



Thanks to Lisa Bergman for the photo

Lent Eggs

Lent can be a challenge when it comes to presenting the richness of this Catholic season to children. To encourage our family to grow spiritually we have devised what we call Lent Eggs. We took the idea from Resurrection Eggs. Resurrection Eggs are twelve plastic eggs designed to help families explore the story of the Passion of Jesus. Inside each egg is a small trinket that gives a hint for that part of the Passion story. Each egg is opened. Everyone tries to figure out what piece of the story is represented by the item inside and then there is a discussion about it.

In this bigger, Catholic version, the Passion story is broken up into forty pieces, one for each day of Lent. This expanded version explores the story of the Passion in much greater depth, incorporating the Stations of the Cross and the seven last words of Christ. Each day of Lent we open one of the eggs, use the clue to figure out what piece of the story we will be exploring, read a scripture passage or meditation, look at a few fine art depictions of the event and have a discussion about that part of the Passion. Every year we seem to hit different aspects of the story. It makes the tradition really interesting.

One thing I really appreciate about the Lent eggs is that they are so flexible and adaptable to the ages of the kids. Just change the meditations and dig deeper into the story as they get older. One idea is to assign different eggs to the older children and have them prepare the meditation or discussion ahead of time.

There are two pieces to the Lent eggs: the eggs themselves and the accompanying art/meditation book. Please don't be intimidated by the size of this project. I've found that putting this tradition together a little at a time with the kids has added to the beauty of it. For the first year just go bare bones and then add to it as you go. We have taken almost three Lenten seasons to get as far as we have gotten. It gets a little more polished each year.

The Eggs

You will need 42 eggs. Forty eggs are numbered 1-40, one egg has Easter on it and one egg is labeled Sunday. I started the project with plastic eggs but they don't hold up so well and frankly they're pretty cheesy. I was able to find a Russian source for wooden nesting eggs that were very reasonably priced. Plus it's fun to get

a big box from a foreign country. Be sure to check out their other toys too.

<http://www.rustoy.com/index.html?search=egg&action=search>

I don't think this company is a huge operation. At times the eggs have been out of stock but their prices are much more reasonable than any other source I've found. They carry a five-egg nesting set for just over \$5. All other vendors were more in the range of \$20. If cost is an issue for you, be patient and just check in on them occasionally. The wooden eggs turned out so beautifully that they are well worth the investment. You may consider purchasing a set or two each year.

Another possibility to help deal with the cost issue would be to make a wall hanging with 40 pockets to hold the trinkets. The pockets could be numbered, decorated with egg shapes, embroidered or painted. Think Advent calendar. I have also seen oval nesting boxes with lids made out of paper mache.

If you do go with the wooden nesting eggs, remember that the nesting sets have a solid center egg so don't count them when you're figuring out how many sets you need. I recommend getting one larger set from another source so that you have one really large beautiful egg for the Easter egg (search for unfinished, wooden, nesting eggs on Ebay). This extra set also comes in handy because the smallest egg in the five-egg sets are tiny and don't always accommodate the trinkets that we want to fit into them. Having a few extra to work with is helpful. Here are a couple of links for the larger ones if there aren't any on Ebay.

<http://www.purcifuls-toys.com/setof7unbnee.html>

This one has a couple of wooden egg stands that could be used to set off the Easter egg.

<http://users.snip.net/~cheb/unpaint.html>

The wooden eggs have endless possibilities as far as how to decorate them on the outside. We kept ours rather simple with a script number and a couple of swirls. Then we stained them with a nice cherry wood stain and put a clear coat over them. I hand lettered the numbers but you could easily stencil them, use rubber stamps or decoupage them. If you are an ambitious artsy type there are really neat Russian and Ukrainian traditional painting styles that you can read up on and try via the Internet. If you're not the ambitious artsy type just hand them to your kids with a bunch of markers. They will look wonderful.

