

Celebrating Our Lord

Great Lent

UNIT
3
Lesson
Three



Prayer Starter

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing us together to share ourselves with each other as you have shared yourself with us. We hope to know your love and live a faithful life. Help us to use the season of Great Lent to learn more about praying and giving and being true disciples. Amen.

Daily Bread

1. What is Great Lent?

After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert to spend time alone. There he could think about his mission to spread the word of God. He was there for forty days and during that time he was tempted by the devil. This story is told in three of the Gospels of the New Testament.

We base our own preparation during Great Lent on this event in Jesus' life.

Great Lent is the forty days before Easter. That is almost six weeks! We use this time to reflect on our relationship with God and prepare for Easter.

During Great Lent we want to think about how to become true disciples, followers of Jesus. We do this through prayer, good deeds, and worship in order to be closer to God.

2. Why do we fast during Great Lent?

"Fasting" is eating less or not eating at all for a time. Jesus did not eat during his time in the desert. During Great Lent, we try not to eat meat for these 40 days. This is a way to remind ourselves of a simpler life. It's also a way to appreciate the abundance that God has given us.

3. Why do we give something up or try to change our ways?

We give something up that we feel is important. Maybe it's spending time on the phone or watching certain TV programs.

When we do without it, we find out two things: 1) Maybe these things are not as important as we think they are! and 2) we can have a new appreciation for how much we enjoy them and can thank God.



We often take things in our lives for granted – such as having enough food, being able to play our video games, or eating sweets. We can appreciate something more if we understand what it feels like to be without it. It also teaches us how, sometimes, we take more than we need for ourselves. There are people in the world who do not have even the basics, while we have everything we need. This can teach us to feel compassion for others in need and move us to be more giving and helpful to others.

4. Why do we give to good causes?

Great Lent is a time we want to spend less time and money on ourselves and more on God and others. There are so many people who have less than we do; Great Lent is a good time to think of and care for these.



SCRIPTURE SOURCE

Jesus returned from the Jordan where he was baptized. He was led by the Spirit to the desert for forty days where he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone.'"

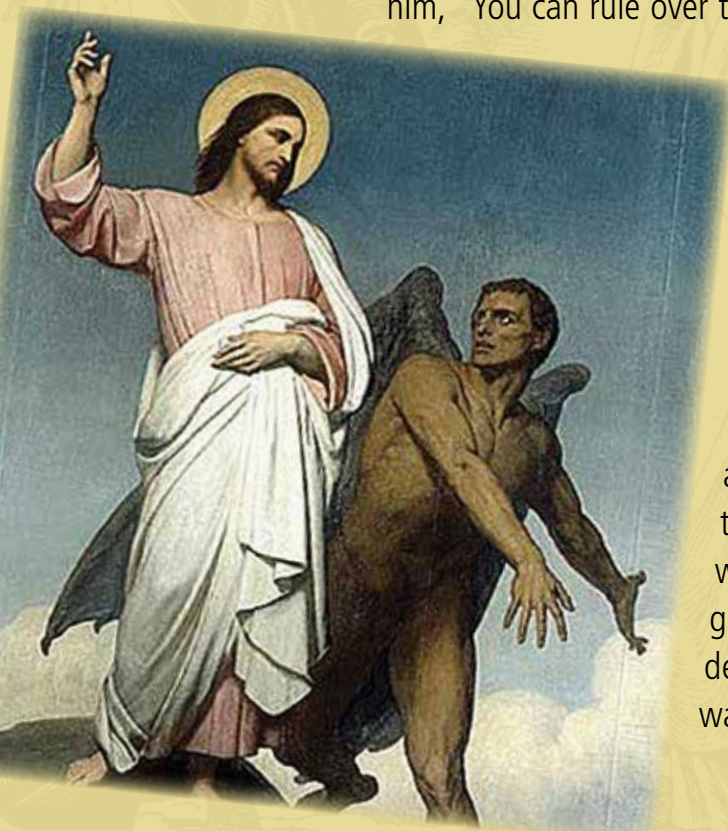
The devil led him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "You can rule over them all, if you worship me."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Then the devil led him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and nothing will happen to you." But Jesus said:

"The Bible tells us not to test God." *Luke 4:1-12*

We often think that it was easy for Jesus to do what he did because he was God. But as a human being, he actually had a choice of how to live. We all have a choice to use our talents and skills in a positive way or a selfish way. The devil tempted Jesus to use his power for his own glory, but Jesus knew himself well enough to fight the devil's temptations. He knew that life was better when it was lived in God's way.



In the Armenian Tradition

During Great Lent in the Armenian Church, we have Bible readings each Sunday that focus on different parts of the Bible. Each story is meant to teach us how we should live and what we need to do to grow closer to Jesus.

The Sundays of Great Lent

- **Poon Paregtan** (not a Sunday of Great Lent but an important Sunday right before Lent begins) *recalls.....the happy, innocent life of Adam and Eve in Paradise.* (Genesis 2)
- **Sunday of the Expulsion** tells us about...*the loss of that original happiness through pride and disobedience. We are not going to lose Paradise forever; we are on the road home.* (Genesis 3)
- **Sunday of the Prodigal Son** tells the story*of a lost son who returns to his father and family home in sorrow and penitence. How great is the father's love and forgiveness! This is a lesson on the nature of God's love both for the "lost" and for those who never stray.* (Luke 15:11-32)
- **Sunday of the Steward** reminds us that.....*we need to be as smart about our spiritual lives as we are about everything else.* (Luke 16:1-13)
- **Sunday of the Judge** tells the story of how.....*if we keep praying from the heart we will always get God's attention* (Luke 18:1-8)
- **Sunday of Advent** is dedicated to....*The Second Coming of Christ that will bring in a new era, a new heaven, and a new earth. Then there will be no need for "Lent" since we will be in total and joyful union with God's will.* (Matthew 22: 34-23:39)

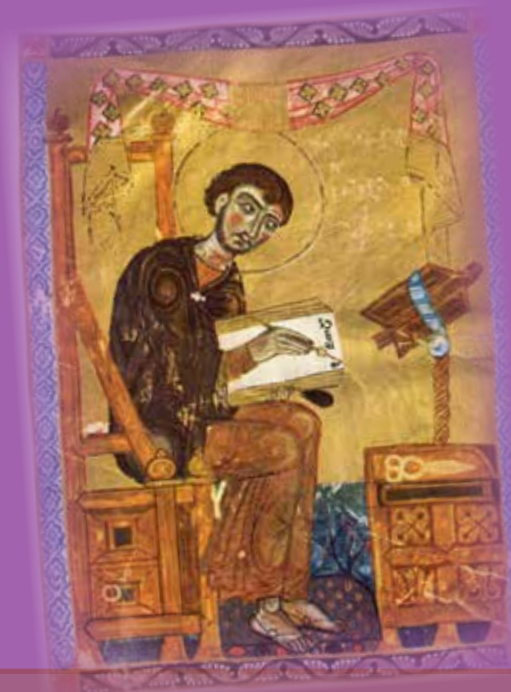


St. Gregory of Narek was a monk, teacher, and poet who lived in the 900's. That's over 1,000 years ago! He was born in Narek and became a student in the monastery of the same name (near the famous Armenian lake, Van). He wrote about the Bible among many other topics. But his most famous poems are the hundreds that are collected in *The Book of Lamentations*. A "lamentation" is a song or poem expressing deep sadness.

The sub-title of this book is *Speaking to God from My Heart*. Here is a part of Prayer 61:

Like the leaves of the cedar tree
That come streaming down in the howling storm,
The evil spirit tries to break
The fruit-filled branches of my life...
The life you shaped with your loving hands, God.

Restore these broken branches
And let them live again
Under your good care, o Christ our King,
Who gives us all good gifts.



CELEBRATE WITH GOD

Caterpillars go into a chrysalis – a little pod, where they can be alone and use what they have inside themselves to become something even more beautiful than they were. When they come out they are able to fly! Jesus came back from the desert, resisting all temptations and ready to begin his mission. The caterpillar comes out of the chrysalis ready to fly. And we can also come out of Great Lent changed.

During Great Lent, we hope to transform ourselves with God’s help, like caterpillars do when they go into a chrysalis. They stay inside for some time to make their transformation into a butterfly.

