

# Ash Wednesday and Children

Written by <https://christinevhides.com>

## Why is it called Ash Wednesday?

Early Christians burnt sacrificial offerings and placed the ashes on their bodies to show sorrow. On Ash Wednesday some ministers make the sign of the cross with ashes on people's foreheads or hands to remind them that we are beginning the Lenten season. In many churches the palm branches from the previous year are burned and used during worship.

## Why bring children to such a serious service? (from *Worshiping with Children*)

When children see all the adults they love and respect wearing ashes and they themselves are marked with ashes, *they know they belong*. They are one of God's people. Other days they may know that with their minds, but on Ash Wednesday they know it in a powerful way with their eyes.

Because we are all marked not with golden markers but with messy black ashes, *children learn that all of us mess up and are forgiven*. The most loved and respected adult they know does and they do. In a world where they are constantly told they can do better and can make good choices and should be special, this is important life-shaping information.

## Can kids really understand what the ashes mean? Are they scary? (from *Bread Not Stones*)

When I talk with my son about the ashes and what they mean (which is actually a pretty easy conversation since children are pretty open/receptive to the cycles of life and the reality that everything that lives dies) I remind him of his baptism as well – that the ashes on his forehead are supposed to remind him that he is human, that he will make mistakes, and that he will need to apologize for those mistakes to other people and to God. But then I remind him of the water that was placed on his forehead as a baby, which should remind him that God's love is stronger than any mistakes he might make. It is a love that won't stop even when his own life on earth does.