

Signs of Lent

Leader Guide

Preparing Your Meeting Space

You will see in the video that each segment begins and ends at a worship table. We urge you to prepare your own worship table in your meeting space. We also suggest that you invite participants to set aside their own devotional space at home. The traditional color associated with Lent is purple, so you may want to have a purple cloth as an underlay for other symbols, colors, and textures. It would be helpful to have a votive candle, matches, and a large, shallow bowl available every week. Suggestions for the worship table are in the Gather & Center section at the beginning of each session, but feel free to use your own creativity and ideas.

Check with participants about sensitivity to scent. If someone is sensitive, you will want to use unscented candles, but if no one has a sensitivity consider using a variety of scents as another way to enter the story. For instance, you might consider a neutral, outdoor scent for Week 1, a night-blooming flower for Week 2, a water scent for Week 3, and so on. Allow your imagination free rein as you prepare with the passage prior to the meeting.

Consider the desert tradition of hospitality and refreshment for the stranger as you choose and prepare the place in which you will meet over the next seven weeks. The opportunity to be quiet and comfortable is important, so seek a room where constant coming and going and voices in the hallways outside will not interrupt moments of silence, attention to one another's words, or thoughtful engagement with the scripture.

May you be blessed and inspired – literally “breathed into” – by the Spirit as you companion others on the spiritual pilgrimage of Lent.

SIGNS OF LENT DVD LEADER GUIDE

This Leader Guide is accompanied by Signs of Lent DVD, Bulletins, Devotional Bulletin Inserts, and Poster Set. Files for this Guide are also available at www.LogosProductions.com under “Adult Study.”

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- ♦ **Lent 5:** *Weeping Women of Jerusalem* is by a contemporary artist from the Philippines, J. Elizalde Navarro.
- ♦ **Lent 6:** *Judas' Betrayal* is a Byzantine fresco from the Monastery Church in Ohrid in Macedonia.
- ♦ **Easter Day:** *The Risen Lord* is the work of contemporary Chinese artist He Qi.

You will see these images on this video, but we also encourage you to let them surround your meeting space as posters and to collect the devotional inserts. A number of options are possible with the posters:

- ♦ Using the posters as a way to invite participation in the discussion group.
- ♦ Making the poster a central focus in the discussion group meeting area provides a focus for exploration.
- ♦ Displaying the posters outside the worship space helps carry the learning into worship.
- ♦ Hanging them in a quiet place such as a prayer chapel can provide sacred space where viewers can record their own response to them in a communal journal.

The members of the study and discussion group might want to share some of the fruits of their reflection with the wider congregation. It is also possible that the images can enrich other meetings or events in the church's life. For instance:

- ♦ Invite children and youth to respond to the images with poetry, photographs, or artwork of their own.
- ♦ Use them as a "visual prayer" at other gathering times – Lenten suppers, meditation groups, retreats.
- ♦ The images are also available as a series of devotional bulletin inserts. Ask lay visitors to bring a copy of the inserts to homebound members, inviting them to write prayers or poems in response.
- ♦ Center them individually on a bulletin board or wall and ask worshippers to bring pictures, photos, news stories, or headlines that speak into and out of the image.

Introduction

Welcome to Signs of Lent DVD Leader Guide. The season of Lent is an opportunity to pilgrimage with Jesus during the final events of his ministry. Lent is a training ground for living in God's realm of *shalom* right here, right now . . . because Jesus told us God's realm already exists here and now. It is the season we set aside each year in the same way a professional musician sets aside dedicated, intensive time to prepare for an important concert, or a runner trains for a marathon. The big event toward which we look is not the feast of Easter but something even beyond that: the full revelation of God's presence among us – God's commonwealth.

