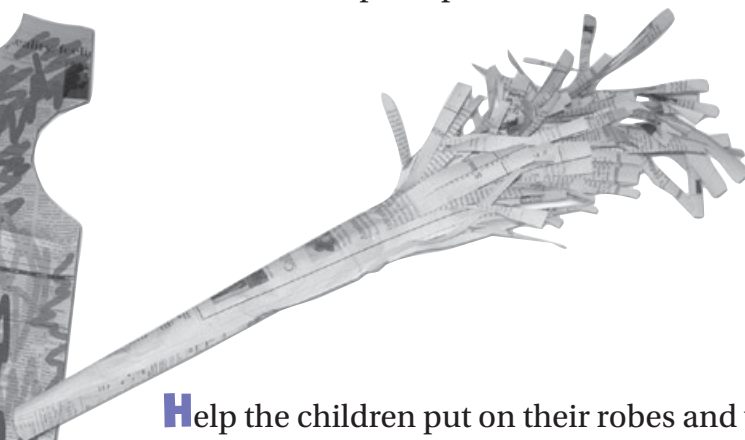
#### For a robe:

Fold each side of a large sheet of newspaper in to meet in the center. Children can decorate their robe with crayons, markers, stickers, etc. As they decorate, cut one neck and two arm openings in each child's robe.



#### For a palm branch:

Roll one sheet of newspaper from the long side to make a tight cylinder. Tape closed near the center. Cut one end of the roll into fringe with long snips, fairly close together. Reach down inside the fringed end of the cylinder and gently pull up the center of the roll.



**H**elp the children put on their robes and wave their palms. Read the Palm Sunday story from Matthew 21 and encourage the children to act out the story. They can spread their cloaks on the road and wave their palm branches as they shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David... Hosanna in the highest!" Note: Gift wrap may be used if you don't have newspapers available. Additional volunteers may be needed to help with the robes. Consider making the palm branches ahead of time.

## Easter Egg Pass

Sit in a circle on the floor with your class. Play a CD of praise music (such as those from the downloadable visual resources included in your Creative Teaching Aids packet). Pass a plastic Easter egg around the circle as the music plays. When the music stops, have the child holding the Easter egg share something from the Easter story. This activity is a good way to explain which parts of the Easter celebration are part of the Bible story and which are cultural traditions.



## Easter Basket

Gather a few materials to create an Easter story basket. Using foam sheets, cut out hearts from a red sheet and crosses from a brown sheet. Also add empty, plastic Easter eggs. Include enough hearts, crosses, and eggs for each child and yourself to have one of each. After going through the story with the children, let them play with the pieces and tell the story themselves.

**DISCUSSION POINTS:** **Jesus loved us so much** (*pass out the hearts*) **that He died on a cross** (*pass out the crosses*) **for our sins.** (*Pass out the empty eggs.*) **Jesus was buried, but He didn't stay in the grave. Open your eggs and look at what's inside.**

**Nothing! Jesus is not in a grave. He's alive!**

**Jesus is  
Alive!**

**Jesus is  
Alive!**







# Jump into Celebrating the Epiphany with Elementary Students

Adapt these activities for your elementary students. Consider sending the ideas home for families to use together.

## Encouraging Others

Talk to your students about connecting your Sunday school class with an overseas mission that your church supports. Perhaps each member of your class could supply one small item and your class can pack a box to send. Include little notes from your class.

### Hints for shipping:

- Do not send glue or glue sticks, which may leak or dry out in transit.
- Pack in boxes weighing less than 10 pounds each and ship “surface” by parcel post.  
The rates for larger boxes are prohibitive and often do not arrive.
- Expect it to take about 4 months for your boxes to arrive.

