



Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a public act of confession and contrition. Acknowledging that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we stand in solidarity as fellow creatures before our Creator, acutely aware of our mortality. In the face of our transience, we pledge ourselves anew to live unto God's Word in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word that remains forever.

Historically, Ash Wednesday was a time when penitents were presented for church discipline during Lent, culminating in reconciliation on Maundy Thursday. Ash Wednesday is also the occasion when would-be disciples of Christ known as catechumens were enrolled in the catechumenate, a special time of learning the basics of the faith in preparation for baptism on Easter Sunday or during the Easter Vigil. In some traditions, Ash Wednesday is a fast day, beginning the Lenten time of fasting and preparation for the Great Three Days that culminate in Easter.

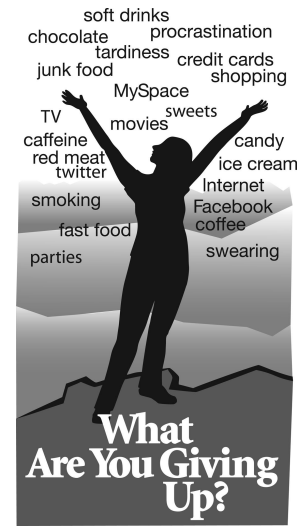
A TIME TO TURN

An excerpt from the *Companion to the Book of Common Worship* (Geneva Press, 2003, 109-110) The Lenten journey from the ashes of death to resurrected life begins on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, which signifies a time to turn around, to change directions, to repent. This first day of Lent reminds us that unless we are willing to die to our old selves, we cannot be raised to new life with Christ. The first step of this journey calls us to acknowledge and confront our mortality, individually and corporately. In many traditions, this is symbolized through the imposition of ashes — placing a cross on one's forehead. During the imposition of ashes the words: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19) are repeated again and again. We are to remember that we are but temporary creatures, always on the edge of death. On Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten trek through the desert toward Easter.

Ashes on the forehead is a sign of our humanity and a reminder of our mortality. Lent is not a matter of being good, and wearing ashes is not to show off one's faith. The ashes are a reminder to us and our communities of our finite creatureliness. The ashes we wear on our Lenten journey symbolize the dust and broken debris of our lives as well as the reality that eventually each of us will die. Trusting in the "accomplished fact" of Christ's resurrection, however, we listen for the Word of God in the time-honored stories of the church's Lenten journey. We follow Jesus into the wilderness, resist temptation, fast, and proceed "on the way" to Jerusalem and the cross. Our Lenten journey is one of *metanoia* ("turning around"), of changing directions from self-serving toward the self-giving way of the cross.

Learn more about Fasting in the Bible at:

http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/worship/pdfs/fasting_in_the_bible_and_reformed_tradition.pdf



The Season of Lent

The season of Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days — like the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call to Ninevah to repent and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. (The Sundays in Lent are not counted in this reckoning of the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter, as every Lord's Day is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.)

In the early church, Lent was a time of preparation for the celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil. In many communities of faith it remains a time to equip and nurture candidates for baptism and confirmation and to reflect deeply on the theme of baptismal discipleship.

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

An excerpt from the *Companion to the Book of Common Worship* (Geneva Press, 2003 110-111) What we hear during Lent is the power and possibility of the paschal mystery, and that the way of the cross, the way to Easter, is through death. To appropriate the new life that is beyond the power of death means we must die with Christ who was raised for us. To live for Christ, we must die with him. New life requires a daily surrendering of the old life, letting go of the present order, so that we may embrace the new humanity. "I die every day!" asserts Paul (1 Corinthians 15:31). Resurrection necessitates death as a preceding act. The church's peculiar Lenten claim is that in dying we live, that all who are baptized into Christ are baptized into his death. To be raised with Christ means one must also die with Christ. In order to embrace the resurrection, we must experience the passion of Jesus. The way of the cross, the way to Easter, is through death of the "old self." In dying, we live. Therefore, at the beginning of Lent, we are reminded that our possessions, our rulers, our empires, our projects, our families and even our lives do not last forever. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). The liturgies throughout Lent try to pry loose our fingers, one by one, from presumed securities and plunge us into unknown baptismal waters, waters that turn out to be not only our death tomb but surprisingly our womb of life. Rather than falling back into nothingness, we fall back on everlasting arms. Death? How can we fear what we have already undergone in baptism? It is the power of the resurrection on the horizon ahead that draws us into repentance toward the cross and tomb. Through the intervention of God's gracious resurrection, lifelong changes in our values and behavior become possible. By turning from the end of the "old self" in us, Lenten repentance makes it possible for us to affirm joyfully, "Death is no more!" and to aim toward the landscape of the new age. Faithfully adhering to the Lenten journey of "prayer, fasting and almsgiving" leads to the destination of Easter.

