

# *FLORIOGRAPHY*

## A LENTEN “FLOWER POWER” CALENDAR

“Floriography” is the secret language of flowers. It bloomed first in eighteenth-century northern Europe, drawing on the fascination with flowers that cuts across cultures, times, and places.

In many churches, the word, “Alleluia” (which means “Praise God!”) is buried, or put away, on Ash Wednesday. It’s not meant to be spoken until the end of Lent. This makes sense because the 40 days (plus Sundays) of Lent are a time of prayer and quiet reflection, a time of fallowness and rest and longing, a time for growing deep. On Easter, all those buried Alleluias sprout up everywhere, in all the prayers and songs. They flower on the tongue.

The same is true for flowers. In some churches, all flowers are removed from the sanctuary during Lent. Then, on Easter morning the sanctuary blooms with a party of tulips and daffodils, hyacinths and lilies — potted Alleluias! The perfume of life spills down the aisles and out the front door. A glimpse of the garden of Eden is restored. Resurrection is spread through the world like pollen on the wind, and Christians head out like bees covered in good news to spread it everywhere they go.

This year we’d like to invite you on a Lenten journey that’s full of flowers. Just at the time of year when things seem most barren and flowerless, we hope you’ll join us in considering the lilies, as Jesus asked us to do. And not just the lilies, but the tulips, the forget-me-nots, the snowdrops, the weeds, and the corpse flower too, to see what they might have to teach us about life and death and resurrection on Easter morning.

So let’s get started: Set aside five minutes each day — over a meal, perhaps — for your family to read and discuss one of that week’s cards. Some of them also include an activity or practice to try. And the Sundays of Lent, along with the High Holidays (Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday) contain a brief scripture passage, reflection, and prayer to share together. We hope these ideas, fun facts, questions, quotes, and activities will together form a glorious garland, a faithful festoon that will help you travel these forty days, through the end of winter and, at last, out into the blooming Alleluias of spring.



## ASH WEDNESDAY

### READ:

God will guide you and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. + Isaiah 58:11

### REFLECT:

Ashes make excellent fertilizer and are a great addition to both gardens and compost piles. Lavender, roses, and apple trees all love ashes! What if you think of the ashes you receive today as a kind of "fertilizer" for your life? What do you hope it helps to flower? To borrow Isaiah's words, what "parched places" need new growth?

**PRAY:** God, make my life a watered garden, full of beauty, nourishment, and delight for you and your world. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### READ:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. + Luke 4:1-2

### REFLECT:

It's easy to think of Jesus' wandering in the desert (or to think of winter, or of Lent, or of any lean time) as something that's gone wrong. But for plants that grow from bulbs, like tulips and daffodils, these lean times are necessary. They have leaves and flowers for a few short weeks, and use that time to make and store food for the other eight months of the year. And without a period of cold, they won't emerge from their bulbs again. For them, winter isn't a bug in the program; it's a feature.

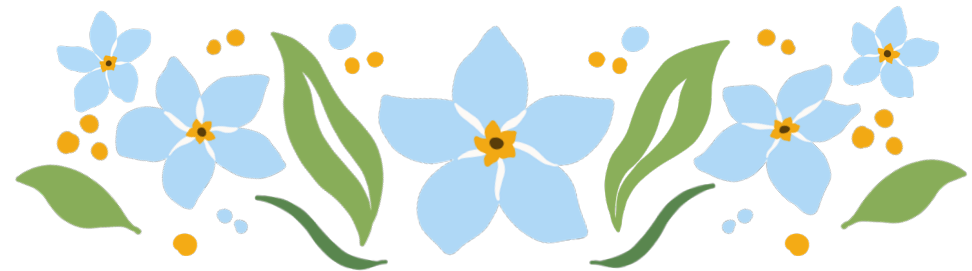
**PRAY:** Let the winter work on me like it does on the bulbs, O God. Let it give me rest and nourishment, and then let me rise in beauty and glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## ACTIVITY

### WEEK ONE

Short on flowers? Make your own! As we make our way through the Lenten season, save these cards (and gather up some other nifty paper scraps) and cut them into flower shapes, or fold them into simple origami tulips (check it out online - it's easy!). Glue them to chenille sticks and gather them into a bouquet, or string them into a garland and hang them somewhere for all to see.



