

What is Lent All About?

Lent, the forty days in the Christian year that lead up to Easter, is a valuable time for Christians. The word “Lent” comes from a variety of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic words meaning “spring”, a time budding with new life and hope. For Christians, Lent is not a celebration of nature; rather, it is a process of prayer and spiritual renewal looking to a time budding with new spiritual life and hope. The Lenten season is an opportunity to cultivate the interior life through spiritual exercises and practices.

In the early church new believers were baptized into its fellowship once a year on Easter. Leading up to their baptism a period was set aside for their formation in the faith. In their baptism they would signify their death to the power of evil and their call to be risen into new life in Christ, who overcame the power of death on the first Easter. In time the whole community of the faithful came to experience this season as a time for growth in faithful discipleship. Lent emerged as a time when both new converts, as well as the body of believers, would join more closely with the living, dying and rising of Jesus. Thus in today’s Church, as in the early Church, Lent is meant to be experienced as a time for the making of disciples.

Rather than being seen as a forty day endurance test, or a bleak and restricted time, Lent is a quality season. It is a time of rediscovery, a golden chance to open ourselves more deeply to the beauty and power of the dying and rising to new life in Jesus. It is a time to ponder the reality of the death and resurrection and to allow it to soak into our deepest parts.

Lent is the time for new life and hope. In the Lenten season, self-examination is crucial. An individual’s response to the call for purposeful reflection on one’s need for God is an important factor in choosing how one will observe Lent.

Through the centuries, Lent became characterized by practices which typify the meaning of this season. One of these is **prayer**. Lent invites us to step aside from the busyness of our daily life, the many things that clutter and crowd our life in order to get in touch with the self and at a deeper level, with the Spirit of God within. Essentially, prayer is attention to God; it places us in a posture of listening. Amidst all the noise and tumult of our daily life, Lent encourages us to experience a new depth of prayer, an authentic attentiveness to God through which we learn to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

A second practice associated with this season is **fasting**. Fasting signifies a willingness to free ourselves from the desires, ambitions and pursuits that center on the demands of the self. It points to a willingness to be freed from the self-centeredness that drives so much of our life in order to experience more fully the liberating power of Christ. Fasting reminds us of the truth that the deepest hunger in our lives must be the hunger for God.

A third practice is **almsgiving**. True hunger for God leads to the giving of ourselves to others. Lent calls us to a greater compassion for others, especially the poor and needy. It invites us to examine ourselves honestly on how subtly we have accepted society’s addiction to possessions, to affluence. Through the days of Lent we are encouraged to focus our eyes on Jesus who gave his whole life in faithfulness to God, giving his life totally out of love for all. As we keep that clear focus we join our life in the loving intention of Jesus to give himself for all.

Lent is a shining opportunity for experiencing “the unsearchable riches of Christ”, a time for spiritual growth so that we might walk in newness of life. Let us determine how we can best take advantage of this opportunity and then dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to our Lenten practice.

Some Ideas For Observing Lent

Prayer

Take a daily "Time Out" for God. Go to a quiet place, light a candle and:

- Read the Bible;
- Read a book about God;
- Write a thankfulness journal;
- Spend time listening to God, rather than speaking.

Fasting

- Set aside one day a week on which you will go without one meal, and spend an equivalent time intentionally seeking God's presence with you.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, from sunrise to sunset, refrain from eating solid foods and only drink water or juice. Every time you feel hunger pangs, think of God and pray.

Almsgiving

Give up eating/drinking something that you like and/or give up watching television or some other activity and donate the money saved and time saved:

- Bring non-perishable food items to a place where they will be taken to the Food Banks for the needy;
- Give money to Lenten outreach projects of your parish;
- Donate money to the Primates World Relief and Development Fund or other Christian relief efforts;
- Visit someone who is a shut-in, ill, alone, or otherwise needs a friendly visit;
- Invite someone who lives alone to have a meal with you and your family or cook and deliver a meal to someone who is ill or grieving or alone.

For further information or pamphlets please contact your AFP Diocesan Representative or the Resources Representative for AFP Canada.

Internet Web Site: www.anglicanprayer.org

KEEPING A HOLY LENT



Anglican Fellowship of Prayer (Canada)



A Suggestion For a Lenten Observance.

The calendar below shows the days of Lent. Each day contains two suggested Scripture readings. It is intended that the two readings be used on alternate years. Take time each day to read the Scripture, contemplate on what it says, what it means and how it applies to your life.

The reverse side of this sheet provides some information about the special days in Lent, as well as some space to record any questions, or comments that arise that you may wish to keep and perhaps discuss with others.