Before you begin numbering eggs you need to find the right sized egg to fit each of your trinkets. In a perfect world you would first get all of your fillers, assign the eggs to items that fit and then number them. However, we still have a few empty eggs that are missing the perfect trinket. You will most likely need a while to collect all the stuff. In the meantime just write the numbers on the bottom in pencil so you can swap in a different size egg later if you need to. Again, don't let this part intimidate you. You can probably find many items in your house right now. Assign the items to your older kids as a scavenger hunt. In a pinch you can fold up a picture in the egg for starters. Some of the things we use are doll house accessories. There are lots available online. Sculpy clay can probably fashion anything you have trouble finding. I've actually had quite a bit of success by doing searches on Ebay. I stuck in "It is finished" and came up with a pair of earrings that had checkered flags on them. Perfect!

The following is a list of the eggs and the contents. Half of the fun is coming up with your own ideas. Some of the listings have a brief note about the discussion to maybe clarify things a little. I'm not sure I have the 40 days broken out in the best way. Look over the line-up carefully and noodle it to make sense to you. I have taken eggs 2 and 3 to explore the roots of our relationship with God and use it as a backdrop to the passion story.

(•) Thing inside the Egg

(*) Discussion

1. Ash Wednesday

- Small bag of ashes from Palm Sunday palms (It's neat to do this with your kids. They connect much more with Ash Wednesday if they prepare their own ashes for the egg.)

*We talk about Lent and that "we are dust and unto dust we shall return"

2. Sin separates us from God's love

- Plastic snake and an apple

*Adam and Eve brought sin into the world. We continue it. Sin and God don't go together.

3. Jesus pays our debt
 - Plastic lamb
 - *Jesus became the sacrificial lamb to pay for our sins
4. Entry into Jerusalem (the story begins)
 - Wooden donkey (from a pair of earrings)
5. Jesus is anointed with perfumed oil
 - Cotton ball soaked in perfume
6. Judas takes 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus
 - Thirty dimes this could be way more interesting if you have access to foreign coins
7. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples
 - A pitcher and basin from a doll house
 - * Jesus asking us to serve one another
8. The last supper and Institution of the Eucharist
 - Small wine goblet and loaf of bread (a first communion Monstrance pin would be nice too)
9. The Agony in the garden
 - Brass cup (Lord let this cup pass from me...)
 - * We discuss the stress Our Lord was experiencing knowing of the coming crucifixion and even more so, the agony of bearing all our sins.
10. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss
 - Hershey kisses (the kids like this one)
 - *How do we betray Jesus in our actions?
11. Jesus cures the soldier who lost his ear
 - Anybody have an old Mr. Potato Head ear?
12. Jesus is bound and led away
 - A length of rope
13. Peter denies Jesus and the cock crows
 - A rooster (They had neat little ones with real feathers in the floral department at Michael's)
14. Pilate washes his hands and condemns Jesus to death
 - A piece of soap
15. Jesus is scourged
 - A length of leather with knots tied in it.
16. Jesus is crowned with thorns
 - The Catholic bookstore had a small pewter crown of thorns to carry in your pocket. A few large thorns from a bush would work as well
17. Jesus carries the cross
 - A small wooden cross
18. Jesus falls for the first time
 - A Band-Aid
19. Jesus meets his mother Mary
 - A small statue of Mary I found this in a search for a miniature statue of Mary on Ebay
20. Simon carries the cross
 - I found a key chain that says, "The cross I carry", doing an Ebay search
21. St. Veronica wipes Jesus' face
 - Grandpa Hogan's handkerchief. Twice now when we've gotten to this egg the handkerchief smelled strongly of frankincense but only on the day we did this egg. When I checked at a different time it just smelled kind of musty like the inside of a wooden egg. Hmmm.
22. Jesus falls for the second time
 - A Band-Aid
23. Jesus meets the weeping women of Jerusalem
 - A packet of tissue