## IMAGINE

### WEEK ONE

Depending on where you are, there may still be some snow on the ground. That snow is doing good work: carrying nitrogen out of the air and into the soil, insulating the ground (weird, right?), and locking moisture in. So next time you see or think of snow, let some extra gratitude bubble up in your heart. You may or may not be a fan of snow, but the flowers you're waiting for sure are!



## ACTIVITY WEEK ONE

God is forever imagining a not-yet, on-its-way, gorgeous future. Gardeners likewise spend their winters curled up with seed catalogs, imagining a world of fruits and flowers in the midst of emptiness and snow. So, with this in mind, be God-like this week: order a seed catalogue, or just browse online, and begin envisioning the flowering of the world! Which flowers are your favorites?



## DISCUSS WEEK ONE

Daffodils are members of the narcissus family. Narcissus was a beautiful Greek youth who fell so in love with his own reflection that he forgot everything else — which is pretty ironic, since these days narcissi are valued by drug companies for producing a medicine used to treat memory loss. Do any particular flowers remind you of anything, or anyone?

## DISCUSS WEEK ONE

You think you're desperate for flowers? One winter in the 1600s, the Dutch went so crazy for tulips that they created the world's first market bubble known as "tulipmania," with the price of single bulbs rising to match the cost of a house! Which flowers are most valuable to you?



## ACTIVITY WEEK ONE

Break out some paints (or crayons, or what have you), and make a portrait of your favorite flower(s). Use a picture as a model, or a masterpiece: Vincent van Gogh's "Sunflowers," perhaps, or Georgia O'Keeffe's wall-sized blossoms.

Do you know why Georgia O'Keeffe painted flowers on such a grand scale? She put it this way: "A flower is relatively small. Everyone has many associations with a flower — the idea of flowers... Still — in a way — nobody sees a flower — really — it is so small — we haven't time — and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time."



## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

### READ:

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. + Luke 9:28-29

### REFLECT:

This story, the Transfiguration, is about how heaven showed through Jesus' earthly body, how light gleamed through matter, how God showed up shining in the face of a human. Spring is a similar transfiguration, in which empty gardens become green and are filled with blooms, empty canopies become filled with leaves and shade, and beauty raises its head from the mud and the muck.

**PRAY:** God, teach us to see your power shining through the stuff of this world and glowing bright, even and especially in the mud and the muck. In Jesus' name, Amen.

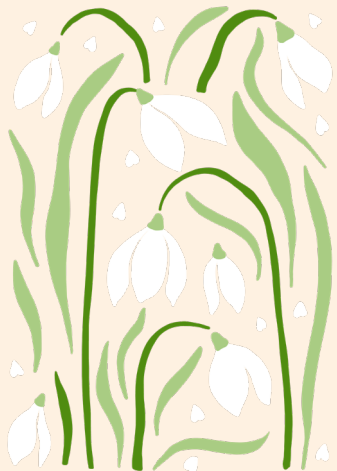


## FUN FACT

### WEEK TWO

The oldest known seed ever to sprout is a date palm recovered from an archeological site in Israel. It was about 2,000 years old when it sprouted in 2008, meaning that the seed existed at the same time as Jesus! Sure enough: hope can hang on for a long time before it blooms.

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## S N O W D R O P

## DISCUSS

### WEEK TWO

How can snowdrops grow up right through the snow? They actually have antifreeze in their sap!

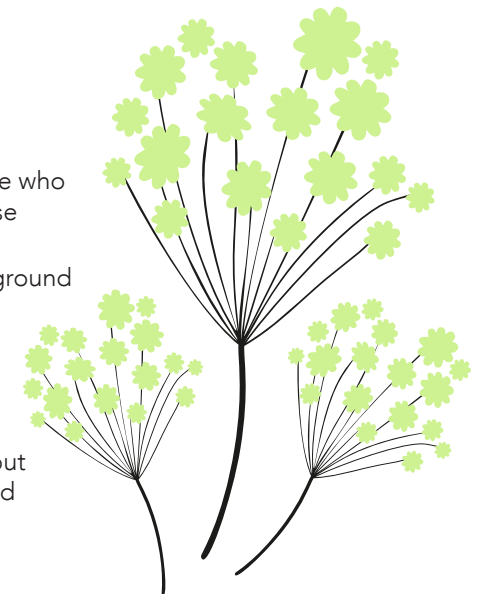
Now, if love is the antifreeze that keeps Christians from wilting in impossible circumstances, how can you get some more of that love inside you? What makes you feel loved? How do you typically show your love for others? And how can we all best give and receive love through the "winters" of our lives?

