



How the Season of Lent Is to Be Observed

What is the meaning of the Lenten season in Christianity?

LENT is the Christian season of preparation before Easter. The Lenten season is a time when Christians observe a period of Fasting, Repentance, Moderation, Self-Denial and Spiritual Discipline.

The purpose is to set aside time for Reflection On Jesus Christ - His Suffering And His Sacrifice, His Life, Death, Burial, And Resurrection.

History of Lent

Early Christians felt the importance of Easter called for special preparations.

The first mention of a 40-day period of fasting in preparation for Easter is found in the Canons of Nicaea (AD 325).

It is thought that the tradition has grown from the early church practice of baptismal candidates undergoing a 40-day period of fasting in preparation for their baptism at Easter.

Eventually, the season evolved into A PERIOD OF SPIRITUAL DEVOTION FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH. During the initial centuries, the Lenten fast was very strict but relaxed over time. We today have absolutely no regard for Fasting and Prayer in our life.

What Is Shrove Tuesday and Why Is It Just Before Lent?

Many churches that observe Lent, celebrate Shrove Tuesday. Traditionally, Shrove Tuesday is almost a carnival - the day before Ash Wednesday and use that day to use up/consume all rich foods such as eggs and all dairy products in anticipation of the 40-day fasting season of Lent. Shrove Tuesday is also called Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras, which is French for Fat Tuesday.

Shrove Tuesday is observed by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists. They also try and abstain from eating at restaurants and such places during the Season of Lent.

During the six weeks of self-examination and reflection, Christians who observe Lent typically make a commitment to fast, or to give up something - a habit, such as smoking, watching TV, swearing, or a food or drink, such as sweets, chocolate, or coffee. Some Christians also take on a Lenten discipline, such as reading the Bible and spending more time in prayer to draw nearer to God.

Strict observers DO NOT EAT MEAT ON FRIDAYS, often opting for fish instead. The goal of these spiritual disciplines is to strengthen the faith of the observer and develop a closer relationship with God.

The Significance of 40 Days

The significance of the 40-day period of Lent is based on two episodes of spiritual testing in the Bible: the 40 years of wilderness wanderings by the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt (Numbers 33:38 and Deuteronomy 1:3) and the Temptation of Jesus after he spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness ([St. Matthew 4:1-11](#); [St. Mark 1:12-13](#); and [St. Luke 4:1-13](#)).

Lent in Western Christianity

In Western Christianity, Ash Wednesday marks the first day, or the start of the season of Lent, which begins 40 days prior to Easter (Technically 46, as Sundays are not included in the count). Officially named "Day of Ashes," the exact date changes every year because Easter and its surrounding holidays are movable feasts.

On Ash Wednesday, adherents attend mass, where a minister distributes ashes by lightly rubbing the sign of the cross with ashes onto their foreheads. This tradition is meant to identify the faithful with Jesus Christ. In the Bible, ashes are a symbol of repentance and death. Thus, observing Ash Wednesday at the start of the Lenten season represents one's repentance from sin as well as Jesus Christ's sacrificial death to set followers free from sin and death.

Lent in Eastern Christianity

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the spiritual preparations begin with Great Lent, a 40-day period of self-examination and fasting (including Sundays), which starts on Clean Monday and culminates on Lazarus Saturday.

Clean Monday falls seven weeks before Easter Sunday. The term "Clean Monday" refers to a cleansing from sinful attitudes through the Lenten fast. Lazarus Saturday occurs eight days before Easter Sunday and signifies the end of Great Lent.

Do All Christian Observe Lent?

Not all Christian churches observe Lent. Most Protestants have moved far away from the practises of the earliest followers of Jesus Christ.

Lent is observed by the Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and Roman Catholics.

Eastern Orthodox churches observe Lent or Great Lent, during the 6 weeks or 40 days preceding Palm Sunday with fasting continuing during the Holy Week of Orthodox Easter.

Lent for Eastern Orthodox churches begins on Monday (called Clean Monday) and Ash Wednesday is not observed.

The Bible does not mention the custom of Lent, however, the practice of REPENTANCE and MOURNING IN ASHES is found in [2 Samuel 13:19](#); [Esther 4:1](#); [Job 2:8](#); [Daniel 9:3](#); and [St. Matthew 11:21](#).

The account of Jesus' death on The Cross, or Crucifixion, his Burial, and his Resurrection, can be found in the following passages of Scripture: [St. Matthew 27:27-28:8](#); [St. Mark 15:16-16:19](#); [St. Luke 23:26-24:35](#); and [St. John 19:16-20:30](#).

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