<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thu</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>
Year 1 Year 2		Shrove Tuesday	1 Ash Wednesday Luke 18:9-14 Luke 18:9-14	2 John 1: 29-34 John 17:1-8	3 John 1:35-42 John 17:9-19	4 John 1:43-51 John 17:20-26
Mark 2:18-22 John 12: 44-50	5 John 2:1-12 Mark 1:1-13	6 John 2:13-22 Mark 1:14-28	7 John 2:23-3:15 Mark 1:29-45	8 John 3:16-21 Mark 2:1-12	9 John 3:22-36 Mark 2:13-22	10 John 4:1-26 Mark 2:23-3:6
Mark 3:31-4:9 John 5:19-24	11 John 4:27-42 Mark 3:7-19a	12 John 4:43-54 Mark 3:19b-35	13 John 5:1-18 Mark 4:1-20	14 John 5:19-29 Mark 4:21-34	15 John 5:30-47 Mark 4:35-41	16 John 7:1-13 Mark 5:1-20
Mark 5:1-20 John 5:25-29	17 John 7:14-36 Mark 5:21-43	18 John 7:37-52 Mark 6:1-13	19 John 8:12-20 Mark 6:13-29	20 John 8:21-32 Mark 6:30-46	21 John 8:33-47 Mark 6:47-56	22 John 8:47-59 Mark 7:1-23
Mark 8:11-21 John 6:27-40	23 John 6:1-15 Mark 7:24-37	24 John 6:16-27 Mark 8:1-10	25 John 6:27-40 Mark 8:11-26	26 John 6:41-51 Mark 8:27-9:1	27 John 6:52-59 Mark 9:2-13	28 John 6:60-71 Mark 9:14-29
Mark 8:31-9:1 John 8:46-59	29 John 9:1-17 Mark 9:30-41	30 John 9:18-41 Mark 9:42-50	31 John 10:1-18 Mark 10:1-16	32 John 10:19-42 Mark 10:17-31	33 John 11:1-27 Mark 10:32-45	34 John 11:28-44 Mark 10:46-52
Palm Sunday Matt. 21:12-17 Luke 19:41-48	35 John 12:9-19 Mark 11:12-25	36 John 12:20-26 Mark 11:27-33	37 John 12:27-36 Mark 12:1-11	38 Maundy Thursday John 17:1-26 Mark 14:12-25	39 Good Friday John 13:36-38 John 19:38-42	40 Easter Eve Romans 8:1-11 Romans 8:1-11

Shrove Tuesday

This is the day before Lent begins and is not part of Lent. The word “shrove” is the past tense of an English verb to “shrive”, which is the action of repenting, confessing and sins being forgiven. Traditionally on the day before Lent, people were “shriven” by the priest. This day is also known as “Mardi Gras” (Fat Tuesday in French) because it was a time of eating the things from which one would abstain during Lent. Pancake suppers have become traditional, originally eaten as a way of using up some ingredients not needed during Lent.

Special Days of Lent

Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent is marked with a special service. The theme for this day, though not for all of Lent is that we all fall short of God’s desires for us, and that we need to continually seek forgiveness and wholeness. The theme also reminds us that we will all die and our bodies will decay to become “dust” while our spirit continues. Ashes have traditionally been a symbol of repentance and forgiveness and the day’s theme is symbolized by drawing the shape of a cross on the forehead of each person using the ashes from the Palm Sunday branches and crosses used the previous year.

Palm Sunday

This is the Sunday before Easter and the beginning of Holy Week. The day commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, using palm branches. The joy and enthusiasm of recognizing Jesus as King and Lord precedes the rest of Holy Week in which the events of Jesus death and resurrection are remembered.

Maundy Thursday

This is the day before Good Friday and is a time for remembering the Last Supper that Jesus and His closest friends and followers spent together. The word “Maundy” is an English adulteration of the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “commandment”. At the Last Supper Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment; that you love one another.” Maundy Thursday is the day that we also focus on servanthood, which is symbolized by Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. In some parishes this is re-enacted by washing another’s feet during a worship service.

Good Friday

This day commemorates the day upon which Jesus was crucified and died. It is a day for remembering that Jesus’ death and all the implications that death has for us. Special services are held throughout this day to help us remember through readings, prayer and vigil.

The Easter Vigil

This service is appropriate from after sunset on Holy Saturday until sunrise Easter morning. This was the traditional time of baptism in the early centuries of Christianity. This service begins in darkness and a new fire is lit, from which the Christ candle is lighted. It signifies the light of Christ coming into the world anew at the resurrection. This service ends the season of Lent and begins the joy of the Easter season.

Notes, Questions and Comments

(This space can be used to record things that have arisen from the Lenten services, readings and prayers that people may want to discuss with others after Easter).