

What Is Lent?

KEY WORD FOR THE CHURCH SEASON OF LENT

RE-PENT

from Latin *re-*, *again* + *poenitere*, to be sorry. **1. to feel such regret or dissatisfaction over what one has done or failed to do as to change one's mind or decide to change one's ways. 2. to feel so contrite over one's sins as to change one's attitudes and ways.**

Among the early Christians, Lent was a period of intense instruction in the faith for "penitents," leading to baptism on the eve of Easter. Over the centuries Christians expanded the time of preparation for Easter from a few days up to as many as 70 days.

Today, during Lent's 40 days, all Christians are invited to adopt a penitential attitude, and to conduct a spiritual housecleaning - giving up self-serving ways, and practicing new behavior appropriate to God's baptized people.

For Contemporary Christians, the six weeks of Lent form a journey taken each year with stops at these traditional points along the way:

- * *Ash Wednesday (and sometimes the following Wednesdays),*
- * *The first through fifth Sundays in Lent,*
- * *Palm or Passion Sunday,*
- * *Holy Week - all leading to...*
- * *Easter and the gift of resurrection through our Lord's triumph over death.*

The Christian Church's season of Lent ...

is a period of time set aside to help us prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord for us. Lent prepares us for Easter. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, the season of Lent sets aside 40 days (not counting Sundays) to review, evaluate, change our lives and practice new behavior appropriate for a member of God's family.

The Lenten signs along the way include:

The **disappearance of “alleluia”** from our worship services beginning with the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. In medieval times some Christians actually buried an “alleluia puppet” in a casket in the church until Easter, when the figure - and the word “alleluia” - were resurrected in the service.

The **mark of ashes** on the foreheads of many Christians on Ash Wednesday. The Jews used ashes as an outward sign of repentance, a practice continued by early Christians, but discontinued by many of the reformers. So, while ashes today may remind us of dust and mortality, it is more in keeping with Lent to see ashes as signs of our repentance, turning away from sin and being faithful to the Gospel.

The display of the **colors violet and black** in churches (*violet* for repentance during most of Lent, and *black* for mourning, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

Lenten **self-denial** is usually thought of as “*giving up something for Lent*” rather than *practicing giving* for Easter. But when giving up sinful, self-serving ways, practice replacing them with new ways to give time and energy and forgiveness to one another, as Christ gave himself for us, forgiving our old debts and reconciling us with God. This is the heart of the Easter message. This is the heart of Lenten preparation.