

Resources for a Holy Lent

“Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting...I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”

From the bidding prayer, Ash Wednesday service, p.265, *Book of Common Prayer*

Why—and how—do Christians observe Lent today? What are the practices, new and old, that make Lent more than “after Mardi Gras” or “before Easter?” How do we teach our children about Lent?

This brief pamphlet describes some of the traditional Lenten practices and suggests resources for deepening your experience of them, whether you have observed Lent all your life or are just beginning to learn about it.

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Lent—what is it?

The prayer quoted on the preceding page goes on to say that in the early days of the Church, Lent was a period of preparing converts for Baptism and for encouraging notorious sinners to be reconciled with God and with the Church. Later, the emphasis shifted to the importance of spiritual and physical discipline and sacrifice to one's spiritual health. Today, many Christians strive to strike a balance between "giving up" material pleasures and "taking on" study, prayer, and charitable work. At St. James, we express these themes through worship reminding us that Jesus' 40 days of prayer and fasting were a time of preparation for our salvation, as well as through educational programs intended to help children and adults better understand His ministry and ours.

It is hard to overlook Lent at St. James. There is a different look, sound, and feel to our worship. Family services, special liturgies, educational programs, and additional opportunities for community and private prayer underscore the holiness of the season.

The traditional **Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper** harks back to a time when committed Christians removed every vestige of rich and satisfying food—primarily milk, eggs, and butter—from their homes in preparation for Lent. What better way of ridding the pantry than making pancakes? The name Shrove Tuesday comes from the old English term "shriven," referring to confession and absolution of sins. In France the day was known as Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday)—an observance that has certainly evolved into an art form! Join us for less raucous but no less joyful indulgence on **Tuesday, March 28**, from 6:30—8:00 pm. Don't forget to thank the youth for hosting this popular event!

Ash Wednesday marks the start of Lent on **March 1** this year. The placing of ashes on the forehead with the admonition, "Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return," is a tangible sign of our mortality and our need for repentance. The ashes come from burned palms from the previous Palm Sunday, and remind us of the torture and death awaiting Jesus after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At St. James we introduce these concepts in Sunday School, where the palms are burned on the last Sunday before Ash Wednesday, and at a special family service at 5:30 p.m. on Ash Wednesday. Imposition of ashes and Holy Eucharist will also take place at 7:00 a.m., noon, and 7:30 p.m., with music at the evening service.

Our **Sunday worship** is different in Lent as well. There are no flowers, the vestments and hangings are a solemn purple, and hymns reflect the themes of the season. The service begins with a sung litany or Decalogue (Ten Commandments). The **Palm Sunday** services on April 9 include special music and a dramatic reading of one of the accounts of the Passion (from the Latin for "suffering") of Jesus.

Holy Eucharist is celebrated at 7:00 a.m. on **Fridays during Lent**, and every day during **Holy Week** except Good Friday. These services provide an opportunity for you to observe this solemn season and still get to work on time! Volunteers from the congregation take turns offering meditations on the Scriptures assigned for these days.

Maundy Thursday (from the Latin for “command”) celebrates Jesus’ great gift of the Holy Eucharist and marks the solemn observance of His lonely vigil in Gethsemane and subsequent arrest. At the end of this service, scheduled at 7:30 p.m. on April 13, all liturgical objects are removed from the public area of the church until Easter.

On **Good Friday, April 14**, we begin at 6:30 a.m. with the **Stations of the Cross**, an ancient devotion in which we walk the Way of the Cross with Jesus (outside, weather permitting.) An **afternoon vigil** from noon to 3:00 p.m. (drop-ins welcome) includes readings, hymns, and additional meditations from members of the parish. The **evening liturgy** at 7:30 p.m. includes both the solemn prayers of the vigil and the reading of the Passion story.

Easter is, of course, the crowning of the year for all Christians. At our Easter services on April 16, you will hear and sing joyful music, listen to the familiar but always awe-inspiring Resurrection Gospel, and find flowers on just about everything that is not moving. Our celebration begins just before dawn at 6:00 a.m. with the lighting of the first fire of Jesus’ triumph, as we celebrate the **Easter Vigil**, a ritual as old as Christianity itself. A special **Family Service** at 9:15 a.m. will help our little ones get past those Easter baskets and begin to understand what we are celebrating, with plenty of time to gather a few more eggs afterwards. The **Festival Service** with full choir and handbells will follow at 11:00 a.m., and those seeking a later service are invited to join our **Contemporary Worship** at 6:00 p.m.

Lent—how can I observe it?

Worship is at the core of our understanding and observance of Lent, which is why we add special weekday services and place so much emphasis on the liturgies of Holy Week. Prayer, study, reading of Scripture and self-discipline all have a place in your personal observance of Lent. As a Christian community, we offer additional ways to deepen your experience of Lent:

Wednesday evening programs, beginning on March 8, will provide an opportunity for worship, fellowship, learning, and meditation. We will begin with Holy Eucharist at 6:30 p.m., followed by a simple supper of soup and bread. At 7:30 you will have the opportunity to participate in one of two courses. “What Jesus Asked” will explore the questions Jesus raised in His teaching ministry, and what the answers might mean for us. A “Spiritual Gifts Workshop” will help you discern why some spiritual practices and ministries fill you up and leave you joyful, while others drain you. (Please note that this workshop will include a one-time Saturday morning session on March 4.)

Stations of the Cross. In addition to the special observance scheduled for Good Friday, this year, you will also have the opportunity throughout Lent to pray the Stations privately indoors with the aid of a series of pictorial representations.

The **labyrinth** is another ancient spiritual practice that is becoming popular today. The shape of the labyrinth, with a single path leading to the center (unlike a maze with its

false turns and blind alleys), is found in many cultures and religious traditions as early as 3500 BC. Examples of labyrinths have been found at ancient sites throughout the world as widely distant as Scandinavia, Great Britain, Mexico, and India. The concept of using the labyrinth as a walking meditation was introduced in the United States by Dr. Lauren Artress, canon at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, when she copied the design from Chartres Cathedral's labyrinth onto a portable canvas floor covering.

Much closer to home, our local community is invited to enjoy a beautiful permanent outdoor labyrinth at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 6030 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, Maryland. Venture a little farther afield, and you can find labyrinths at the Washington National Cathedral and the Church of the Epiphany in Washington, D.C..

The Saint James' Youth Group has reproduced the labyrinth—a place for prayer and meditation some describe as a spiritual discipline, a symbol for religious pilgrimage, a holy path of discovery—as an offering to enhance your journey through Holy Week. Our labyrinth will be placed in the Parish Hall for your use on Good Friday and Holy Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

For your reflection...

Repentance is a Kind of Circling

Repentance itself is nothing else but a kind of circling; to return to Him by repentance, from whom by sin we have turned away...which circle consists in two things; which two must needs be two different motions. One is to be done with the whole heart; the other is broken and rent; so as one and the same it cannot be. First, a turn, wherein we look forward to God, and with our whole heart resolve to turn to Him. Then, a turn again, wherein we look backward to our sins, wherein we have turned from God: and with beholding them, our very heart breaketh. These two are two distinct, both in nature and names. One, conversion from sin; the other, contrition for sin. One, resolving to amend that which is to come; the other, reflecting and sorrowing for that which is past. One, declining from evil to be done hereafter; the other, sentencing itself for evil done heretofore. These two between them make up a complete repentance, or a perfect revolution.

*Lancelot Andrewes
Sermon Four on Repentance
Ash Wednesday, 1619*

Solvitur ambulando.
It is solved by walking.

St. Augustine

Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.
Ephesians 5:2

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The Book of Common Prayer

