

Worship on the Web



CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

Season of Lent

Lent is the 40 day period before Easter beginning with Ash Wednesday. There are six Sundays in Lent.

The meaning of Lent

During Lent Christians may fast, or give up some of their usual routine, to give time to personal examination and to reflect on their relationship with God.

The season of Lent reminds us of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting and praying in the desert (Luke 4: 1 to 4: 15) and the 40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24: 12 to 24: 18).

The origins of Lent

Originally Lent varied in length but from the fourth century onwards 40 days became standard. It is often associated with the a period of fasting and self examination required of candidates for **baptism**. To this day Easter is still a traditional time for baptism.

Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent is called Ash Wednesday and it is traditionally a day when Christians prepare for the period of fasting and self examination to come.

Some churches, mainly in Anglican and Catholic traditions, hold Ash Wednesday services at which churchgoers are marked on the forehead with a cross of ashes as a sign of repentance and reminder of our mortality.



cross of ashes on forehead

This practice comes from an ancient biblical tradition of putting on 'sackcloth and ashes' to show grief and sorrow for past wrongs (Daniel 9: 3; Luke 10: 13).

The ashes are made from the palm crosses used on Palm Sunday the year before.

Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus' joyous entry into Jerusalem, so when the crosses used in the Palm Sunday service are converted to ashes, Christians are reminded that this joy was followed by the pain and suffering of the cross.

The minister or priest takes the ashes, sometimes mixed with oil, and marks each participant on the forehead with the sign of the cross. This is a symbol that through Christ's death and resurrection, all can be free from sin.