

THE TERMS

Lent is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "spring." The season lasts from Ash Wednesday until Maundy Thursday of Holy Week.

Ash Wednesday is the day on which Lent begins, often observed in worship by receiving a cross of ashes on the forehead.

Holy Week includes the days from Palm Sunday through Easter.

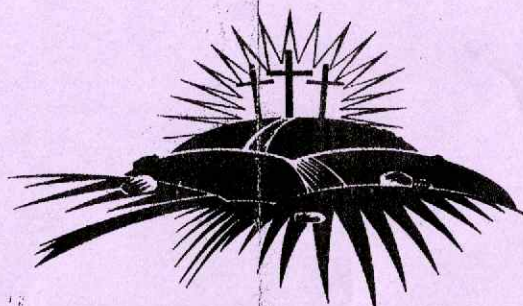
Palm or Passion Sunday has contrasting names, one because of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (to waving palm branches), the other because this Sunday begins Jesus' days of suffering and death.

Maundy Thursday gets its name from Jesus' "new commandment", to love one another, which he spoke during the Passover meal when he washed his disciples' feet and instituted the Lord's Supper.

Good Friday marks the events of Jesus' trial, crucifixion, death and burial, sometimes with special *Tre Ore* (three-hour) observances.

Easter comes from the name of an ancient spring festival. Easter is the "great Sunday" after which each Sunday worship service is modeled.

Fasting, Abstinence, Almsgiving, Self-denial and Penance refer to the Christian practice of intentionally giving one's time, energy, and possessions for others, especially the needy, as Christ gave himself for us.



LENT

THE SYMBOLS

Colors: *Violet* is the usual color for all of Lent, symbolizing repentance. *Black* dominates on Good Friday, while *white* is the color for Easter.

Ashes placed on the forehead hint at an ancient ritual—covering oneself with ashes in penitence. Receiving the cross-shaped "smudge" reminds us that we are dust and is a public statement of repentance. Usually the ashes are from the previous year's Palm Sunday branches, illustrating the circle of the church year.

Forty Days of Lent parallel the 40 days which Jesus spent in fasting and prayer in the wilderness.

Palm branches in ancient times signified victory and were used in triumphal procession of Romans and Jews.

THE SEASON

Easter is the oldest Christian season. **Lent** appeared sometime later. We use ancient terms and symbols from times and cultures foreign to us during these seasons. But Lent and Easter are alive and well in the Church, because they focus on the center of our faith from which we draw our life in Christ.

Lent is a time of *preparation*. The observance of Lent during the 40 days (plus six Sundays) before Easter appeared in the early Church as an imitation of Jesus' 40 days of self-denial and prayer in the wilderness. New adult converts to Christianity practiced Lenten penance, personal asceticism, and prayer. These prepared them to receive the Baptism, Confirmation, and their first Lord's Supper in the Saturday evening vigil before Easter.

The Lord's Supper, Easter, and Baptism are related to the Jewish Passover, as it commemorates the Old Testament Israelites' rescue from death (the Exodus) and their new life as God's chosen people.

Easter, *the* Sunday of the Church Year, is followed by 50 days leading to the Pentecost festival. For new Christians these first days after entering the church were a time to explore how the experience of the Easter vigil would change their lives.

Today Lent remains a time for us to examine our lives, preparing for Holy Week and Easter. On the day of Christ's resurrection we celebrate *our baptism*, for baptism joins all God's people with the death and victorious resurrection of our Lord.