

What is Lent?

Lent is the six - week period leading up to Easter. It's one of the most important times of year for many Christians around the world, particularly those within the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, held at a similar level of importance to Advent – the build up to Christmas.

While Advent is a celebration and a time of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently seen as a time of solemn observance and preparation for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. From its start on Ash Wednesday until its conclusion on Easter Sunday, Lent has been a traditional time for fasting or giving something up or abstinence. Just as we carefully prepare for events in our personal lives, as a wedding, or birthday; a commencement Lent invites us to make our minds and hearts ready for remembering Jesus' life, death and body resurrection.

When does Lent start?

Because Lent follows the liturgical calendar, the exact date that Lent falls each year changes. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is always held 46 days (40 fasting days and 6 Sundays) before Easter Sunday.

Ash Wednesday is the day after Shrove Tuesday, which in some places is more commonly known as Pancake Day. Elsewhere in the world Shrove Tuesday is known as Mardi Gras (meaning 'Fat Tuesday' in French).

What do Christians do during Lent?

These days, Christians around the world observe Lent in many ways. Many from more orthodox and traditional denominations will still observe the fast strictly, beginning with the wearing of ashes on Ash Wednesday and abstinence of meat, fish, eggs and fats until Easter Sunday.

Others will choose to give up just one item for Lent, more commonly a 'luxury' such as chocolate, meat or alcohol. It is also becoming increasingly common for people to give up other things in order to refocus their faith during this time; such as watching TV, going to the gym, even social media.

Many Christians also use Lent to study their Bibles and pray more intensively, making use of the many devotional books and courses now available to.

And, of course, more and more Christians are turning to the 40 acts challenge as a way of doing Lent differently; using simple daily reflections and acts of generosity as a way of putting others first during preparations for Easter.

Sundays during Lent are very important to Christians around the world. While the Monday to Saturday of each of the six weeks are concerned with fasting and abstinence, the Sunday is a celebration symbolic of Christ's resurrection. Instead of fasting, Christians hold feasts in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. The sixth Sunday is particularly important because it's Palm Sunday.

What is the meaning of the name?

The name Lent comes through Middle English *lente* and Old English *lencten* or *lengten*, referring to the season of spring and the lengthening of days. It is also related to the French word *lente*, which means “to move slowly.”

What is the Liturgical Colour?

Purple is a cool colour on the colour wheel, reflecting divinity, wisdom, dignity, mystery, and creativity. Dark purple is a penitential colour, evoking sadness and deep reflection. In the first century CE, purple dye was very hard to come by, so only the wealthy could afford purple garments.

Rev. Wendy Noble, March 2020