

Season of Lent Background Information from Rotation.org

Lent What is Lent and why does it last forty days?

Lent is a time of repentance and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on their relationship with God, often choosing to give up something or volunteering and giving of themselves for others. The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness. Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter" celebration of the Jesus' victory over sin and death.

The Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday is called **Shrove Tuesday**, or is more popularly known by the French term Mardi Gras, meaning "Fat Tuesday," contrasting to the fasting during Lent. The entire three day period has now come to be known in many areas as Mardi Gras.

Carnival or Mardi Gras is usually a period of celebration, originally a festival before the fasting during the season of Lent. Now it is celebrated in many places with parades, costumes, dancing, and music.

Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is the first day of the season of Lent. Its name comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on worshippers' heads or foreheads as a sign of humility before God, a symbol of mourning and sorrow at the death that sin brings into the world. It not only prefigures the mourning at the death of Jesus, but also places the worshipper in a position to realize the impact of sin.

The color used in the sanctuary for most of Lent is purple. These colors symbolize both the pain leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the suffering of humanity and the world under sin. But purple is also the color of royalty, and so anticipates through the death of Jesus the coming resurrection and hope of newness that will be celebrated in the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It is a day of penitence and remembrance of our sins of the past and awareness of our mortality. Palm branches are usually burned and the sign of the cross is placed on the forehead using the ashes. Sometimes a small card or piece of paper is distributed on which each person writes a change he wishes to make. The cards are then brought to the altar to be burned along with the palm branches. The ash cross is an outward sign of the person's sorrow and repentance.

Some church traditions change the sanctuary colors to red for Maundy Thursday, a symbol of the disciples and through them the community of the church. Since communion is often observed on Maundy Thursday in the context of Passover, the emphasis is on the gathered community in the presence of Jesus the Christ.

What is **Maundy Thursday**?

Maundy Thursday, also called Holy Thursday, is a service to commemorate Jesus' Last Supper. The word Maundy comes from the Latin *mandatum*, which means "commandment." At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment to love one another as he had loved them (John 13:34). Prior to breaking the bread with the disciples, Jesus washed their feet. Maundy Thursday worship services include Holy Communion and sometimes foot washing as well.

Traditionally, the sanctuary colors of Good Friday is black. It symbolizes death, not only the death of Jesus but the death of the whole world under the burden of sin. In this sense, it also represents the hopelessness and the endings that come as human beings try to make their own way in the world without God. Black is used through Holy Saturday, although it is always replaced by white before sunrise of Easter Sunday.

The source of our term for the Friday before Easter, "**Good Friday**," is not clear. It may be a corruption of the English phrase "God's Friday". It is the common name for the day among English- and Dutch-speaking people, a day that proclaims God's purpose of loving and redeeming the world through the cross of Jesus Christ, a day that is good because God was drawing the world to God's self in Christ. We call it "good" because we look backward at the crucifixion through the lens of Easter!

Why is Easter on a different day each year?

In 325 AD, the Council of Nicea set the date for the celebration of **Easter** as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, March 21. For this reason, the date will change each year and can fall anywhere from March 22 to April 25.

We enjoy celebrating Palm Sunday. The children get to make paper palm branches and for many is one of the few times they get to take an active role in "big church." We wave the palm branches and celebrate. And we all love Easter Sunday! It is a happy time, with flowers, new clothes, and the expectation of Spring in the air.

Resources: <http://www.cresourcei.org/cylent.html#Ash> By Dennis Bratcher
<http://infoserv.umc.org/faq/lenteaster.htm>