

COMING  TO
OUR  SENSES:
RETURNING 
TO GOD 

A Devotional Resource for Lent

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*An Invitation
to Prayer
during Lent*

Pastor and author Frederick Buechner wrote, “To repent is to come to your senses.” So often we live unaware of God’s presence, ignoring the ways God desires us to live. God remains an abstract idea at a distance. Thankfully, God became flesh and comes to us still in ways we can touch, taste, see, hear and smell. During the season of Lent, the call to repentance is a full-bodied encounter with God in the flesh. We will let our physical senses awaken us to God’s presence, call us to prayer, and help us return to God.



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PREPARATION: REPENTANCE

The scriptures and rituals of Ash Wednesday draw on physical images and experiences to call us to repent.

Ash Wednesday

The greasy, smelly ashes marked on our foreheads today are a visceral reminder of mortality, fragility and need for repentance.

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Joel 2: 12-13

Thursday

The Psalm for Ash Wednesday week is a prayer that God would cleanse us of our sins. Today as you wash your hands, let that remind you to turn to the God who forgives and cleanses us.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

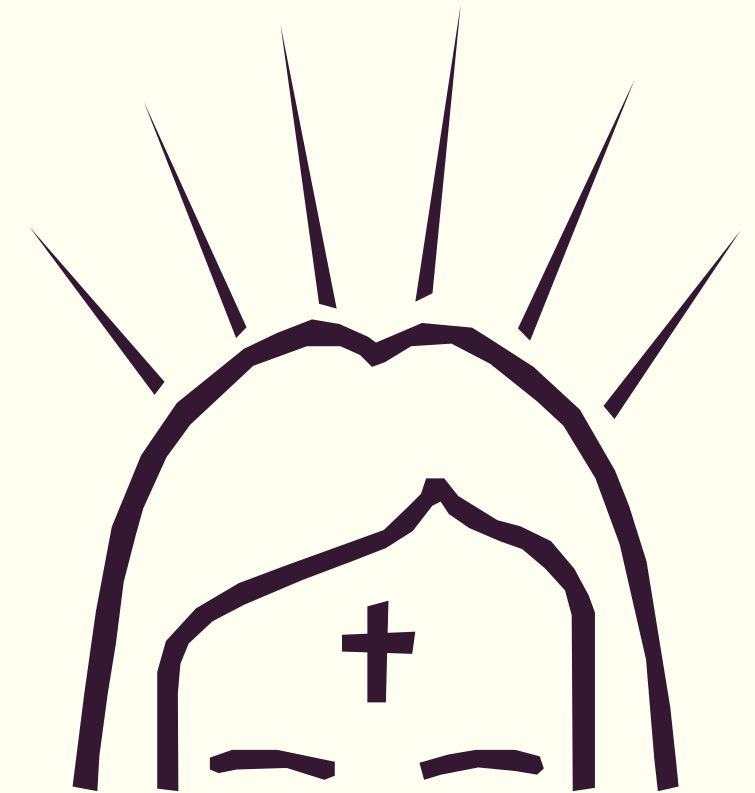
Psalm 51:2

Friday & Saturday

Lent is a wakeup call to repent and return to God. Today take notice of alarms, new message alerts, loud music and startling noises. Let them remind you of the Lenten call to wake up to God's presence.

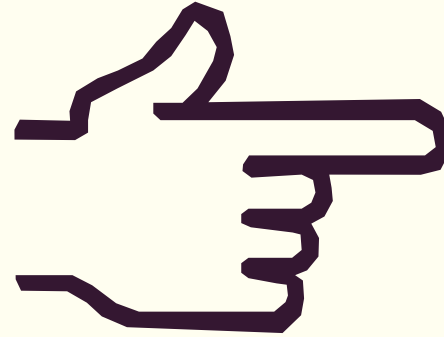
Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near.

Joel 2:1



TOUCH

This week let your sense of touch open you to God's presence.



1st Sunday in Lent

In scripture, we hear about God's hand leading the people out of Egypt. As you use your hands today, let them remind you that we too are led by God's hand.

The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Deuteronomy 26:8-9

Monday

Today pay attention to your sense of touch. Notice the cold car seat, a warm mug, the brisk wind against your cheek. Let the sensations remind you that God is so very close.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Psalms 139:7-10

Tuesday

Today pay attention to the ways touch brings comfort. Use your hands to comfort another and remember that God promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes.

See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.

Revelation 21:3b-4

Wednesday

Ponder how Jesus used touch to heal and to bless. Pray for someone who needs healing.

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him.

Mark 5:22-24

Thursday

Today when you touch water, let it remind you that in baptism you have been "sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Remember the promises made in baptism when you use water to cook, clean and bathe.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6: 3-4

Friday & Saturday

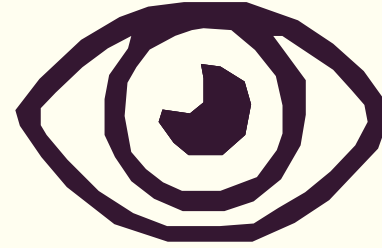
How will you touch the lives of those around you this weekend? Notice how your hands feel as you reach out to help someone else by doing a chore, writing a note, or simply offering your presence.

Do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Deuteronomy 15:7b-8

SIGHT

This week let your sense of sight open you to God's presence.



2nd Sunday in Lent

Our Psalm today proclaims that we will see the goodness of God. Today let your eyes linger on the good things in your life. Let them remind you of the goodness of God.

This I believe—that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

Psalm 27:13

Monday

Today pay attention to visual sensations. Notice how the light looks at different points of the day. Focus on the faces of the people you encounter. Look at the trees and the spaces between the trees. As you observe all this, pray for God to open your eyes to behold God's glory.

The heavens proclaim [God's] righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory.

Psalm 97:6

Tuesday

Notice times you can't see clearly today. Perhaps there is fog on your windshield or a smudge on your glasses. Let this remind you to pray for God to help you see more clearly.

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes. For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings ... For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:1-2, 7, 9

Wednesday

Reflect upon a time when it took time to see something clearly or perceive the whole picture. Pray that our eyes will be opened to see the face of Christ in everyone we meet.

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently, and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

Mark 8:22-25

Thursday

Today, anytime you see a mirror let that remind you that though we see dimly now, one day we will see God face to face. Let the mirror remind you that God fully sees you, knows you and loves you.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

Friday & Saturday

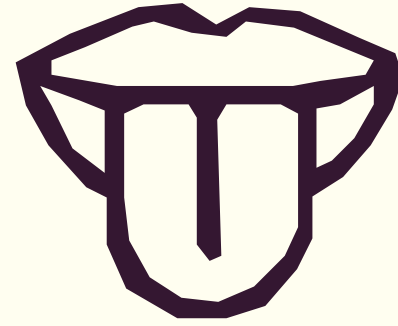
Be on the lookout for those who brighten your life. Seek to brighten the life of someone else this weekend.

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness ... See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Isaiah 42: 6-7, 9

TASTE

This week let your sense of taste open you to God's presence.



3rd Sunday in Lent

Our Psalm today speaks of thirsting for God. Today pay attention to times when you feel thirsty. Let your physical thirst remind you of the thirst for God deep within you.

O God, eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you.

Psalm 63:1

Monday

Notice what you taste today and the food and drink that sustains you. Let your taste buds remind you of the goodness of God.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 34:8

Tuesday

Today take notice of all the flavors in your food. Pray for those who do not have the privilege to worry about what their food tastes like.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations.

Isaiah 25:6-7

Wednesday

Reflect upon stories in which Jesus gave people a foretaste of the feast to come such as the wedding at Cana, feeding the 5000, and sharing breakfast with the disciples by the sea. When you enjoy a beverage today let it remind you of God's abundance given to you.

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

John 2:9-10

Thursday

Notice when you feel hunger today. Let that remind you of the ways God provides for us as God provided manna in the wilderness for the Israelites. Reflect on how you can help provide food for others.

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

Exodus 16:11-12

Friday & Saturday

This weekend, pay attention to the people seated around you at meals, or those you long for at meals. Let them remind you that God rejoices to be in relationship with us. When we repent and return to God, God rejoices and throws a rich feast.

Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:21-24

HEARING

This week let your sense of hearing open you to God's presence.



4th Sunday in Lent

In the story of the Prodigal Son, the elder son hears music and gets angry that his father is rejoicing at the return of his brother. What are you hearing these days that makes you angry? Bring that to God in prayer.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him... Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Luke 15: 25, 28, 31

Monday

Today pay close attention to the sounds you hear. Notice the sound when the heat kicks on, when the water runs, when cars pass. Let those remind you to pray for God to open your ears to God's word and help you speak of God's presence.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:28

Tuesday

Today be aware of the times you struggle to hear or understand what is being said to you. Let those times remind you that God longs to open our eyes, ears, and hearts so that we might turn to God and be healed. Pray for God to open you and heal you.

For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.

Matthew 13:15

Wednesday

Ponder how the voice of Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. The word of God has the power to raise us to new life each new day as well. Pay attention to loud voices and loud sounds and let them remind you of how God's voice pierces the sounds of death and despair and calls us into life.

And Jesus looked upwards and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11: 41b-44

Thursday

Today as you listen to or read the news, think about the cries of those in need. Let those stories remind you that God hears and answers our cries. Let the stories remind you to pray for those in need.

The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them.

Exodus 2:23b-25

Friday & Saturday

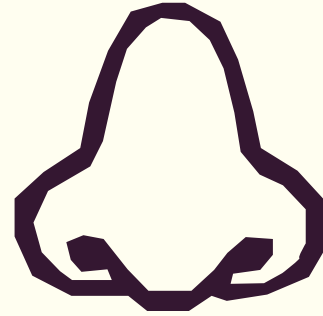
This weekend, notice the times that you aren't able to be heard by others for whatever reason. Perhaps you call a loved one and get an answering machine, or someone you are with doesn't seem to be able to listen to you. Let these times remind you of how God hears and answers us.

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.

Psalms 40:1

SMELL

This week let your sense of smell open you to God's presence.



5th Sunday in Lent

Scripture says that when we live together in unity it is like fragrant oil is poured out upon us. Today notice instances of people living together in unity and give thanks for the sweet fragrance of unity. When you notice disharmony, pray for unity.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

Psalm 133:1-2

Monday

Scripture talks about the prayers of God's people rising up before God like incense. Our prayers are a sweet fragrance to God. Let the sweet smells you notice today remind you to give thanks to God for the blessings in your life.

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.

Psalm 141:2a

Tuesday

Death stinks. In our time we are often shielded from the stench of death but we know deep in our bones that death stinks, both literally and figuratively. Today pray for all who are facing death and all who are grieving.

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

John 11:38-40

Wednesday

Sometimes the stench of death can only be met with the fragrance of love. Mary of Bethany showed Jesus great love by anointing his feet with perfume before his death. Reflect on fragrances that convey love to you: the smell of bread baking, sheets freshly laundered for you, a meal prepared for you.

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

John 12:1-3

Thursday

Today notice the smells of the oils, soaps, and moisturizers you use. When King David was anointed with fragrant oil, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. In our baptisms we too have been anointed with oil and the Spirit has been poured out upon us. Remember that as you use oils today.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

1 Samuel 16:13

Friday & Saturday

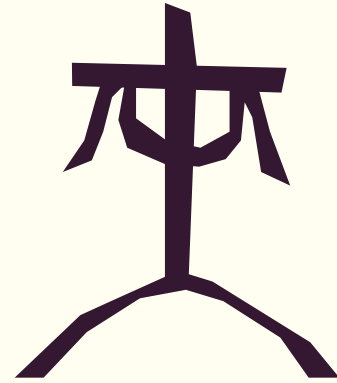
Notice the scents of the food you eat and drink. Let the scents remind you to give thanks to God. Pray for those who must live among unpleasant odors.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil.

Psalm 23: 5

HOLY WEEK

This week let the sounds, images, and scents of Holy Week scriptures call you to return to God.



Palm Sunday

As Jesus rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Luke 19:36-40

Monday

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

Isaiah 50:4-6

Tuesday

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

Psalm 31: 9-10

Wednesday

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Maundy Thursday

And during supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

John 13: 3-5

Good Friday

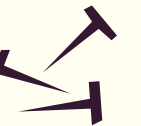
It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.

