

# A look at Lent



The season of Lent is a time when we prepare our hearts, minds and souls for the sacred observance of Christ's death on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter. In Lent, we recognize we are simply dust and ashes without Christ, we confess our sins to God, and we follow Christ to the cross, where we are made whole again. In the early Church, the six weeks of Lent were a time of training and instructions for converts to Christianity who were preparing to be baptized on Easter. The English word "lent" is derived from the Germanic root for "long," because Lent occurs in spring, when the days lengthen.

**Forty Days.** Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the Holy Saturday. Sundays are excluded from the counting of the 40 Days because they still remain "little Easters" even during this solemn season. The number 40 is significant because, at the start of his

ministry, Jesus spent 40 days fasting, praying and resisting temptation, as we are called to do during Lent.

**Three Disciplines.** Traditionally these three disciplines are associated with Lent:

**Fasting.** Skipping a meal once a week or refraining from eating certain foods affords us the opportunity to spend more time feeding on the Word of God and being spiritually nourished through prayer and meditation.

**Abstinence.** Removing a particularly bad habit, sinful indulgence or guilty pleasure from our daily routine frees us to engage in activities that are God-pleasing and reflects in a small way the self-sacrifice that Christ endured for us.

**Giving.** Giving something extra during this time – to our church, to the poor and needy among us, to charities or other service organizations – is a way to remember that Christ gave up everything to save us from sin, death, and the devil and to free us to live a new life in Him.

**One Focus.** Our focus during Lent is solely on the cross of Christ. For it was on the cross that the sinless Son of God suffered and died for us that we might be fully forgiven and live forever with him in heaven. Reading Scripture verses about the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion and putting a cross in a prominent place where we can see it often keep our focus strong.

# Ashes, Ashes

On Ash Wednesday, worship leaders place a cross of ashes on our foreheads as a visible reminder that we are dust and to dust we shall return. (see Genesis 3:19) "For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God," Scripture reminds us. (Romans 3:19) But though we have fallen down because of our sin, we shall be lifted up one day to heaven, because Christ was lifted up for us on the cross.

**Ponder the Passion.** The word "Passion" in the context of Lent does not refer to intense romantic love, but to the sufferings of Christ from the night of the Last Supper to his death on Good Friday. Scriptural accounts of these last days in Christ's life are called the Passion Narratives. Make an effort to read some portion of one of the Passion narratives each day of Lent. Then spend five to ten minutes simply pondering the words you have just read.

Matthew 26:14-27:66

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Luke 22:14 – 23:56

John 18:1 – 19:42

## Songs of the Season

The words of the hymns of the season of Lent are rich with imagery that stirs our spirits with new understanding of Christ's sacrifice for us. And the music of many of these hymns creates a somber yet reverent atmosphere in which to commune with Christ. Sing or simply read the words of these Lent hymns as part of your regular devotions. Here is some background information on some of the most well-known Lent Hymns.

**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross** - Written by Isaac Watts in 1707, this hymn was one of the first "hymns of human composure," because it was based only on personal feelings, not the repetition of a Psalm.

**O Sacred Head, Now Wounded** - Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, this hymn was part of a lengthy poem that addressed the various parts of Christ's body as he suffered on the cross. Other sections of the poem reflected on his feet, knees, hands, side, breast heart and face.

**Abide With Me** - Henry F. Lyte, an Anglican pastor, wrote this hymn shortly before dying of tuberculosis. His inspiration of the hymn came from the King James Version of Luke 24, where the risen Jesus walks with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "Abide with us," the disciples say to Jesus, just before he makes himself known to them. (v29)