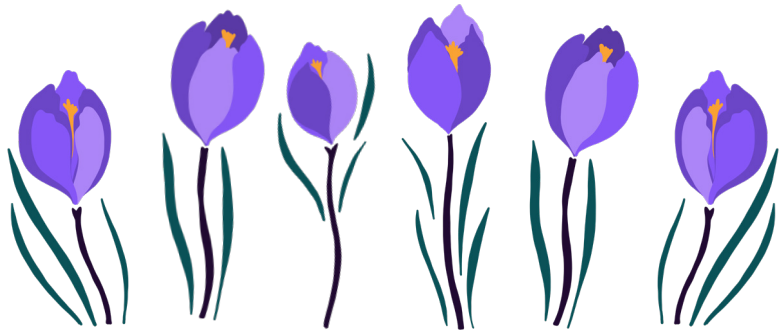
## ACTIVITY

### WEEK TWO

"There are always flowers for those who want to see them." + Henri Matisse

There may not be flowers on the ground yet, but that doesn't mean there aren't any overhead! Depending on location, silver maple trees can bloom in February, and sugar maples in March and April. The flowers may be small and green, but they're still flowers. Go outside and look for beauty in the air!





## DISCUSS

### WEEK TWO

The very first flowers of spring — snowdrops, crocuses, most spring ephemerals — are tiny. These hardy early-risers, growing in the midst of difficulty, don't have time or energy for the showy blooms of their cousins that come later. Jesus knew that God's revolution is built on tiny things: mustard seeds, lost coins, newborn babies. Why do you think that is? And what tiny thing is starting to bloom in you?



## IMAGINE

### WEEK TWO

Barrenness and fallowness may look the same, but they're not. Even if your yard looks barren right now, trust that it's actually the deep breath before the plunge, the pause before the birth, the sleep before the dawn and day. Just because life's green is buried down deep where you can't see it doesn't mean it isn't about to spring forth!



## ACTIVITY

### WEEK TWO

Plant a seed somewhere close: in a backyard, a community garden, in a pot on a porch, or a cup on the window sill. Spend some time with it now and then, watch it closely, and envision the tiny transfiguration going on in the dirt!



## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

### READ:

Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" + Luke 13:6-9

### REFLECT:

We're impatient for the world to give us what we want. But plants don't always work on our schedule. Easter lilies take three years to grow, forget-me-nots are biennials (popping up every other year), and some winters are just harder on plants than others. Is there something you're eager for that you might have to wait for just a liiiiittle bit longer?

**PRAY:** God, I want it all on my schedule. Help the plants and flowers teach me patience. In Jesus' name, Amen.





## DISCUSS

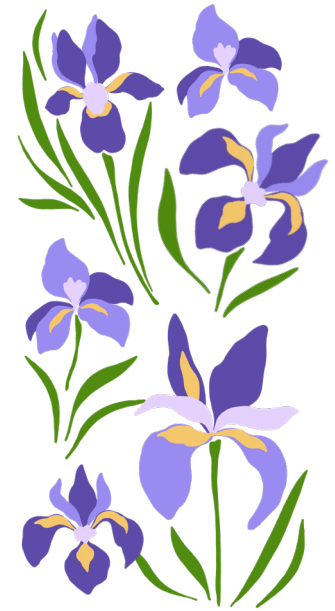
### WEEK THREE

Daffodils are sometimes called Lent lilies. Unlike Easter lilies, their trumpets are announcing what hasn't even happened yet. As you look ahead, what are you looking forward to? What are you hoping for? What good news do you want to announce, even though it hasn't yet happened?

## ACTIVITY

### WEEK THREE

With warmth and light, many flowers can be encouraged to bloom earlier than they naturally would. Find some bulbs with green shoots (you can find them in almost every grocery store) and bring them home. Keep track of their progress, and when the first bloom opens. You can even try your hand at prediction: who can guess the day of the first bloom?



## FLORIOGRAPHY



P O P P Y

## FUN FACT

### WEEK THREE

An old story says that when they were looking for a man to be Jesus' adoptive father and Mary's husband, all the eligible men were asked to come carrying dead branches. When Joseph presented his, lilies burst into flower along the branch, showing that God had chosen him.