BIBLE BYTES

The “desert” Jesus stayed in for 40 days was probably different from what we think of as a desert. There were plants and trees and water. Wild animals would have been living there. Imagine how scary that would have been at night!



Well Versed

“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Matthew 4:4

Family Focus

Today, the children learned about Great Lent, distinctive spiritual practices of the season and how to use these practices to transform their lives and become closer to God. They made a butterfly and cocoon craft as a beautiful symbol of change. We also reviewed the lessons of the Sundays of Lent.

Living Your Faith

1. Review the Sundays of Lent with your child at home.
2. Place his or her craft in a prominent place as a reminder of how we are changed with God.
3. Put aside a few minutes each day to say a prayer with your family. It can be as simple as asking for a blessing or thanking God for your days together as a family.

After the descriptions of home blessings are finished, say to the children: “Now we are going to do for Jesus what we do for everyone else’s birthday! We are going to make a birthday card for him.”

8. Distribute construction paper and markers/crayons. Fold the paper to make the shape of a card and have the children decorate the cover to reflect something they know about Jesus and his birth and/or his baptism. They can cut up pieces of old Christmas cards that you have displayed on your desk. 15 min.
9. Invite the students to share the **Family Focus** with their parents. Close with this prayer: “Dear God our Father, thank you for sending your Son to earth to share your love and teach us about kindness. Help me remember this time for what it really is: an expression of your love through the birth of our Lord and Savior. Amen.” Dismiss the class. 5 min.

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Key Concepts

1. Great Lent is a forty-day period of preparation for the greatest feast of the church, Easter.
2. The paradigm for our Lenten “retreat” is Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil.
3. Great Lent is a time to become closer to God and be transformed into better disciples.
4. We experience the Sundays of Great Lent to understand our relationship with God.

Objectives

During this session students will

1. Explore the basic components of the season of Great Lent.
2. Review the story of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness.
3. Learn about St. Gregory of Narek and his world-renowned *Lamentations*.
4. Create a chrysalis with a butterfly in it to symbolize the kind of transformation that we

can go through during Lent.

5. Discuss how to say simple prayers at home.

Materials Needed

Bible
Scissors
Newspapers to cover desks
Green tissue paper cut into 3” squares
Toilet paper rolls or paper towel rolls, cut into three inch long rolls
Liquid glue and glitter or Sparkle Mod Podge (available at craft stores)
Small bowls or paper cups
Sponge brushes (one for each child)
String or twine
Small butterflies from the floral section of the craft store or homemade from felt or paper

Note to the Teacher

Next week’s lesson on Easter includes a number of Bible readings. It might be interesting and entertaining to have these stories “performed” or read aloud by volunteers from either parents or an older class.

Procedure

1. Welcome the students and say the opening prayer together.
2. Tell the children that this week is the beginning of Great Lent. Great Lent is a very important time in the Christian calendar because it is the time of preparation to celebrate the most important Christian holiday – Easter. Explain that Lent is a general term for the season of fasting and preparation before a feast. But because Easter is the greatest feast, we call the Lent that precedes it “Great” Lent. Say to them, “Great Lent has a history.” Read the first two paragraphs in #1 of **Daily Bread**. Then tell children: “Let’s learn about Jesus’ temptations directly from the Bible.” Read **Scripture Source**. Then continue with **Daily Bread**. Ask the children what they think they might give up during Great Lent this year or what positive things they might try to do – allow all answers. 10 min.
3. After you have discussed what each of you will change for Lent, tell them that the true importance of this effort is to become closer to God. Say to them, “There are many ways to become closer to

God. One way is through prayer. Let's look at a special prayer that was written by one of our great church fathers, St. Gregory of Narek." Read **Did You Know?** Ask the children to read the prayer together, one line at a time. At the end of the first two lines, ask: "Can you picture these leaves – with the storm knocking them off the branches?" After the next three lines, ask: "What are these branches of our life, branches that St. Gregory describes as "fruit-filled"? (Perhaps these are the gifts God gave us – talents, family, friends, our school experiences, etc. and when something bears fruit it is full of life!) Read through the entire second verse and then ask: "How are these branches of our life broken? (Through selfishness, pride, laziness and other less-than-godly ways we are always tempted to fall into – think in accordance with a third-grader's life!) "How do we help God to restore these 'broken branches' during Lent?" (Through the classic Lenten practices of prayer, helping others, giving money to charity, reading the Bible, attending church, giving things up, fasting, etc. – everything that helps us focus on what's important in life – God and one another!)

