



Lent

The word Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word Lencten, which simply means lengthen. It is the period that leads up to Easter, which reminds us that the days are lengthening and nature is preparing for new life, Spring.

After His baptism, Christ then went to the wilderness. After, his baptism. Baptism is the sacrament to the commitment and cause of Jesus. Christ was tempted during his time in the wilderness. It certainly seems as though his baptism was a precursor to the wilderness.

During the season of Lent we traditionally give up something. This reflects the period of time that Jesus spent in the wilderness without food and water to pray before his impending public death in Jerusalem. We observe Lent, as a reset from the noise, clutter, and speed of life.

Fasting is about creating space; space to listen, see... be.

In earlier times, people used Lent as a time of fasting and repentance. Since they didn't want to be tempted by sweets, meat and other distractions in the house, they cleaned out their cabinets. They used up all the sugar and yeast in sweet breads before the Lent season started, and fixed meals with all the meat available. It was a great feast! Through the years Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) has evolved (in some places) into a pretty wild party with little to do with preparing for the Lenten season of repentance and simplicity.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday usually begins with a service where we recognize our mortality. From dust you came and to dust you shall return. With the imposition of ashes, the sign of the cross is placed on our foreheads with ashes.

Why ashes? In Jewish and Christian history, ashes are a sign of mortality and repentance. Mortality, because when we die, our bodies eventually decompose and we become dust/dirt/ash/whatever. Repentance, because long ago, when people felt remorse for something they did, they would put ashes on their head and wear "sackcloth" (scratchy clothing) to remind them that sin is pretty uncomfortable and leads to a sort of death of the spirit. This was their way of confessing their sins and asking for forgiveness.

Where do the ashes come from? On what we now call Palm Sunday, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem while people waved palms and cheered him on. Less than a week later, Jesus was killed. The palms that were waved in joy became ashes of sorrow. We get ashes for Ash Wednesday by saving the palms from Palm Sunday, burning them, and mixing them with a little oil. It's symbolic.

So what is Lent? At Jesus' baptism the sky split open, the Spirit of God, which looked like a dove, descended and landed on Jesus, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, My Beloved, with whom I am pleased." Afterward, as told in Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus was sent into the wilderness by the Spirit. Where he fasted and prayed for 40 days. During his time there he was tempted and found clarity and strength to resist temptation. Afterwards, he was ready to begin his ministry.

Maybe Jesus needed some time with God to sort through the major changes happening in his life. Maybe he needed to get away from family, friends and the familiar routine in order to see God (and himself) more clearly. Perhaps he wanted some intentional time with God as he searched for direction and answers like you. Like Jesus, we may need to take some serious time to pray and listen for God.

Lent is a specific time to "repent" - to *return* to God and re-focus our lives to be more in line with Jesus. Each Sunday are typical "feast days" to help remind us of the Great Hope of the Way of Jesus.

Here are some Lenten prompts for prayer / meditation for each week (6 Days per week, sans Sundays):

Mondays: Reflect

Tuesdays: Listen

Wednesdays: Lament

Thursdays: Attention

Fridays: Imagine

Saturdays: Rest