24. Jesus falls for the third time
 - A Band-Aid maybe you can find a trinket from Niagara Falls or something if the Band-Aid thing is getting too redundant
 25. Jesus is nailed to the cross “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”
 - 3 Large square headed nails (you can find them at Home Depot)
 26. The executioners cast lots for his garments
 - Dice we also threw in a white lab robe from the Barbie doll closet
 27. INRI
 - A gold crown
 - * We talk about Jesus being a king
 28. The eclipse
 - I’m using a foreign stamp that commemorates an eclipse in some African country. I think there are cardboard glasses that you use to watch an eclipse that might fold or roll up to fit in a medium sized egg. A wrapper from eclipse gum would work or a sun charm from the bead store.
 29. The good thief; ”This day you will be with me in paradise.”
 - I found a ring with the Hamburgler on it. Maybe you could find some GI Joe handcuffs?
 30. “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother”
 - A miraculous medal
 31. “My God, why have you forsaken me?”
 - help me out here? Maybe a #4 refrigerator magnet: “4-saken”?
 32. “I thirst.”
 - A small piece of sponge or a miniature Coke bottle?
 33. “It is finished”
 - An earring with a checkered flag
 - * This was the official wording that was stamped on legal documents of that time, relating to debts. “It is finished”, indicated that payment had been made in full and the contract had been fulfilled. It is speculated that Jesus was quoting this commonly known reference rather than that he had completed His life on earth.
 34. Jesus dies on the cross “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”
 - A crucifix
 35. The temple curtain is torn
 - A purple cloth ripped in half
 36. Earthquake and saints appearing to many
 - A small geode cracked open that I got at a rock shop
 37. They pierce the side of Jesus
 - A small sword (pilfer one from your boy’s Lego stash)
 38. Jesus is taken down from the cross
 - I found a little Pieta for this one on Ebay
 39. Jesus is laid in the tomb that is sealed and guarded
 - A large round stone and a lead soldier that Jeffrey found in the back yard. Army men would work too.
 40. The women come to anoint Jesus’ body
 - Three small glass, corked bottles with spices in them from the doll house section
- Easter Egg
- This egg is the biggest and fanciest. Ours has the word Easter with a painting of a Lily on it. It is empty but the inside is finished in gold leaf. Another option would be to decorate it with gems and beads or something equally regal.
- Sunday Egg
- This one is always filled with jelly beans or m&ms let the kids clean it out and then move it ahead to the next Sunday space. (Never, never fill this ahead of time. Lead those little ones not into temptation.)

After you get the initial semi-finished assembly together you're ready to rock and roll. You really just need to keep one day ahead of things so don't worry if you have lots of missing fillers in the lineup. Look around the house for a good place to display the eggs. The visual reminder in our high traffic area has helped us keep the focus on the season. If you have a long mantle or shelf somewhere line all of the eggs up in six-day groupings. The first will only have four, Ash Wednesday through Saturday. Then the next egg is the Sunday egg (which always has chocolates or jellybeans in it—we opted for the “Every Sunday is a mini Easter so rejoice” version of Lent), then come the next six eggs with a space for the Sunday egg to move into, then six more eggs and a space and so on ending with the big Easter egg. I macraméd a purple cord with small red beads on the ends that we loop around the egg that we're on so we don't lose track of where we are. This is especially helpful when we've fallen days behind.

The Notebook

Along with the eggs we have put together a three-ring notebook that has artwork for each of the parts of the Passion story. Originally I printed these images on small card stock and put them in the eggs with the clues but I found that the paintings lost so much of their impact when they were reduced to that size. I think that the pictures, many of them taken from fine art, keep the focus on the seriousness of what is transpiring. Most of the artwork was pulled from the Internet.

This site has extensive galleries of the passion.

<http://www.catholictradition.org/>

This is a collection of paintings of the passion by James Tissot

<http://www.joyfulheart.com/easter/tissot-passion.htm>

You can also find many beautiful images on Google images.

The pages of the notebook go into sheet protectors so accompanying scripture passages and meditations appropriate to the ages of the kids can be easily inserted.

That's the gist of it. It is a big project but putting it together is a large part of the beauty of it. The kids have really enjoyed working on it with me. We have lots of good memories. They actually look forward to Lent now.

Feel free to call me if you have any questions.

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