

A Lenten Tradition

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Setting traditions is a way to make important occasions more meaningful. For some churches, tradition concerning the observance of the Lenten Season has been established a long time ago, but for some, traditions are only recently being set. Below is outlined one way tradition was set in a Baptist church.

On the first Sunday of Lent, a bare cross is carried very slowly to the front with much reverence. Ours was suspended on a wire in the baptismal area with heads of nails that have been hammered into the back of the cross. The cross is brought in silence. One of my favorite songs to use as a theme is "Once Again" by Tim Hughes. The first Sunday, the entire song is sung. For the rest of the Sundays, only the chorus is sung. The person who brought in the cross remains gazing at the cross until the end of the first chorus.

The second Sunday the purple drape is brought in. (Two ends of a cloth are sown together to make a rectangular circle. (If it is carried with the arms through the circle, it will be easier to transfer it to the cross.) Someone lifts the cross off the wire so that the cloth can be draped over the cross. Person stands gazing after cross has been returned to the wire until the chorus is finished.

The third Sunday the crown of thorns is brought in (made of grapevine wound around in a circle). Someone else lowers the cross so the crown can be placed on the cross. Person remains until chorus is finished.

The fourth Sunday the hammer is brought in. You can find a rawhide hammer at the Farm & Ranch store. The sound of a hammer nailing can be heard as the person brings it to the cross. Chorus follows. Hammer is left at the foot of the cross.

The fifth Sunday the bread and chalice are brought to the cross and held uplifted as the chorus is sung. Then they are taken to the Lord's Supper table to be used then, or later in the service. Any of these elements can be brought in on alternate Sundays. For example, you may want the Lord's Supper on a different Sunday.

The sixth Sunday is, of course, Palm Sunday. The Children's Departments practice at the beginning of Sunday School to be sure there is order when they leave the palm branches at the foot of the cross. They are told to find their parents after they have left their palm branches at the cross. As an alternate to this suggestion, you could encourage everyone to meet at a certain location to pick up a palm and proceed into the sanctuary waving the palm branches. They could be singing "Bless That Wonderful Name of Jesus."

At the end of this service, the pastor will put out the Christ candle. (Each week a candle has been snuffed out.) Then the young people will drape the candelabra with black, as well as, the cross. The choir, or a soloist, will sing "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence". In the meantime, the lights slowly go out. (We have blackout cloths on tension rods to cover the windows, as well.) There is total darkness when the singing is completed. After a few moments of complete darkness, lights will be turned on only enough to be able to leave in silence. A lot of people never come to Good Friday services and miss out on a very moving experience such as this.

Easter Sunday is described under Dramatic Moments, "Alleluia! He Is Risen!". If looking for candelabras to extinguish a candle each week, look for them at places like Hobby Lobby. It will need to hold seven candles. You may prefer to use a larger candle for the last candle, the Christ candle. Some people ask why use candles? There is something very poignant about seeing "life" snuffed out with each candle, until even the Christ candle is gone.

You are encouraged to use the cross where it best suits your sanctuary. With the advent of screens, we have had to use a free standing cross, made out of crude wood. It is hollow so that a stand could be made with boards protruding that will let the cross slide down on the platform to stand upright.