

What Is This Season Called “Lent”?

The season of Lent is a special time in the Church’s Year when we prepare for Holy Week and Easter. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day when we remember our mortality (as we are marked with ashes) and repent of our sins. Our self-examination and repentance continues for forty days, recalling the forty days during which Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness after His Baptism (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). [Sundays are “in Lent” but not part of the forty days of Lent, as every Sunday is a “little Easter.”]

So we sing in one of our hymns:

*O Lord, throughout these forty days
You prayed and kept the fast;
Inspire repentance for our sin,
And free us from our past.*

Lent is not a time for us to “beat ourselves up,” but rather a time for us to recognize our situation as sinners before God. We seek and receive His forgiveness, and grow in faith and knowledge of our Savior Jesus through time spent in God’s Word.

*You strove with Satan and You won;
Your faithfulness endured;
Lend us Your nerve, Your skill and trust
In God’s eternal Word.*

As part of the discipline of Lent, it has long been a custom to choose something to “give up” for these forty days. While many choose things that are an end in themselves (such as giving up desserts in order to lose weight), the real point of such a practice is to deny ourselves in such a way that as we are reminded of what we have given up, we then use that reminder as an occasion for prayer to God and meditation on His Words. This is what Jesus did as He fasted in the wilderness, going without food for forty days (yes, that’s possible!) in order to devote Himself entirely to prayer.

*Though parched and hungry, yet You prayed
And fixed Your mind above;
So teach us to deny ourselves,
Since we have known God’s love.*

Lent is not an end in itself. It is, as noted above, a time for us to prepare for Holy Week and, above all, for the highest Festival of the Church’s Year: The Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Sunday. At the same time, we prepare for the even greater Easter that is yet to come: the Day when our Lord Jesus returns, the Day when all the dead are raised to life again, the Day when all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior will enter into the joys of the New Heavens and the New Earth, the blessed and everlasting life prepared for us. So these days of sorrow and repentance will be replaced with praise and thanksgiving that will last forever!

*Be with us through this season, Lord,
And all our earthly days,
That when the final Easter dawns,*

We join in heaven's praise. (LSB 418)

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

(Collect for the First Sunday in Lent)

*Join us this year for our Lenten Services, as we explore the theme:
Behold, Your God!*