This leader guide invites you to ponder your own discipleship in the company of others as you read these stories of encounter between Jesus and a variety of individuals he meets in a variety of settings:

- ♦ **Lent 1: Sand** (Matthew 4:1-11) Jesus encounters profound solitude and self-denial in the wilderness.
- ♦ **Lent 2: Wind** (John 3:1-17) Nicodemus comes to Jesus to reflect on his own spiritual pilgrimage.
- ♦ **Lent 3: Water** (John 4:5-42) Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink of water and they are both transformed.
- ♦ **Lent 4: Earth** (John 9:1-41) A blind man seeks healing and a whole community is shaken by the result.
- ♦ **Lent 5: Rock** (John 11:1-45) The death of a friend challenges Jesus to put his own life in jeopardy.
- ♦ **Lent 6: Tree** (Matthew 26:14-27:66) Judas becomes the instrument of Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion.
- ♦ **Easter: Light** (John 20:1-18) The risen Christ meets Mary Magdalene and commissions her as the first evangelist.

The stories we read in Lent invite us to tap more and more deeply into the core story of our faith. The lectionary assigns three texts and a responsive psalm for each Sunday. During this time of the church year (as well as during the seasons of Advent – Epiphany), the Hebrew Scripture, Epistle, and Gospel for each week are carefully chosen to remind us of the strong and faithful connection between the Christian community and its Jewish ancestry.

Although this study will emphasize the Gospel passages, it also dips into the other passages from time to time. Please consider reading the other lessons for each week as well as the Gospel. This interweaving of texts invites each of us to look deeper by submerging ourselves in the symbols and images of the master stories that express our faith.

As counterpoint to the journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem, the Hebrew Scripture reminds us of other journey stories, and about leaving familiar places to become a “wandering people.” Adham and Havah (Eve) leave the Garden of Eden. Abram and Sarai leave their home along the Tigris River. The Hebrew slaves leave Egypt across the Reed Sea. David prepares to leave his flocks to become king. Ezekiel calls the Spirit to the dry bones so that they can live . . . and leave the valley of death. Similarly, the Epistle lessons are Paul’s reflection on how his scriptural heritage shaped him as a follower of Jesus.

Signs of Lent Resource Collection

Signs of Lent includes several types of resources: DVD, devotional inserts, a poster set, worship bulletins, and a postcard.

- ♦ **For Leaders:** This Leader Guide is intended as a leader reference to accompany the Signs of Lent DVD. The video provides a presentation for each week of the study, as well as a brief opening and closing worship ritual.
- ♦ **For Participants:** Use the Signs of Lent Devotional Inserts together with this video. This will provide each participant with the full-color image for each week, discussion questions, and devotional suggestions for use at home through the week.
- ♦ **For the Meeting Room:** The seven images used in Signs of Lent are available as a poster set. Posters are printed on durable paper stock, 17 x 26 inches.
- ♦ **For Worship:** Expand the Lenten learning experience into the worshipping congregation by using the Devotional Inserts in worship. You might also choose to use the Easter bulletin with the image of *The Risen Lord*.

Using This Leader Guide

This Leader Guide provides a helpful leader reference. Each weekly session follows the same simple format:

- ♦ **Gather & Center** offers a simple worship ritual to bring participants from the demands of everyday life to a place of inner stillness.
- ♦ **Enter & Engage** opens the Gospel passages in a variety of ways, sharing some background information and inviting participants to reflect on their own faith journey in the light of Jesus’ ministry and the lives of the people he encounters.
- ♦ **Ask Yourself** suggests some questions that might offer fruitful dialog with scripture, with self, and with others. *NOTE: This segment is not included on the video. Questions for participants are available in the Signs of Lent Devotional Inserts and in this Leader Guide.*
- ♦ **Ponder & Pray** gathers the threads of the scripture and weaves them into a closing ritual.

About the Images

This study draws on the witness of seven works of art. The deep beauty of each visual image challenges us to dive beneath the surface of the scripture just as we were immersed in the waters of baptism. In this way, we engage in an ongoing process of growth in discipleship. Art informs us as it transforms us, beckoning us to richer ways of knowing. The following images help to shape this study:

- ♦ **Lent 1:** *The Temptation in the Wilderness* is a painting by Huguenot artist, Briton Rivière, from the late 19th or early 20th century.
- ♦ **Lent 2:** *Spark* is a 21st century watercolor created by Rutusha, a nine-year-old from India.
- ♦ **Lent 3:** *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* is an Italian painting from the late 15th century by Lazzaro Bastiani
- ♦ **Lent 4:** *The Hand of Jesus* is a 6th century mosaic from the church of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.