Luke 23:44-48

Holy Saturday

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden, there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

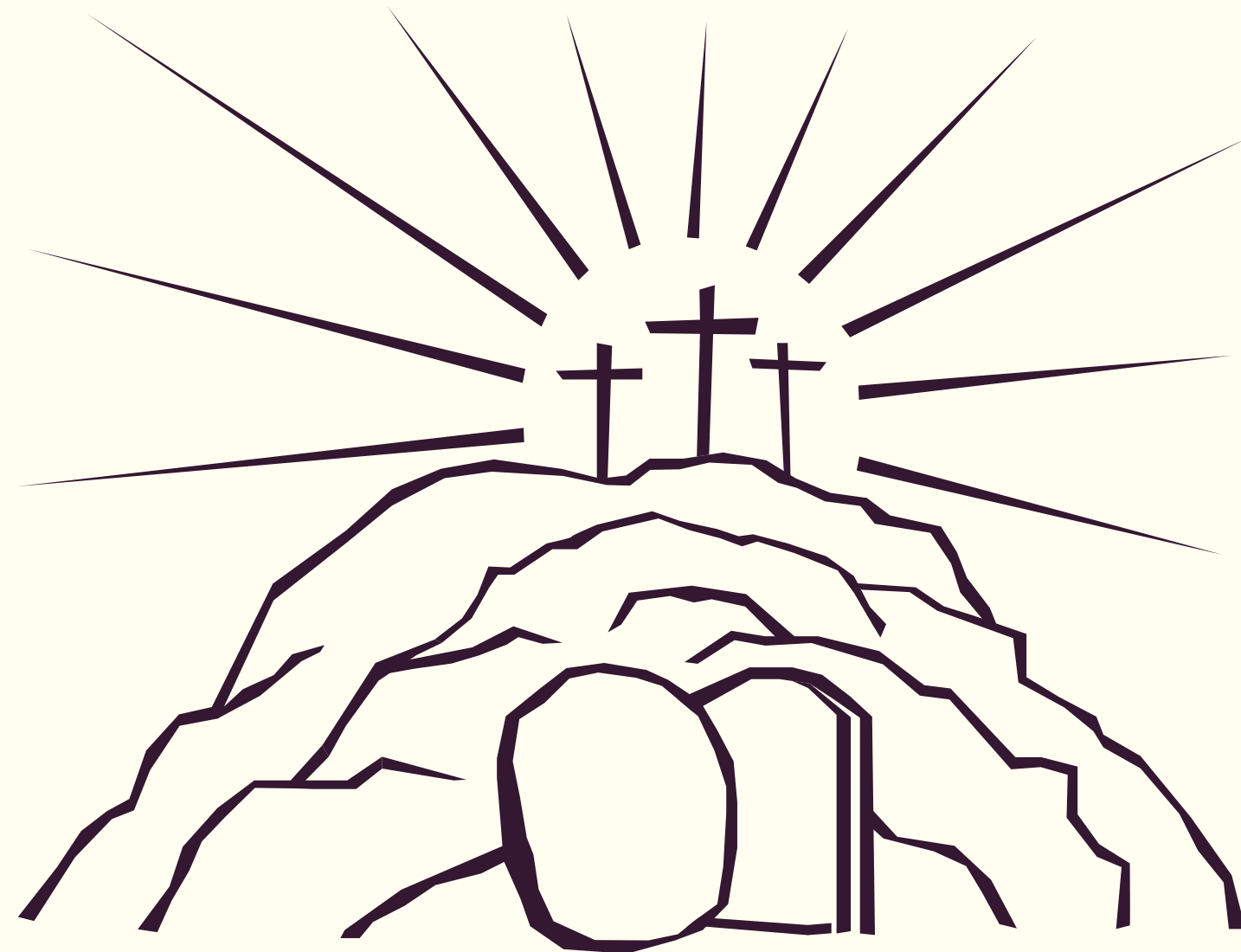
John 19:40-41



EASTER SUNDAY

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

Luke 24:1-5



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