**Lent: A Journey of Self Reflection and Renewal March 2, 2022**

**Songs of worship: I Surrender All, What Shall I Render? Speak to My Heart Holy Spirit**

**What is Lent?** Lent is the six-week period leading up to Easter. It is 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. Starting 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 in a wedding, birthday, or a graduation. Lent invites us to make our minds and hearts ready for remembering Jesus’ life, death, and body resurrection.

**When does Lent start? (March 2nd - April 14th, 2022)** 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 the UK 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, dairy 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, or social media.

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

Sundays during Lent are very important to Christians around the world. Where 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.

**What does Shrove Tuesday mean?** Shrove Tuesday comes originally from the word shrive (meaning “absolve”). As the last day before the Lent, Shrove Tuesday was a day of self-examination where Christians would consider what sins they needed to repent of and what changes to their life or spiritual growth they would focus on during the fast. While Shrove Tuesday was a day for the purification of the soul, it also had a practical significance too, from which would emerge our modern-day tradition of pancakes.

In preparation for Lent centuries ago, those observing the fast would use Shrove Tuesday to also purify and remove from their house any of the items that they were foregoing for the 40 days. Traditionally this included meat, fish, eggs, fats, milk, and sugar – so Shrove Tuesday became the final blowout before Lent began!

These ingredients combine easily to make pancake batter, hence why in the UK Shrove Tuesday is now synonymous with the making, tossing and racing of pancakes. The gorging on rich foods on Shrove Tuesday also gives us the alternative name of Mardi Gras (meaning ‘Fat Tuesday’ in French), which in turn has grown into a whole carnival feast in Louisiana, USA.

**Why is Ash Wednesday called Ash Wednesday? March 2, 2022,** Ash Wednesday begins Lent. The day gets its name from the traditional blessing of the ashes taken after the burning of Palm branches (or crosses made from Palm leaves) from the previous year’s Palm Sunday celebrations. In some churches the ashes are used to draw a cross on the head of people to mark the beginning of their Lent fast. The drawing of a cross is often done while repeating the words “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15) or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

**What is Holy Week? (April 10th Palm Sunday – April 17th Easter)** Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week – the last week of Lent leading up to Easter. On Palm Sunday Christians everywhere remember Jesus’ triumphant arrival in Jerusalem. Church services will often include a procession of palm branches, symbolic of the ones laid at Jesus’ feet as he rode into the city. Palm crosses will also be distributed on this day, to be kept until the following year’s Ash Wednesday as a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As Holy Week draws to a close and Easter approaches, we have Holy Wednesday, commemorating Judas Iscariot’s intent to betray Jesus; Maundy Thursday, commemorating the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples in which he predicts his betrayal by the following denial by Peter; and Good Friday, the day on which Christians around the world remember Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.

With Good Friday over, Christians look forward to Easter Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from his tomb.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” **Mark 16:5-7**

**Questions for self-reflection:**

1.  When I wake up on Easter Sunday morning, how will I be different?
2. Is there a habit or sin in my life that repeatedly gets in the way of loving God with my whole heart or loving my neighbor as myself? How do I address that habit?
3. Is there anyone in my life from whom I need to ask forgiveness or pursue reconciliation?
4. What practical steps am I taking to carve out time for daily prayer, meditation and Be Still and Know moments with God?
5. What spiritual discipline can I continue to improve upon?
6. What are some things in my life that I tell myself I need but I really don’t? Can I give one or two of them up (at least for the remainder of Lent)?
7. How is what I am doing this Lent helping me grow closer to Christ?
8. What can I tell myself even when it is hard to deny myself as I honor Christ in Lent?
9. What two virtues do I want to focus on during this Lenten season (e.g., patience, charity, kindness, gentleness, temperance, love etc.)

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Matthew 4:1-11(NKJV)** - **Satan Tempts Jesus**

**4**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2**And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. **3**Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

**4**But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

**5**Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, **6**and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’

and,

‘In *their* hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

**7**Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’ ”

**8**Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9**And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

**10**Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

**11**Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.