During the final week, Holy Week, we hear the fullness of Christ's passion, his death, and resurrection. From Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and on to the Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday), all of Holy Week focuses on the passion. As his followers, we travel Christ's path of servanthood through the Lord's Supper and the suffering of the cross toward the glory of Easter, all of which underscores the inseparable link between the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Prayers for Lent

These prayers might be used in a variety of settings: Opening Prayers (at the beginning of worship) or concluding collects (after the Prayers of the People); for church websites or newsletters; or in personal, small group, or family devotion.

First Sunday in Lent

Holy One, whom alone we worship and serve, your Word and Spirit sustain us in the wilderness. Keep us faithful in times of struggle and testing so that we may enter into your glorious realm with Jesus Christ our Savior.
Matthew 4:1-11 / Year A

Holy God, by the grace of Jesus Christ you know the tests and trials we face. Walk with us through this wilderness. Come to us with ministers of healing and visit us with messengers of hope, so that we may return to you in faith, believing the good news of the gospel; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Mark 1:9-15 / Year B

Gracious God,
you are our way in the wilderness.
In our own times of testing
be our spiritual nourishment,
protect us with your angels,
and show your authority in our lives,
so that we may hunger for righteousness and live in peace and safety,
worshiping and serving you alone; through Christ Jesus our Lord.
Luke 4:1-13 / Year C

Second Sunday in Lent

God of great love,
you alone can take away the sting of sin
and remove the venom of death.
Show us a sign of your saving power in Jesus Christ, so that we may believe in him
and receive the gift of eternal life;
through Christ, our healer and redeemer.
John 3:1-17 / Year A

Eternal God, holy and faithful,
what can we give in return for our life?

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Teach us to take up the cross of Christ with grateful hearts and humble spirits, offering all for the sake of the gospel, so that we may receive life in fullness; through Christ, who is coming in glory. Mark 8:31-38 / Year B

Lord our God, blessed is the one who comes in your name!
Gather us in your gentle presence as a hen shelters her brood beneath her wings.

Finish the work you have begun in us so that we may show your glory; through Jesus Christ our peace.
Luke 13:31-35 / Year C

Third Sunday in Lent

God of spirit and truth,
you alone satisfy our dry and weary souls. Let us drink from the spring of your mercy so that we may never be thirsty
for the gift of your saving love;
through Jesus Christ, the water of life. John 4:5-42 / Year A

Holy God, in Jesus Christ you have built for us an eternal house, a temple of righteousness, a place of gracious plenty for the hungry
and abundant life for the poor in spirit.

Fill us with zeal for the body of Christ. Overturn the tables of corruption and greed and upset the imbalance of injustice,
so that we may worship you in spirit and truth; through Jesus Christ, who is risen indeed.
John 2:13-22 / Year B

God of patience and compassion, cause our lives to bear good fruit – the fruit of repentance –
so that others may taste and see your goodness and grace;

through Christ our Lord. Luke 13:1-9 / Year C

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Gracious God, giver of all light and vision, by your Word you made the day and night.

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Let your wondrous work be revealed in us so that your glory might shine like the sun;
through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. John 9:1-41 / Year A

Loving God, giver of all light and life, you sent Jesus Christ into the world not to condemn, but to save.
Help us to lift up the light of Christ

so that the world might believe in him and receive the gift of eternal life; through Christ, the light of the world. John 3:14-21 / Year B

God of the lost, the least,
and all who long for home,
when we wander from your ways
and waste the gifts you have given us, welcome us back, we pray,
so that we may celebrate and rejoice
in your presence forever;
through Jesus Christ your beloved Son. Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 / Year C

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Christ our Savior, you call us by name, leading us from death into eternal life. Awaken and unbind us by your Word, so that we may live and grow in faith, sharing your saving love with others; for you are the resurrection and the life. John 11:1-45 / Year A

God of thundering glory and wondrous love, you lifted up Jesus Christ from the earth to draw all people to your holy name.
Like grains of wheat that fall to the dust, teach us to die—and so to bear much fruit, giving our lives for the sake of the gospel, following and serving Christ Jesus forever. John 12:20-33 / Year B

Loving God, how lavishly you pour out the costly gift of your grace upon us. Fill our homes and our lives
with the fragrance of your love,

so that we may show your glory and serve your people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. John 12:1-8 / Year C

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