## FLORIOGRAPHY



L I L Y

## ACTIVITY

### WEEK THREE

Tradition holds that the Annunciation, the day the angel Gabriel invited Mary to take part in God's plan, happened on the same day of the year as Jesus' crucifixion. Many paintings of the Annunciation show Gabriel presenting Mary with a lily, suggesting a deep connection between pregnancy, flowering, birth, death, and resurrection. Look up "Annunciation" paintings, and see if you can find any lilies.



## DISCUSS

### WEEK THREE

Bulbs and seeds both produce new flowers after being buried, but they're different. Seeds represent the next generation after the plant that produced them; bulbs, on the other hand, are actually the same plant (genetically identical to the parent plant) flowering again. Which aspects of our lives are like seeds, and which are like bulbs? When Jesus was buried, and then rose again — was he more like a seed? Or a bulb? Or both?



## ACTIVITY

### WEEK THREE

Following Jesus is all about “bearing fruit” (and flowers, after all, are the first step toward fruit: after a flower is pollinated/fertilized, the plant can develop fruit!). What fruit? Well, one classic example is acting with love and care. Who in your life could most benefit from some floral love this week? Some fresh flowers, perhaps, or a handwritten card, or a homemade piece of art, depicting spring flowers to come?



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### READ:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!  
+ 2 Corinthians 5:16-18

### REFLECT:

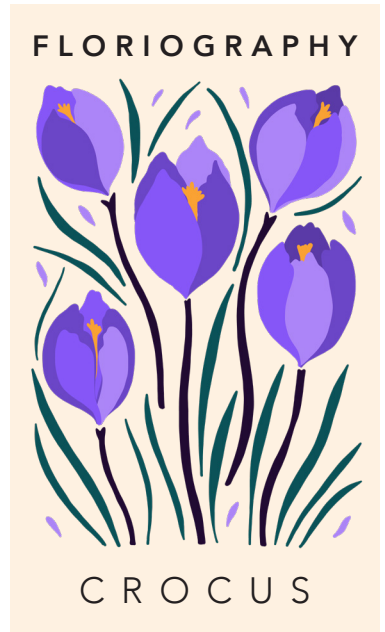
Every spring seems like a new beginning, and in a way, it is. And yet, spring seasons have been happening for longer than you — or any of us — have been alive. What if salvation is like that, too? It feels fresh and new in the moment, and it is! And at the same time, it's an experience of a deeper, longer history, a personal taste of God's ongoing salvation of the whole wide world...

**PRAY:** For beginnings that feel new no matter how old they are, thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## ACTIVITY

### WEEK FOUR

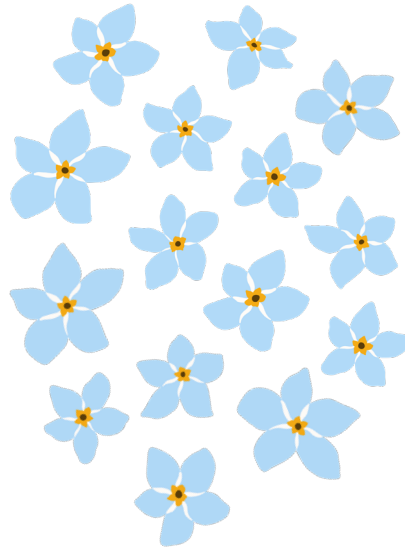
When the prophet Isaiah wanted an image of hope, he chose the crocus. He didn't have winters the way many of us do, but he knew about relatively lifeless seasons, and couldn't think of any better flower to symbolize hope. Read Isaiah 35 together.



# PRAY

## WEEK FOUR

Wildflowers may bloom on their own, but it takes a lot of human work to get all those potted Easter flowers to your church. Pray for the workers that are even now making it happen: the planters, the growers, the tenders, the transporters, the arrangers, and more. Give thanks for their labor in birthing this new little patch of Eden.



# IMAGINE

## WEEK FOUR

We know that flowers aren't actually there for humanity's sake, right? We load them with all sorts of meanings, but every single flower, its look and placement and fragrance, is primarily about attracting insects and animals that help with pollination, and ultimately, creating the next generation. In flowers, beauty and new life are inextricably intertwined.



# FUN FACT

## WEEK FOUR

The gigantic flowers of the tropical corpse plant smell like rotten meat in order to attract the beetles and flies that pollinate them. Smells terrible to humans, but if flies wrote odes to beauty, you can bet there'd be many dedicated to the corpse plant! Where do you find beauty in so-called "ugliness"?

