

Be heart-ready for Lent in 2018

This year there is a very special day on February 14th. It's special because it is Valentine's Day – and millions of cards and gifts will be shared. But it's special in the church because it is Ash Wednesday – and that marks the beginning of the 6 weeks called Lent.

Lent is the time when Christians take time to try and live God's way, the way that Jesus showed us. At the end of Lent comes Good Friday, when we remember the big love of God on the cross where Jesus died. Then comes Easter day, when we celebrate that love brings life and joy to the world.

Valentine's Day is about love – and so is Lent. There are three things that we can do with the big love that is at the heart of Lent and Valentine's Day:-

- **Big love says thank you:** Valentine's Day helps us to tell people we love them. Sometimes that is people who know – and sometimes it is a surprise to people who don't know! It can be about romantic love between couples – but this Valentine's Day why not say thank you for other kinds of love as well? A special card for a grandparent or a child, a chocolate heart left on the desk of a teacher or colleague. All these remind us to say thank you for love.
- **Big love gives up:** Lent is traditionally a time when Christians try to live carefully, and follow the example of Jesus more closely. This often means giving up things for a season; things like chocolate or crisps, social media or TV watching. Love often means giving up something for other people – being unselfish and generous, thoughtful and kind. As a family, you could decide to give up something for Lent and every time you go to do that thing, instead take a second to pray for God's love to be known in the world.
- **Big love takes up:** Lent is also a time when Christians decide to take up new ways of living, perhaps giving more away, praying more, reading the Bible more. Sometimes it means doing something that takes a bit of extra time or effort. Love goes the extra mile for other people, taking time to listen, to do new things together and to make a difference to the world. As a family, you could decide to take up something for Lent – doing something together that shares God's love with others. Check out live Lent for ideas on how to start doing something new.

A prayer for Valentine's/Lent:

Make a heart shape with your hands (or hold a simple heart shape).

“Dear God – thank you for all the love in our lives and in the world. Help us to share that love with other people each and every day.”

Hold both hands out, palms up

“Dear God, give us courage to let go of things this Lent. Help us to discover more about following Jesus and sharing his love in the world.”

Make a cross shape with your hands (or hold a simple cross).

“Dear God, as we think about your big love for us this Lent, help us to take up new ways of living. Help us to live generously and make a difference to others.

Amen.”