

Understanding Lent and Easter

Before we begin the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday (February 25th this year), the Church has had the custom of celebrating **Shrove Tuesday** - the day before Ash Wednesday. On this day it was the custom to use up all milk, eggs, and fat in a household since these were not allowed in the strict fasting of Lent. Doing this meant that Shrove Tuesday foods became very rich, and the day has often been known by the name "Fat Tuesday." Recipes for all manner of rich foods that medieval Christians consumed during Carnival have been preserved in various pre-Lenten traditions. Such feasting developed in part to prepare body and spirit for the long fast and in part to use up the foods that could not be stored during Lent.

Doughnuts filled with raisins and apples were one of the first European carnival foods to become popular in America. More widely known are pancakes.

Another name for this day is *Carnival* meaning "farewell to meat". Medieval Christians developed carnivals to celebrate one last time before the Lenten fast.

The name of Shrove Tuesday, however, is derived from a different custom: that of confessing sins (being shriven) in order to begin the spiritual battle of Lent renewed by an awareness of God's power and mercy.

Both confession and festival are still excellent ways to prepare for Lent. Perhaps we, too, can find in confession a renewal of joy in God's forgiveness. Perhaps we, too, can find in festival a renewal of foolishness and fun with our Christian brothers and sisters.

Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencton* meaning the time of year when the days grow long.

The season begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with the Easter Triduum that includes Maundy Thursday through Easter Sunday. Because Lent is determined by the movable date of Easter Day, the dates are different each year. Do you know an easy way to find these dates for any year? (Hint: look in the Prayer Book!)

Lent is forty days long excluding Sundays. Since every Sunday is a "little Easter" celebrating the resurrection, Sundays remain feast days even during the solemn Lenten season. The five Lenten Sundays are followed by the Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday), which ushers in Holy Week.

In the early church, Lent was the time of preparation for the Easter baptism of converts to the faith. Persons, called catechumens, who were to receive the sacrament of "new birth," were expected to fast and prepare during these weeks. The Bible readings appointed for the five Sundays in Lent provide a short course in the meaning of baptism.

Lenten themes:

?? Baptism.

?? Fasting - the 40 days of Lent represent the 40 days of fasting and temptation that Jesus spent in the wilderness. Self-denial is an opportunity for discipline, the sacrifice of our will to the

purpose of God.

?? Reconciliation - Lent is a time for reconciliation with God, self, and others.

Symbols and Traditions of Lent:

- ?? Color: purple for penitence and royalty, or rough linen or a similar material, unbleached, raw, plain, and austere, to reflect the mood of Lent. This is based upon the sackcloth of Old Testament mourning.
- ?? Ashes - these are prepared from the previous year's palms used on Palm Sunday. The ashes symbolize our mortality and sorrow for our sins. The people of the Hebrew scriptures put ashes on their foreheads as a sign of penitence.
- ?? Alleluias, joyful canticles, the *Gloria in excelsis* are omitted from worship and replaced with songs and responses that are more in keeping with Lent's contemplative mood.
- ?? Vestments and hangings are more austere. Flowers are omitted from the altar.
- ?? The Cross is symbol of Christ and his sacrifice, love, salvation, redemption, atonement, and victory.
- ?? Retreat time during Lent is set aside for teaching and learning, spiritual growth, fasting and self-denial, mediation and retreats.

Shrove Tuesday Pancakes

2 1/2 cups flour ; 1 1/4 teaspoons baking soda ; 1 tsp salt
1 egg; 3 cups buttermilk; 4-6 tablespoons butter

Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt into a mixing bowl. In another bowl, beat together the egg and buttermilk. Pour the egg and buttermilk mixture into the flour mixture and stir just until no dry flour is visible. Do not over mix.

Heat a skillet or griddle over medium high heat, until a drop of water flicked on the griddle's surface sizzles. Remove the pan from the heat, and put in 2 T butter. When it is melted, return to the heat, add the pancake batter by spoonfuls. Stir the batter to mix in the butter. Cook until bubbles appear on the edges, turn and finish cooking.

Makes 18-24 pancakes.

?? Stations of the Cross began in the Holy Land as a series of devotions along the *Via Dolorosa* (Way of Sorrow) and later spread to parish churches, where the faithful stop to pray and reflect along a way that outlines Jesus' passion.

Social Justice Themes for Lent

Ash Wednesday raises ethical issues through the Litany of Penitence (BCP267-269):

- ?? exploitation of other people
- ?? dishonesty in daily life and work
- ?? indifference to injustice, human need, suffering, and cruelty
- ?? prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us
- ?? waste and pollution of God's creation.

As we explore more fully the Baptismal Covenant and the covenant of the Torah, we come increasingly aware of how far we have strayed from God's ways.

Evangelism and Lent

- ?? How is your personal Lenten journey opening you to inviting unchurched family and friends to join you at worship?
- ?? What programs and services is your church offering that would be particularly appealing to newcomers?
- ?? Use your mite box offering to meet needs in your local community. This will also raise the visibility of your congregation in your community.
- ?? Encourage your children to invite their friends to church.

Holy Week is when the church dramatizes the events leading up to and including the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. It begins with the Sunday of the Passion, or Palm Sunday, and the joyous triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and ends with the vespers of Easter Sunday evening.

The name **Maundy Thursday** comes from the Latin *mandatum* or “command,” from the words of Jesus in the gospel of John: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34).

Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of our Lord. It is known as “Good” because of the new life brought about by his victory of the cross.

