

# Living Faith @



*Dear Faith Shapers,*

Sometimes I feel sorry for February. (I know, weird.) But February has the misfortune of always being stuck right in the middle of winter. It's not at the beginning of winter with the excitement of Christmas, a brand new year, and pretty white snowflakes. It's not at the end of winter when we start to enjoy longer days, warmer temperatures, and the first sightings of tiny green buds peeking through rapidly melting snow. Nope – February is smack-dab in the middle of those never-ending weather delays and cancellations, messy piles of mismatched mittens, and the dreaded cabin fever that has even the most saintly among us screaming, “Enough!”

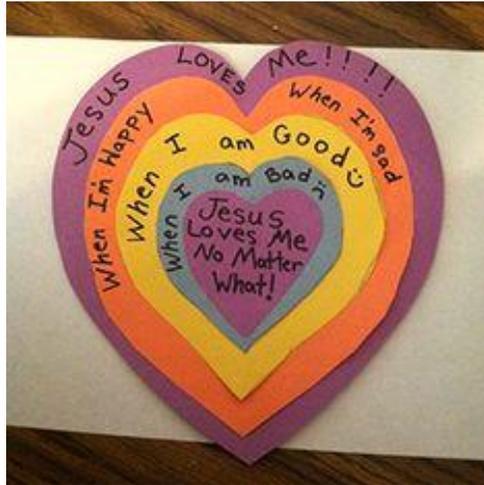
*Poor February!*

But February does give us a great opportunity for some fun and unique activities with our family, and our students. Valentine's Day (February 14<sup>th</sup>) is the perfect time to try out some fun crafts for gifting to loved ones, and to simply discuss what it means to love one another – the way that God first loved us! Presidents Day comes quickly after that (February 17<sup>th</sup>) and gives us an excellent chance to learn the history of our country and its leaders. And this year Ash Wednesday falls on February 26<sup>th</sup> when we can begin our journey to Easter with some meaningful activities to help us understand what the forty days of Lent are all about. And this year we even get an extra day in February – how about a special Leap Year party to wrap up the month?

I hope these resources will help you and your family or students to avoid the “middle-of-winter” doldrums and look forward to a fun-filled and faith-filled February!

*Jane Harris*

*Pastor at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Rockwell and St. Paul Lutheran Church, Thornton*



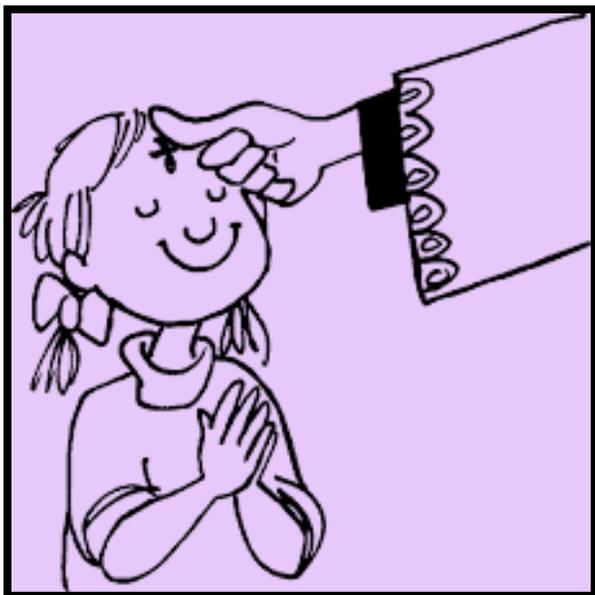
*A fun and easy heart craft – showing children that Jesus' love for us truly is unconditional. Tape it on a mirror in their bedroom or bathroom so they see it every day.*

## History of Valentine's Day

No one is quite sure where the origins of Valentine's Day first came from. There were at least three Saint Valentine's from the early Catholic Church who were martyrs. The day of St. Valentine could have been named after any one of them. The day became associated with romance sometime in the Middle Ages. In the 1300s English poet Geoffrey Chaucer wrote a poem that linked the day with love. This likely was the beginning of celebrating love on this day. In the 18th century sending romantic cards on Valentine's Day became very popular. People made elaborate handmade cards with ribbons and lace. They also began to use hearts and cupids as decorations. The holiday spread to the United States and in 1847 the first mass produced Valentine's cards were made by entrepreneur Esther Howland.

*Here's a Valentines' Day craft to help kids remember that Jesus loved them so much, He gave up His life on a cross. Use brown foam sheets or construction paper for the cross and candy hearts. Pick (appropriate) sayings from the candy hearts to glue on the cross. You can then use magnetic tape to put on the back for a magnet, (wait until glue from putting the candy on dries) or you can string a ribbon thru the top for hanging.*





Each year, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and is always 46 days before Easter Sunday. Lent is a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) marked by repentance, fasting, reflection, and ultimately celebration. The 40-day period represents Christ's time of temptation in the wilderness, where he fasted and where Satan tempted him. Lent asks believers to set aside a time each year for similar fasting, marking an intentional season of focus on Christ's life, ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection. Often called the Day of Ashes, Ash Wednesday starts Lent by focusing the Christian's heart on repentance and prayer, usually through personal and communal confession. This happens during a special Ash Wednesday service.

**Here are some activities that will help children learn more about Ash Wednesday & Lent:**

- Have a big pancake feast on Shrove Tuesday (the day right before Ash Wednesday), sharing the meaning behind it. Pancake Day comes from England where it was common tradition to use up all the eggs, milk, and butter in the kitchen prior to Ash Wednesday. These ingredients were often used to make pancakes!
- On Ash Wednesday, hold a simple candle-lighting service at home. Have each person reflect on things they'd like to let go of – bad habits and so on. Burn those as a way of releasing them. Prayer: Lord have mercy on us, forgive us, and help us to do better.
- Draw a large cross or use a cross you may have hanging on the wall. Take your finger and trace around the shape of the cross while saying the Lord's Prayer. Make this a daily practice throughout Lent this year.
- Attend an Ash Wednesday service! Explain beforehand why we start Lent this way – if you need help check out this website: [https://www.ducksters.com/holidays/ash\\_wednesday.php](https://www.ducksters.com/holidays/ash_wednesday.php)

**An easy and meaningful activity to participate in throughout Lent is to create a 40-day prayer chain.**

Simply take construction paper and cut the paper into 40 strips (or 46 if you want to include Sundays,) about 1 inch by 8 inches, but that can vary a bit. (Just be sure your paper chain strips are wide enough to write on, and not too narrow that you can't read them, or too wide that they become giant, droopy paper ovals.)

Each day talk about someone or something you and your children would like to pray for and write it on one of the strips of paper. (One prayer request per paper strip.) You can guide the children to include both prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers requesting something. Then tape, glue, or staple the chains together. On Day 2 you will have 2 links on your chain; Day 3 there will be 3, and so on.) Every day until Easter they will see their prayer chain growing and growing! What a fun way to learn about praying for one another!



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