

## **Easter in a Godly Play® Classroom with Friends**

by Melinda Wenner Bradley

Quakers using Godly Play® in their religious education program have stories from that curriculum and other resources to choose from during this time in the First Day School year. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list, but some thoughts on what has worked in one meeting's program (for example, there is also a Godly Play enrichment lesson about crosses that I have not used and cannot speak on). Over the years, I have found that what resonates with me as a storyteller and has led to deep wondering with children is material that helps them connect the baby whose birth we recount with great care at Christmas to the man whose earthly life ends at Easter. Friends will need to discern how to explain the crucifixion, based on ages in your circle of children and the culture of your meeting community. Finally, while most Friends meetings do not celebrate Lent in the same manner as other Christian denominations, it can be beneficial to take advantage of the weeks before Easter Sunday to build an understanding of the mystery of Easter.

***Faces of Easter*** is a Lenten series of seven stories, told in the weeks before Easter Sunday. While some programs tell the story one week at a time over several weeks of Lent, I usually divide it into two sections and tell it in the two weeks before Easter. This story helps make a connection for children between the baby is born at Christmas . . . and he dies at Easter. It's Jesus as a child, as a young man, in the desert, discerning what will his work be, healing the sick, and on the cross. During the wondering, the children are invited to bring things from other stories in the room to help us understand the story; kids go to the story shelves and bring back other pieces to set beside "Faces." I have had powerful experiences with children doing this. We've put the matzo we keep for the Exodus story next to Jesus in the desert, our Native American talking stick next to young Jesus in the temple with the rabbis, the dove from a Faith & Play testimonies story next to John baptizing Jesus, and the heart from the George Fox story next to the baby Jesus in Mary's arms. The story ends with the resurrection and the storyteller puts the pieces (8x11 pictures) in a circle with the words that "in the end is the beginning."

***Easter Egg Story*** - I've used this story on Easter morning, primarily because we have a lot of relatives and visiting children on Easter at our meeting and that morning also includes an egg hunt. It's nice to provide a connection between the mystery of Easter and our Easter egg tradition, and it also teaches about the symbolism illustrated in Easter egg designs, particularly on Ukrainian Pskany eggs. (I never knew that dots on eggs represented Mary's tears.) After the wondering, children enjoy designing and making their own (wooden or paper cut-out) eggs using the symbols and their explanations.

### ***Two additional ideas:***

- One year, when our FDS group was mostly older elementary children, we did a mural of the Passion. Each week we read from our Children's Bible and then represented that part of the Lenten journey on our mural.

- We've also read the children's book "The Light of the World," by Katherine Paterson, a story about Jesus and his life and work in the weeks before Easter. This past Christmas, after a particularly harried pageant rehearsal, we gathered to hear the beginning of the book to settled down a bit. While the children were delighted to see their pageant roles in the story, it was also lovely to be able to connect for them who this baby grows to be -- a teacher, a healer, a friend. The language of the story speaks to Friends' beliefs about our own inner teacher and the Light within each of us, as well.