

Your church at Easter

Over the time of Lent and Easter, your church may have lots of things happening that the whole family can enjoy. Visit <http://www.achurchnearyou.com/> to find your local church, or, if you go to a Baby and Toddler Group in a church, ask the leaders what they're doing for Easter. Many churches will also put out posters with their Easter information, or put a card through your letterbox.

Services that are great for children:

- Most churches will have a special **Mother's Day** service, this year on March 11th. Remember the first wave of protectiveness or love you felt for your child? That's a little like what God feels for us. On Mothering Sunday, we hear stories of a mother's love in the Bible, and flowers may be given away.
- **Palm Sunday on March 25th** – the Sunday before Easter this year – we hear the story of how Jesus came into Jerusalem a few days before his death, riding a donkey. The crowds waved palms and cheered him as a king. Some churches get a real live donkey for this service, and everyone gets palm branches or a cross made out of palms to hold and take home.

If you take home your palm cross, you can use it to pray at home using the prayer suggestion below. (If you don't take your palm cross home, you can make a cross together from thin card instead.)

1. Each point of the cross links to a theme. Hold the cross in your right hand and then place your left thumb on the left 'crosspiece'. **Pray for the world**, in these or similar words: *Loving God, thank you that your peace reaches into every situation across our world. Be close to those places that need peace this day. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer*
2. Place your left thumb on the right of the 'crosspiece' and **pray for people in need** in these or similar words: *Loving God, thank you that your hope reaches into every situation. Be close to those who are ill or sad this day. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer*
3. Place your left thumb on the base of the 'crosspiece': **Pray for the community where you live** in using these or similar words: *Loving God, thank you that your joy reaches into our homes. Help us to know that you are with us every day. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer.*
4. Place your thumb on top of the 'crosspiece': **Pray for those who lead in the church and teach us about Jesus**: *Loving God, thank you that your love is shared through your church. Give wisdom to those who help us to know the Good News of Jesus. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer*
5. Place your thumb in centre of the 'crosspiece': **Pray for yourself**, in these or similar words: *Loving God, thank you for Jesus and the love he showed for me. Help me to follow him more and more each day. Amen.*

- **Good Friday, March 30th.** Some churches do special activities for families with young children such as Messy Church or a craft workshop on Good Friday, which is when we remember the day Jesus died. There may also be a procession or street drama locally organised by churches working together. The story is told in an age-appropriate way, and children can do art or other activities (there are often also hot cross buns). But the story isn't finished until ...
- **April 1st – Easter Sunday.** A time of great joy and celebration. Jesus rose from the dead! God's love is stronger even than death.

What you might notice in church

Before Easter, the church might be very plain – especially around Good Friday. There may be few or even no decorations.

There might be an Easter Garden inside or outside the church. This is a miniature model of a garden that shows the parts of the Easter story – there might be crosses made of twigs, or a mini tomb for Jesus's body to be buried in. It will also be full of spring flowers and other signs of new life.

On Easter Sunday, the church will probably have lots of white or gold fabric, and loads of flowers and candles. There may be lots of lilies – this beautiful, white, trumpet-shaped flower is a symbol of hope and peace, which has long been associated with Easter.

Also on Easter Sunday, you may notice that the big tall candle next to the font (the water bowl for christenings) is lit. This is the candle your child's christening candle was lit from! It's a sign of Jesus's new life, which was shared with your child at their christening. Why not go along to see the candle or simply light your child's baptism candle again at Easter?

Other events

- **Pancake Parties** – some toddler groups or Sunday Schools might have a Pancake Party. This year Pancake Day is February 13th, so the church may have one on or before that day.
- Many churches will have a **Spring Fete or a flower festival**. These are a great opportunity to get to know your neighbours and explore the church itself. There will often be things for children to make or do at these events – grandparents especially love getting handmade Easter presents! And you can pick up some chocolate and springtime toys to make an Easter basket for your little one.
- Your church may also have an **Easter Egg Hunt** sometime over Easter weekend. The egg is a symbol of new life, and some people also think that the egg cracking open and the chick coming out can remind us of how Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter Sunday.