



07 March 2025

## LENT

Lent is a time of preparing for Easter observed by Catholics and some Protestants. It is a period of 40 days (46 days counting Sundays) which begins with Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter. This last Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> was Ash Wednesday. The 40 days of Lent was formalized in the Catholic Church at the First Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.



Our church has not observed Lent, but some of our people have, and we may have some questions about it. So today let's take a very brief overview look at Lent.

Lent was started as a way to remind people not only of Christ's death as they approached Easter, but also to remind people of the importance of repentance. One Catholic description is,

“During Lent we seek the Lord in prayer by reading Sacred Scripture; we serve by giving alms; we practice self-control through fasting. We are called not only to abstain from luxuries during Lent, but to a true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ's will more faithfully.”

“Since we observe Advent”, it is asked, “Why don't we observe Lent?”

Historically, some of the Protestant reformers did not observe Lent as part of their rejection of Catholic ritualism, sacramentalism, legalism, because of the prescribed or obligatory observance of Lent, as well as the reformers' focus on the authority of the Bible and the priority of the gospel.

One of the minor things Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli is remembered for is preaching a sermon defending the right to eat sausage during Lent, which the Catholic church had forbidden. He based his argument on Martin Luther's statement that “Christians are free to fast or not to fast because the Bible does not prohibit the eating of meat during Lent.” This sermon helped spark the fire of reformation in Switzerland.

Over the years the observance of Lent has developed much more sacramental weight, and is seen by some as a means of grace, of earning favor with God.

It is clear that the Bible does not direct us to observe Lent, nor does it forbid us to observe Lent. There are some who believe we should only do that which the New Testament directs us to do, and we are not free to add things, whether it be in observing days or music and how we worship, and

so we should not observe Lent. Others see that there is freedom to do anything that is not specifically forbidden in Scripture, and so we are free to observe or not observe Lent.

At this point let's turn to God's instruction through the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 14.

“One person values one day over another, another values every day the same. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and the one who eats, does so with regard to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God” (5-6).

In areas of freedom we are free to make choices and follow them, and that includes observing special days and choices in foods—including a time, a discipline of preparation for Easter.

How about a few modest observations.

- While most evangelical churches encourage preparation and celebration of Christ's birth during Advent-Christmas, the emphasis on Easter seems to be retreating. Whether we have a special season of preparation for Easter or not, the death and resurrection of Jesus should be center stage because it is essential to the gospel, to our salvation. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth,  
“For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- Focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus leads us to grow in our understanding and appreciation of both our great sinfulness and His great love and grace for us.
- Focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus also will motivate us to stay close to Him, serve Him with joy.

I have found that personal, spiritual preparation makes both Christmas and Easter more meaningful and joyful. Start preparing for Easter by reading the gospel accounts, Christian books (check our church library), and keeping your focus on what Christ has done for you.

Pastor Lyle