

LENT is a forty-day season of spiritual preparation marking the time leading up to Easter, the Christian holiday celebrating Jesus' resurrection from the grave and victory over sin and death. The early Christians observed with great devotion the days of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Lent derived out of this custom. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent.

The word *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring," the season that prepares the earth to bring forth the new life of summer. Spring, of course, is also the time of Easter.

The 40 days of Lent mirrors the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. (See Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, or Luke 4:1-12.) These were the 40 days of preparation for the beginning of his ministry. The number 40 was an important number in Judeo/Christian history relating to preparation. (Remember that the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land.)

Historically, during Lent, converts to the Christian faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.

You are invited therefore, in the name of Christ and his Church, to observe a holy Lent – by self examination and repentance; by offering forgiveness and mercy to others; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word (Bible). You can discover many practical ways of doing these things and more in our document entitled "My Preparation for Easter," available on our website, from the church office, or in the Welcome Table Kiosk.

ASH WEDNESDAY marks the beginning of Lent — a forty-day period leading to Easter. Traditionally on Ash Wednesday a mixture of ashes and oil are placed on the foreheads of penitent worshippers. Today this sign continues to act as a reminder to us of our mortality and of our need for forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ.