



Going for growth downloads

This article comes from the blog [Worshipping with Children](#). It is written by Carolyn C Brown, a Christian educator in America who has a passion for exploring how worship and Scripture can be opened up to children.

<http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.com/>

Observing Lent and Celebrating Easter

Most congregations work hard to include children in Advent and Christmas celebrations. Lent and Easter are another story. Often the children are not expected at and not even wanted at these worship services. The hope is that they will hear the stories in church school or at home and join the congregation celebrating the stories when they are older and understand them more fully. I think that is a mistake. The Lent-Easter stories are the key stories of our faith and the worship services of Lent, Holy Week and Easter are our high Holy Days. Children need to be part of them with the entire congregation.

Children CAN hear the passion and resurrection stories. From an early age they can be told that people who were angry with Jesus killed him on a cross, but that God would not let Jesus stay dead and made him alive again on Easter. Over the years they add the details. The younger the children the more they follow the emotions of the story rather than the facts. For that reason it is important to always tell the whole story. Even on Good Friday, mention the surprise that we know is waiting.

Children also find different kinds of good news in the passion and resurrection stories than adults find in them. Older preschoolers celebrate God as most powerful super power in the universe and are glad to be allied with God. Younger elementary schoolers, who are moving out into the world on their own more and more, find comfort in the God who knows us and promises to be with us always even after we die. Older elementary schoolers identify most strongly with Peter as he lived through Holy Week. Jesus' forgiveness of the best friend who betrayed him proves to them that God will forgive anything. Adults find comfort in the promise of new life. All these different versions of "the best news" enrich each other when they are woven into the congregation's worship.

Exploring the stories in the sanctuary in worship gives them more power for children. For example, a palm parade with other children in a classroom may be a kid thing, but a triumphant parade in the sanctuary with people of all ages communicates that this is indeed an important parade. Hearing the story of the Last Supper is one thing, but celebrating the Last Supper on the "anniversary" of very night that Jesus invented it with the whole church brings the story to life. It's the same with hearing the crucifixion story on Good Friday or getting up before sunrise to hear the story outside on Easter Sunday morning.

So, as you begin planning for the season as a whole, consider the following....

Make a big deal about changing the colours in the sanctuary. Do it together on either Ash Wednesday or the first Sunday of Lent. This can be fairly formal with people carrying out the white or green cloths and banners and others processing in with the purple ones. Or, it can be more informal with worship leaders inviting worshipers to help change the altar frontals and explaining in the process the meaning of Lent and the purple. Describe the changes in the sanctuary that will come on Good Friday and again on Easter.

Hide the ALLELUIA! Many congregations ban the use of the word "Alleluia!" in the congregation's worship during Lent. To highlight this, create (or get young or older artists to create) a beautiful poster of the word, show the poster at the beginning of the service on the first Sunday of Lent, then put it in a box and tuck it somewhere in the sanctuary. Leave it there until Easter where young children can check on it, if they wish. On Easter morning, bring it out, shout it, sing it and enjoy it.

Encourage a Lenten worship discipline for children and their families. Because Lent is basically spring training for disciples, it is an opportunity to encourage children to grow as worshipers.

If you tend to use historic prayers of confession and assurances of pardon or repeated sung responses during Lent, introduce and explain them to the children during worship and encourage them to join in on praying and singing them. (Many adults will listen appreciatively.)

Encourage households to pray together at home each day during Lent. This can be as simple as challenging them to pray before one meal each day or at bedtime each day or to pray the Lord's Prayer together each day (perhaps learning it in the process). Or, it can involve providing printed devotionals for households of different ages. Young children learn the practice of daily prayer by praying with their parents. Older children often begin to pray on their own when provided a printed guide to be followed for a set period. If you do this, don't simply set the discipline at the beginning of Lent. Mention it throughout Lent encouraging people to keep with it or get back to it if they have let it slip. Congratulate them at the end of Lent and give specific suggestions for keeping the discipline going.

As you plan services that include children, be sure to invite them and their parents repeatedly. One parenthetical "children are welcome" will not do the job. You will have to say that children are not only welcome, but are encouraged to attend. Be sure to set the times of weekday services with children and families in mind, i.e. before bedtime on a school night. Explain to the whole congregation why it is important that children participate in these services.