

What is Lent all about?

Lent is a 40-day liturgical season that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Easter. Sundays are not included in the 40-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Though not biblical, Lent has long been a tradition in the Christian Church, and it is thought that the tradition of the 40 days recalls the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11), the 40 days and nights Noah and his family spent on the ark and the 40 years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Focused on the Easter promise of new life and renewed faith, Lent invites us to look honestly at ourselves as we seek to be strengthened in the call to be Christ's disciples. Lent is considered a time of penance, discipline, almsgiving (sharing what we have), prayer (for ourselves and others), and fasting (special resolve to work on greater faithfulness).



Ash WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday (February 6th) is the first day of Lent. On this day, Christians focus on their complete sinfulness and the necessity of Christ's suffering and death to insure their salvation. Ashes are referred to many times in the Old Testament as signs of sorrow, mourning, humility, and repentance, and on Ash Wednesday they are used to remind people of their mortality; that "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). We use ashes during Ash Wednesday worship in a ritual called the Imposition of Ashes. In this custom, ashes are mixed with a small amount of oil and applied to the forehead of each worshipper.

The character of Lent as a time of renewed commitment and service suggests many possibilities for us. Here are some suggestions that can provide rich spiritual experiences for us all as we embark on our own Lenten pilgrimage.

- **Return to Discipline.** Lent is a wonderful time to recommit yourself to a discipline. It can be daily devotions, reading, prayers at bedtime, mealtime prayers, family prayer time, attending Wednesday Lenten services. Pick any discipline you would like. Lent is a time to return to those spiritual practices that give us life and keep us centered on God.
- **Make a Lenten Candle Cross.** Use wooden logs to make a cross. Drill 6 holds for candles. Light one candle each week of Lent. Use it just as you would use an Advent wreath. A different idea would be to plant a lily bulb in a pot and watch it grow all through Lent.
- **Use a Lenten calendar.** You can buy one or make your own. Lenten calendars can give a Bible reading for each day, offer a challenge, or give an idea of something to do for each day. Lenten calendars are well suited for family times and mealtimes. Our Sunday Students will be bringing one home.
- **Home decorating for Lent.** The cross is the central symbol of the Christian faith and is an especially appropriate image for our Lenten journey with Jesus to his crucifixion. You may make or purchase a simple cross and put it in an area where your family gathers. The color for the season of Lent is purple so you may want to use purple placemats, tablecloth, or a purple table runner during Lent.
- **Fasting.** Christians in many traditions observe personal fasts during Lent- giving up specific foods, habits, or pastimes. Fasting helps us remember the sacrifice of Jesus and recall our own need for God. Some examples- giving up meat, dairy products, candy, or soda; not watching TV, movies, or video games. Lent can also be a time for adding instead of giving up. Some examples- writing affirming notes, visiting the sick, preparing meals, or offering to baby-sit.
- **Offering for the Poor.** Collecting money or food for the poor is an act of discipleship that recalls the practice of almsgiving. You can give to the ELCA hunger fund or on a more personal level, you may choose to assemble health kits or collect canned goods for the food pantry in our community.