### You might provide:

|                        |                  |         |
|------------------------|------------------|---------|
| Markers                | Crayons          | Pencils |
| Colored pencils        | Sticky notes     | Rulers  |
| Scissors               | Lined paper      | Brads   |
| Watercolor paint boxes | Transparent tape |         |
| Construction paper     | Glitter          |         |

**Discussion Points:** The unit theme for May is “A Time for Courage.” People in many other countries are facing the same persecution that the Bible heroes from this month encountered. This package can encourage children in these countries and let them know that God loves them and that other children are praying for them.

## Resurrection Tree

Just as an Advent calendar helps to count the days until Christmas, a Resurrection Tree can help your class count down to Easter. This tree is a valuable Bible study activity and is a great tactile, visual, and verbal tool to use as a testimony of God’s truth.

A few Sundays before Easter have a Bible “Scavenger Hunt,” leading your class through the Gospel of John’s account of the Passion Week looking for events in the life of Jesus (John 12–20). Then, write a few words about each event and its Bible reference on a felt or paper leaf shape.

After your class has created about 14 leaves, place them in a basket. Create a bare tree on a piece of poster board or on your bulletin board. On each Sunday leading up to Easter, draw some of the leaves out of the basket and pin them to the branches, reading the events and discussing them with your class. As the green leaves bring the tree to life, post a sign on the tree trunk that says, HE LIVES!



# Youth Center:

## Seven Last Words

The seven last words aren't just seven words. They are the seven final phrases Jesus said as He hung on the cross. They are taken from the combined accounts of the four Gospels as a glimpse into the depth of Jesus' suffering to redeem us while also showing His divinity.

Use these words for class, personal, or family devotion time with your youth. They could be used one at a time or as a group in a longer Bible study time. For each one, read the verse in the Bible, talk about the validity of the title given, and wrestle with the question.

### FIRST WORD: (Word of Forgiveness)

*"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34

- What does this show us about Jesus' love?

### SECOND WORD: (Word of Salvation)

*"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* Luke 23:43

- What does this tell us about grace through faith?

### THIRD WORD: (Word of Relationship)

*"Woman, here is your son . . . Here is your mother."* John 19:26-27

- How does this show Christ's humanity?

### FOURTH WORD: (Word of Abandonment)

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

- What do we see in Jesus as He is separated from God while bearing the full weight of our sin? (See also Psalm 22:1.)

### FIFTH WORD: (Word of Distress)

*"I am thirsty."* John 19:28

- How does this statement fulfill the prophecy in Psalm 69:21?

### SIXTH WORD: (Word of Triumph)

*"It is finished."* John 19:30

- What is finished?

### SEVENTH WORD: (Word of Reunion)

*"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* Luke 23:46

- How is Jesus showing complete trust in the Father? (See also Psalm 31:5.)

# TEACHER'S DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a thoughtful time when we prepare for the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He illuminates our path and lights up our lives. Aren’t you glad for a perfect yet personal Savior?

As you journey through the reflective days of Lent, remind yourself of all the gifts from our amazing God. As you look ahead and prepare yourself and your students for Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, don’t forget that great love motivated Him to come and die for us. We can show Him our love by living in a manner that brings Him glory and honor.

## SUGGESTED READINGS:

- » John 3:16-17
- » Matthew 5:14-16
- » Psalm 18
- » Psalm 27
- » Matthew 28:1-10

## FAMILY ACTIVITY

### National Day of Prayer

The National Day of Prayer (the first Thursday in May) is a day to pray for our country, its leaders, and our people. Not only do we have the First Amendment right to voice our beliefs in public, but our lawmakers give us a specific day to do so. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1952, the National Day of Prayer is an opportunity for us to be “salt and light” and to be a “city set on a hill.” Adapt these ideas for remembering the National Day of Prayer to your family:

- Find out if your community is having a National Day of Prayer observance and organize a family outing around the event.
- Help the kids and their friends decorate their bikes or skateboards in red, white, and blue. Have a parade up and down your street. After the parade, invite all participants into your backyard for prayers and ice cream.
- Decorate the outside of your home with red, white, and blue streamers, balloons, and American flags during National Day of Prayer (NDP) week.
- Have a neighborhood family potluck. Decorate in red, white, and blue. Give each family a topic to lead the group in prayer after dinner.
- Have a family devotional time to talk about stories from the Bible where prayer changed people’s lives. Memorize 1 Timothy 2:1 with your children and discuss the importance of praying for our country and its leaders.
- Teach older children the names of their elected officials and the offices they hold. Emphasize the vast responsibilities these officials carry and their special need for prayer.

