



## THE LOWDOWN ON LENT

From "What is Lent?"  
[www.elca.org/communication/whatislent.html](http://www.elca.org/communication/whatislent.html)

Lent is a 40-day liturgical season that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes at the Great Vigil of Easter. Sundays are not included in the 40-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Though not biblical, Lent has long been a tradition in the Christian Church, and it is thought that the tradition of the 40 days recalls the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, fasting and being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Lent is considered a time of penance and discipline.

Because of Lent's penitential nature, worship tends to be more solemn, and purple is the liturgical color of the season. Some congregations remove flowers from the worship space, and for many, songs of praise like the Gloria in Excelsis ("Glory in the highest") and expressions of joy like the exclamation "Alleluia" ("Praise the

Lord") are removed from the liturgy until Easter. Many congregations hold special mid-week worship services and promote other devotional activities to help their members concentrate on the Lenten disciplines of fasting, almsgiving (charity) and prayer.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. On this day, Christians focus on their complete sinfulness and the necessity of Christ's suffering and death to insure their salvation. Ashes are referred to many times in the Old Testament as signs of sorrow, mourning, humility, and repentance, and on Ash Wednesday they are used to remind people of their mortality -- that "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Many churches use ashes during Ash Wednesday worship in a ritual called the Imposition of Ashes. In this custom, ashes are mixed with a small amount of oil and applied to the forehead of each worshipper.

The Sunday of the Passion or Palm Sunday begins the last week of Lent, known as Holy Week. During

this holiest time of the church year, the worship services relive the final week of our Lord's human life. Holy Week includes Maundy Thursday, when Christians observe Christ's "Last Supper" -- the institution of the Sacrament of Holy Communion -- and the mandate to serve one another in love. Good Friday commemorates the imprisonment, trial and death by crucifixion of Jesus.

Lent culminates on Saturday evening of Holy Week in the Great Vigil of Easter, when Christians gather in darkness, light new fire, and celebrate the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in the resurrection of Christ.

## FEATURED RESOURCES

- ELCA Resources for Lent- [www.elca.org/communication/lentresources.html](http://www.elca.org/communication/lentresources.html)
- ELCA World Hunger Lent prayers and Litanies - [www.elca.org/hunger/resources/ideas/prayers2.html](http://www.elca.org/hunger/resources/ideas/prayers2.html)
- Pericope Partners (vignettes about ministries of the ELCA, interpret the partnerships we share as a whole church; use in Sunday bulletins and congregational newsletters) - [www.elca.org/pericope](http://www.elca.org/pericope)

## MONTHLY BIBLE VERSE

*This Bible verse was selected by Harold Usgaard, bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, for everyone in the synod to study.*

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

ROMANS 5:8



## ABOUT OUR SYNOD

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod is a faith community of 130,000 baptized people in 184 congregations as well as related institutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Its geographic area includes 15 counties in the southeastern corner of Minnesota.

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