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# VERBENA

# ACTIVITY

## WEEK FOUR

Spring ephemerals are wildflowers that grow, bloom, and die in forests before anything else has leafed or flowered. They've figured out how to take advantage of the brief period between the warming of the soil and the time when it gets too shady to use the sun to make food. Head out to look for some today!



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DELPHINIUM

## ACTIVITY

### WEEK FOUR

"The earth laughs in flowers."  
+ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pick a place in your neighborhood that could use some beauty, and plant some native wildflowers, or some other native plant. Commit to taking care of it in the weeks ahead — and think of it as an act of neighborly love and laughter.



## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### READ:

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? + Isaiah 43:19

### REFLECT:

Look up the lyrics to the old hymn, "Now the Green Blade Riseth." Find a good recording (Steve Winwood has a great one). Listen hard. What do the lyrics evoke in you? What connections can you make to your life today, and in the days to come?

**PRAY:** Make me like wheat. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## DISCUSS

### WEEK FIVE

The flowers of most spring ephemerals hang downward to prevent them from filling up with rainwater and having their pollen washed away — a perfect example of having learned how to survive and thrive in their particular circumstances. What are some ways you've adapted to your circumstances, either recently or over the years?

## FLORIOGRAPHY



BLUEBELL



## ACTIVITY

### WEEK FIVE

The Victorians were into floriography, the language of flowers, in which different blooms were said to mean different things. You could say a lot to a person through the flowers you gave them. Look up a list of flower meanings online. For example, if you wanted to put together a bouquet that means, "Life wins," what flowers would you use? Play a game with the list, and send "secret" messages to each other!



## FUN FACT

WEEK FIVE

You may love the colors of flowers, but many have a secret: hidden bullseyes and landing strips invisible to humans but clear as day to bees and other animals who can see ultraviolet light. There's more to the world — more to life — than meets the (human) eye!



## ACTIVITY

WEEK FIVE

Look up "Beal seed experiment" and read about hidden treasure, secret nighttime digs, and 140-year-old miracles. Ask yourself what was planted in you long ago that might be getting ready to sprout now, even many years later.

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ROSE

## DISCUSS

WEEK FIVE

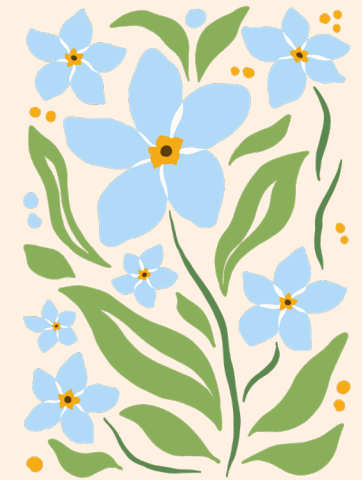
Spring flowers are starting to grow — and so are weeds. But what makes a weed a weed? Mostly its ability to grow in difficult situations, survive hard times, spread when uptight people don't want it to, and annoy the powers that be. Roses may be gorgeous under perfect conditions, but dandelions can flower anywhere. Which would you rather be?

## REFLECT

WEEK FIVE

A single forget-me-not would be easy indeed to forget — if you noticed it at all, which many of us probably wouldn't, since it's so small. But nobody who's ever seen a garden full of those tiny blooms of blue (the rarest of all flower colors!) is likely to forget it. Maybe the same is true of loving, patient, gentle, enduring Christians?

## FLORIOGRAPHY



FORGET-ME-NOT



## ACTIVITY

### WEEK FIVE

Many of our ancestors made “herbariums,” journals into which flowers were pressed and preserved. Start one today, and collect the flowers you see this week, next week, and during the seven weeks of Eastertide (the season starting with Easter Sunday and ending with Pentecost)!

As a teenager, Emily Dickinson compiled a beautiful herbarium that has recently been digitally published by Harvard University Press. It’s worth a look!

## DISCUSS

### WEEK SIX

One of the reasons lilies make such good Easter flowers is that they look like trumpets. Look outside. Think about the world. What encouraging things deserve some more attention? What good news would you trumpet if you could?