Easter is a festival season of fifty days whose first day is Easter Day, the Sunday of the Resurrection, and whose last day is the Day of Pentecost. Easter begins after sundown on Holy Saturday. The celebration of Easter is initiated with the Easter Vigil, which can be observed after sundown but ideally is kept just before sunrise, so that the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection comes with the dawn of the new day.

Easter Day is the principal feast of the church year. The word “Easter” comes from Easter, a Teutonic goddess whose name is associated with springtime, growth, and fertility. In most languages the name of the day is *Pascha*, which means “Passover.”

Symbols and Traditions of Easter

- ?? Color is white for festival and joy.
- ?? The paschal candle - the darkness of death giving way to light and life, symbolizing Jesus’ passing over from death into life. It also symbolizes the light of Creation, the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness, the fire of Pentecost. Pascha is Greek for “Passover.” The paschal candle is lit from Easter through the Day of Pentecost. The year’s date is carved into the candle to show that the Good News of Easter is for every age, including us today.
- ?? Baptisms and confirmations have traditionally occurred in this season of initiation. Ideally these sacraments take place at the Great Vigil of Easter.
- ?? The empty cross, a sign of the victory of Easter.
- ?? Alleluias and the Gloria are present once again in the liturgy after their absence in Lent.
- ?? Butterfly symbolizes resurrection or new life from a cocoon.
- ?? Egg the Easter symbol from which new life emerges.
- ?? Pomegranate is a regal symbol, filled with red seeds that further symbolize life and fertility and the open tomb.
- ?? Ear of corn as it burst open we see the fertile new life within.

? ? Easter lily is a symbol of purity and of beautiful new life.

Social Justice Themes of Easter

The collect for the Third Sunday of Easter asks god to “open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work.” It reminds us that:

?? the actions of the church and of individual Christians must be judged as to whether they are redeeming or demeaning works.

?? The healing ministry of the church involves the healing of society as well as individuals.

Ascension Day: is celebrated forty days after Easter Sunday (therefore always on a Thursday) and recalls our Lords’ exaltation by being taken gloriously up into heaven. After Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, scripture tells us, he was seen for forth days before he ascended into heaven to be “seated at the right hand of God the Father.” After Jesus ascension, the disciples awaited the promised Spirit in Jerusalem.

LENTEN ACTIVITES FOR ALL AGES:

FAREWELL TO ALLELUIA: The penitential nature of Lent means that we omit from worship the Alleluias, joyful canticles, and the Gloria in excelsis. These are replaced with songs and responses that are more in keeping with Lent's contemplative mood. An activity to teach and reinforce this for your church family is to "bury the alleluias." Make an alleluia poster or banner. There could be one for the church, or perhaps every Sunday School class could make one. Put the banner in a cardboard tube or envelope. At the end of your Shrove Tuesday celebration, or during Sunday School the last Sunday of Epiphany, carry the banner in a procession to its' Lenten hiding place. This can be somewhere in the church, or even buried outside. (Just remember where you put it!) On Easter morning before the service, "resurrect" your banner and carry it in the Easter morning procession.

LENTEN CALENDARS: We are called to observe Lent through discipline and self-denial. One way to learn and observe this in our homes and churches is through a Lenten calendar. Using the enclosed calendar outline: write the month and date in each square beginning with Ash Wednesday, February 13, and ending with Easter Day, March 31. This will take two calendar pages. Next, in each square write a discipline or act of self denial. These are simple "to do" lists. It can be tied into a mite box offering, where, for example, you give 5 cents for each coat in your house, or 10 cents for each glass of milk you had today. Sundays should not be "to do" lists but perhaps a suggested Bible reading. Copy and distribute your completed calendar. The calendar can be tied into a Lenten Mite Box Offering and the Diocesan Children’s Lenten Offering. Mite boxes for this year are available from Episcopal Parish Services, 1-800903-5544 or www.episcopalparishservices.org. You can also give out stickers with the calendar. As each daily task is completed a sticker is placed on the rectangle.

BUTTERFLY BANNER: Lent is a time of death into the new life of Easter. To help people of all ages better understand this, craft projects and visual symbols are often very helpful. For this banner you will need:

- ✂✂ Cardboard toilet paper rolls (enough for 1/family)
- ✂✂ Felt in all colors
- ✂✂ Pattern of a butterfly – one is enclosed
- ✂✂ Instruction sheet (1/family) – see below
- ✂✂ Brown or white paper bags, string or yarn to tie shut (1/family)

Assemble prior to Palm Sunday: cut out butterfly patterns. Put one butterfly into each toilet paper tube. Put tube and instructions (see below) in paper bag.

Hand out 1/family after the Worship service on Palm Sunday.

Easter Morning: as people return their decorated butterflies to you, put them on a large felt banner. The words across the top of the banner should read “He Is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!” You can also put your church name on it. Carry the banner in the Easter morning procession(s).

Instruction card should read: (put a copy in each bag). Just as the butterfly moves from cocoon to butterfly, we move from death into new life at Easter. Remove the butterfly from its’ cocoon. Using markers or fabric pens, write your family’s name(s) on the butterfly. Then decorate it – you can use buttons, glitter, fabric, markers...whatever your family wants to use! Be creative and colorful! Return your butterfly to (name of person in charge) prior to the service on Easter morning and watch your butterfly “fly” down the aisle!

Compiled and written by Carolyn Chilton. Major source: The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Education by Joseph P. Russell, Cowley Publications.