



A Sacred Season

With the arrival of February comes the arrival of a new season in our life together as people of God: the Season of Lent. Whether this is your fifteenth or fiftieth journey through this season, I am struck each year by the new things that God is prepared to reveal to me with the arrival of Lent. As we come closer to Ash Wednesday, I invite you to wonder the same: what new things about myself, my faith, and my relationship with God and others is the divine ready to reveal to me this year? How will I make space in my life to pay attention to God's voice this season?

History Of Lent

The Season of Lent is an ancient one that has its origins in Egypt, where those of the Christian tradition (around the beginning of the fourth century) began to practice a forty-day physical, emotional, and spiritual fast that imitated Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness immediately after his baptism. The Christian church in Egypt celebrated Jesus' baptism on January 6, and thus Lent immediately followed that date. As this fasting period continued to develop within the church, this time began to be designated for the instruction of new converts to Christianity who would then be baptized at the end of the forty days (this group of new initiates was called the catechumenate). Following the lead of the Christian church in Egypt, other Christian churches began to adopt the concept of this fasting period placing it immediately prior to Easter instead of immediately after January 6. This was because the churches in Rome and North Africa were already doing some kind of preparation and instruction time before the baptism of new converts at Easter, therefore this new length of fasting time fit well into the church's annual rhythm.

A major theme of the liturgical season of Lent is reconciliation. In the following weeks during Sunday Morning Worship you will hear readings from the Bible that discuss Jesus' relationship with those he meets, with his disciples, and with God the Creator. As we journey through this Season of Lent today, we are invited to reflect on how God calls us to be in relationship with both God and one another (and the ways that we have failed to live into this calling). Another purpose of the Season of Lent in the early church, in fact, was as a penitential time—this forty-day time period was a time for reflection and repentance for those who had been isolated from the community (and it led directly to their reintegration into that same community). One early church leader, Cyril of Jerusalem, described the Season of Lent as a "period of grace": "You have a long period of grace, forty days for repentance. You have plenty of time to discard and wash thoroughly your soul's apparel, and so to clothe yourself and come back." The Season of Lent is a perfect time to reflect on the brokenness of the world and all of the ways in which we feel separated from God and one another. We can do this safely during this forty-day period because we know that God has already defeated death, has promised to be present with us, and empowers us as community to be a living sign of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Today, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America observes Lent as a forty-day period that begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with the proclamation of Christ's resurrection at the Easter Sunday Service. These forty days do not include the Sundays throughout the season, because in the early church Sunday was not a day for fasting—rather, it was a day to come together, share the meal of

the Eucharist, and celebrate Christ's presence among the community. The church marks the penitential and reflective nature of this liturgical season with the color purple.

Journey Through Lent With Faith United

Lent is a gift to us, because it offers an intentional season when we are invited to tell the truth about the brokenness of ourselves and the world and place our trust in God's ability and desire to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. Lent removes the pressure to pretend that we are okay, instead inviting us to the sacred space of sitting in God's presence just as we are. Lent is a season that we encounter day by day, patiently—it is a season that our hearts need, especially now. As we approach the onset of this Sacred Season, I invite you to engage in a congregation-wide daily spiritual practice: reflective time with the Psalms. I have written a daily devotional for our whole congregation (and beyond—I hope you'll share it with others in your life!) for this Sacred Season. As we approach Ash Wednesday you will be able to find it on our website for download, or you'll be able to contact our office to request a physical copy. Each day you will be directed to a specific Psalm, and be offered two reflection questions. I pray that this daily time spent in God's word will ground you in love and mercy as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, led by our divine shepherd.

In Peace

Pastor Marissa