4. Conclude by telling the children that they can always look back at this prayer through Lent and remember how God can help us grow and change so that we resemble him more and more (after all, we were made in his image). Tell them that this is the whole goal of our Christian lives and that using the time of Lent to make that transformation in ourselves is just like the way a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Describe that process by reading or teaching **Celebrate with God** and announce that they will be making a chrysalis to remind themselves of how beautiful it is to change into more godly ways. 10 min.

5. Give each of the children one of the paper tubes and follow the instructions below to create the chrysalis:

- Fill the small bowls with the Mod Podge or watered down glue.
- With your sponge stick, brush tubes with the Mod Podge or glue.

- Paste squares of green paper onto the tube so they overlap.
- Continue pasting layers until you have pasted on three full layers, letting each one dry for a few moments before adding the next. If you are using glitter, spread glue over final layer of paper and then sprinkle glitter.
- Close off one end of the tube with a piece of the green paper.



Take a piece of string or twine and tie it in a loop. Drop it into the chrysalis halfway, and then attach the butterfly in the loop inside the tube.

- Once the butterfly is inside, paste one square of tissue paper with the Sparkle Mod Podge over the opening with the rest of the string loop outside of the tube for pulling open the chrysalis. When it is dry, the chrysalis is ready to be opened and the surprise ready to be revealed. Allow 5 minutes for clean-up. 30 min.

6. Clean up and review **In the Armenian Tradition**; tell students that every Lenten Sunday you will take a few moments to read the day's special Bible lesson. Plan to do this, referring back to today's lesson for the readings and explanation. Invite the students to share the **Family Focus** with their family and pray every day at home during Great Lent. Say to them, "A prayer does not have to be a long, drawn out, formal talk. A prayer can be simply taking one minute to stop and say 'Thank you' out loud for the love of Jesus and the presence of God in your life." Conclude class with St. Gregory's' prayer. 10 min.

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Great Barekendan

(Genesis, Chapter 2)

Although this Sunday is not a day of Lent (as the five Sundays following it are), the Armenian Church opens the series of Sundays of Lent with Barekendan. To distinguish this Sunday from the other ten Barekendan Sundays, it is called “great” or “Real Barekendan”. The word “Barekendan” means joyful, happy and vital living. For this reason, the first Barekendan Sunday is marked especially by general festivities.

No other Sunday among the Church Sundays is observed so carefully as this one, though corrupted from its original meaning. It may be assumed that these festivities are due, perhaps, to the re-alization of the onset of the forty to fiftydays of Lent. Consequently, people would be making the most out of the occasion thus presented to enjoy food and have a good time. This opinion, however, is only partly correct.

In fact, Great Barekendan commemorates the happy, careless and innocent life of the ancestors of Mankind – Adam and Eve – in Paradise.

This Sunday, besides reminding us that man is created happy and put in a happy environment, suggests also the idea that man is destined to everlasting happiness. The Holy Bible, as well as man’s experience, testifies to the truthfulness of this idea. A child under normal conditions (not perfect or ideal conditions) is the happiest creature in the universe. His happiness is seldom dependent upon outsiders but springs from within his little self. A heap of sand is enough to make him happy for hours. The mere appearance of a butterfly suffices to set his heart a-tremble with boundless enjoyment. It is as if everything in nature exists to make him happy.

A child truly comprises in himself/herself and symbolizes the infancy of the human race. And, to be sure, the days in Paradise of Adam and Eve – our ancestors – remind us all the attractions of our own childhood and the beauty of such projections, all found to be recorded in the first pages of the Bible. The day when the child starts to distinguish between “good and evil”, the moment “his eyes are opened” ... he begins to lose his innocence of childhood and his happiness as well. The next Sunday will explain this idea more.