## PALM SUNDAY

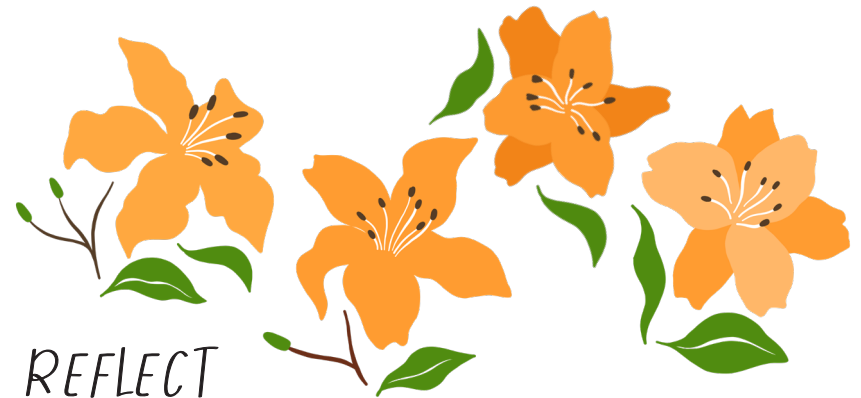
### READ:

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Jesus and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” + Matthew 21:8-9

### REFLECT:

If you’re a churchy type, you’re probably used to waving palms in the air on Palm Sunday. But for many of our ancestors, before it was possible to ship palms halfway around the world, people would use whatever was at hand — and this Sunday was sometimes just called “Branch Sunday.” If God were to ride into your yard today and you felt like waving something in praise, what would it be?

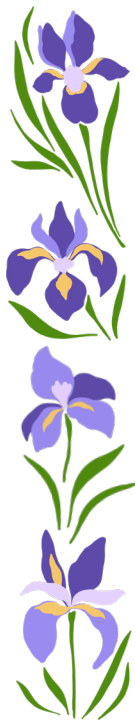
**PRAY:** Here I am, waving my birch, crabapple, and white pine, oh God. Hosanna! In Jesus' name, Amen.



## REFLECT

### WEEK SIX

Some say that lilies represent the “purity” of Mary. But remember: in Mary’s case, “purity” means purity of heart, strength of spirit, sharpness of mind, and clarity of purpose. Think of the song she sings after Gabriel’s visit, rejoicing in how God takes down “the mighty from their thrones.” And think of her strength, even and especially in her sorrow and vulnerability, as she keeps watch during the days ahead.



## MAUNDY THURSDAY

### READ:

Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him... In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. + Luke 22:39, 44

### REFLECT:

One legend says that after Jesus' death, lilies were found blooming in the garden of Gethsemane, where they had sprung up in the places his sweat fell to the ground. What does this legend make you think of? Why would Jesus' sweat be so precious that flowers would spring up where it fell?

**PRAY:** For all in anguish, we pray, O God. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## GOOD FRIDAY

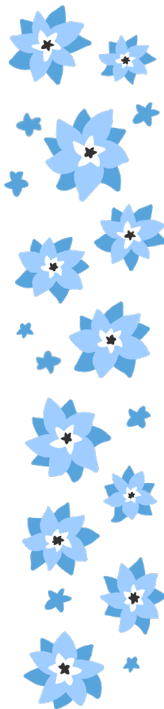
### READ:

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. + John 19:16-18

### REFLECT:

They thought they were burying him, putting him away forever. But they really were planting him, like a seed or a bulb, so he would rise again anew! One of Jesus' earliest teachings about his death was to compare it to a seed that falls to the earth, so it may grow and bloom. What in our lives needs to die, in order to be reborn?

**PRAY:** For an end to all suffering, for beauty to overwhelm the world, I pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## HOLY SATURDAY

### READ:

Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. + Genesis 1:11

### REFLECT:

On the Saturday of Holy Week, many churches have an Easter Vigil service that connects the great themes of Creation to the Resurrection. Some tell stories of Jesus descending into the underworld and breaking down its doors to let the dead free, just to remind us that even when it looks quiet and serene on the surface, God is often working miracles underground. Today, go outside and find a "sit spot" to be still, and watch, and listen. If you like, put your ear to the ground. See if you don't hear the tiniest crack, like a seed splitting open, like doors being unlatched, like a stone just beginning to roll away.

**PRAY:** For all you do when I'm not looking, O God, thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## EASTER SUNDAY

### READ:

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. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Humanity must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." + Luke 24:1-7

### DO:

Back on Ash Wednesday, we remembered our mortality with an ash cross on our foreheads; now remind yourself that you are made in God's image by taking some pollen from an Easter lily (or a petal from any flower) and tracing that same cross on your forehead.

**PRAY:** Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! In Jesus' name, Amen.