*(Adapted from the National Day of Prayer Resource Kit)*



# Threads in the **ROYAL ROBE**

Scripture reveals to us who God is, what He requires of us, and how He shows His love to us in mighty saving acts of grace. We can never begin to know all there is to know of Him, but our gracious God is able to show us enough of Him in order to have life, health, and peace.

Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know of the triune God. We learn what He desires to make known to us.

The Bible does not teach us in neat theological categories. Rather, God makes Himself known through accounts of His work in the lives of real people, through prophecies and prayers, doctrinal teaching, and wise sayings.

When we follow all these threads of truth, we see a pattern emerging—a royal robe woven from the gathered truths of Scripture adorns our King and displays His love.

To see God more clearly, we express what we learn from Scripture in a coherent way, known as the essentials of faith. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed both express the essentials of faith.

The great Reformation confessions of faith further laid out the teaching of Scripture in a

systematic way, weaving together the Golden Threads of Scripture, bringing forth the royal robe that glorifies Jesus our King. By studying them, we grow in our understanding of God. Such knowledge leads us to put on the robe of Christ by faith. This means that we take our place in union with Him, growing in love and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The essentials of faith are not all Scripture has to say about God, but they represent the Golden Threads around which the whole royal robe is woven. Under the heading of "Teacher Devotionals," every Bible lesson in this curriculum is keyed to the Golden Threads it expresses. The Stray Threads section picks up additional ideas or notes the ways in which the Golden Threads may get distorted.

Believers in the Reformed tradition are a people who celebrate that God can be known because He has graciously made Himself known. A crucial part of our faithfulness is learning and studying the essentials that have been revealed. So, we offer these in hopes of enriching every Bible lesson, enabling you, as a teacher, to trace the threads of Christ's Royal Robe in the teachings of Scripture.



## **1 ESSENTIAL NUMBER ONE: The One True God Is the Triune God of Grace—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whom Alone We Must Worship and Serve.**

In the Old Testament, we learn that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the creator of the entire world and the constant redeemer through the mighty acts of the people Israel. In the New Testament, we see the LORD, Israel's God, actually is the Triune God, who reveals Himself to be the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has entered into covenant faithfulness with His people and will not leave us or forsake us.

## **3 ESSENTIAL NUMBER THREE: Holy Scripture Is the Word of God Written, Through Which, in the Power of the Holy Spirit, We Truly Meet the Triune God.**

One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the recovery of Scripture as our sole authoritative source for knowledge of God and its return to the ordinary people of God. The traditions of the church could be helpful in interpreting the Bible, but must always remain beneath the written Word of God. The Reformers affirmed at the same time that what needs to be known about God from Scriptures can be known by ordinary people who engage in a plain reading of the Bible. The Bible is clear enough in its essential teaching for all who read with prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word.

## **4 ESSENTIAL NUMBER FOUR: The Triune God Is Sovereign Over All.**

Our religion is not simply a human invention, nor is it subject to human whims for change and supposed corrections. We do not have the freedom to decide who we would like the Lord to be. God is, and He has made Himself known to us, in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While what we may know of the triune God is true and reliable, we always recognize that we never know all there is to know about Him. The Lord God is high and holy, completely other, beyond our grasp and control, and splendid in His glory. God is moving history toward its appointed end. The triune God of grace is in control. He reigns. He alone is Judge. He alone is worthy of our praise. We never have dominion over Him. God alone reigns.

## **2 ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO: The Eternal Son of God Came to Us as a Human Being in Jesus Christ.**

In the fullness of time, God the Son took up our humanity as He came to us as Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is all that God has to say to us, in word and deed, about who He is and how He loves us. And Jesus is all we have to say to God, as the one man who lived a life of perfect obedience to Him, on our behalf. In Jesus' relationship with His Father, and in His promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we come to know that the one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **5 ESSENTIAL NUMBER FIVE: Humanity Has Fallen into Sin.**

The Scriptures teach us that, although God created us good, through our own willful choices, humanity sinned against Him. The sin of our first parents rocked and wracked the world with terrible consequences. Now, by nature, we are prone to suppress the truth and to choose against our God and our neighbors again and again. There is nothing we human beings do in this world that is not without the taint of our sin. We are helplessly lost in our sin. This means the death of ever hoping to get to the Father on our own. Such a realization is the beginning of crying out in repentance and faith for the rightness and goodness that only can come from the Lord Himself. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who comes to us as a man, has enacted perfect obedience, free from sin, on our behalf.

# 6

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER SIX: We Are Made Right with God by Grace Alone Through Faith Alone.**

Our salvation from our sins and our sinfulness is all from Christ Jesus. We never can earn our way into God's favor, whether by our good works, zealous worship, or many prayers. The Father forgives our sins by the work of Jesus Christ alone. Christ's death alone takes away the guilt of our sin. Christ's faith and obedience alone, the living sign of His covenant faithfulness, comprise our reconciliation with God. He gives us Christ's righteousness. Our record before God is replaced with Jesus' record! When this happens, we believe in who Christ Jesus is and what He has accomplished. We confess that He is our Lord and Savior. But even this belief and confession is a gift of God, the result of the Holy Spirit's work inside us. Salvation is all of God. We simply rest in what He has done for us.

# 7

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER SEVEN: Election: God Chose Us to Be His Children and Servants.**

God chose us to believe in Him now that we might spend the rest of our lives serving Him and telling others about Jesus. The essential teaching of election is the awareness that we do not make our way to the Father; He has come all the way down to where we are to claim us. Election, then, is not to a life of ease but to one of service. Those whom He calls, He sends to bring His message to a lost world. If we know Him, it is because He chose us. If He chose us, He sends us to tell others, "Believe the good news and discover your chosenness!"

# 8

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER EIGHT: The Holy Spirit Makes Us More and More Like Jesus.**

Sanctification means "to make holy," and it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. For we not only receive a new record of righteousness in Christ, but we also receive a new nature. God places His own Spirit within us, and a wonderful series of benefits begins:

- ❖ The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ so that all that belongs to Him comes to belong to us (John 16:14-15).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, fashioning us more and more in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the Scriptures so that we might be transformed by hearing the Word (John 14:26).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit prays within us, crying out to the Father for us and through us (Gal. 4:6).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and His presence is the guarantee of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- ❖ The Holy Spirit gives us the power to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) and enables us to do the ministry and works of Jesus (see Matt. 10:1 and John 14:12).

Of course, the old, sinful nature still remains in us and, thus, the new and the old are in conflict. Christian growth involves a hard struggle. We can never do it on our own. We live in constant need of "the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2). The person of the Holy Spirit then moves us to live in obedience and empowers us to keep going even after we fail or when the way is difficult. His work will continue until we meet Jesus in Heaven at last.

# 9

## **ESSENTIAL NUMBER NINE: We Are Called to a Life of Obedience.**

The people of God, Christ's Church, bring His Word and His love to a broken world. We are in the world, even though we do not belong to this world (John 17:16). We serve the world even though we are aliens and strangers here, passing through on our way to our heavenly homeland. Psalm 84 notes that those who "have set their hearts in pilgrimage" to the city of God cause the dry, desert lands to become a place of springs as they pass through. With the Holy Spirit prompting us and empowering us, with the grace of Jesus cleansing us, with the love of the Father beckoning us, we both gather for worship and move out in service to God. So, even though the church does not belong to the world, it strives to love the world as Christ did.