



WHY WE DO THE THINGS WE DO IN LENT

If you are new to the Anglican Church, please don't get spooked by our Lenten worship services! While much may seem unfamiliar, there are firm Biblical foundations for all that we do. It is our sincere hope that our liturgies during this solemn season might help shape our hearts for Christ, preparing us for the deepest sorrows and highest joys of Holy Week and Easter.

Lent is the forty-day season stretching between Ash Wednesday and Easter Day (not including Sundays in case you're doing the math, as they are always feast days celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord). The word Lent comes from an ancient Anglo-Saxon word *lecten*, which simply means "Spring." We set this time aside in the Church to remember the forty days Jesus spent in the desert after His baptism, being tempted by Satan, He was tempted by the lures of the World but chose, instead, to do the will of His Father. We seek to follow in His footsteps, struggling with our own temptations and praying for His grace to aid us in living holy lives for the sake of His glory.

Lent is traditionally a time of fasting, self-examination, prayer, and self-denial. Sometimes Christians choose to give something up for Lent, such as one meal each week, sweet foods, social media, or television. Others take something on, such as serving the poor on a regular basis or visiting a nursing home once a week.

In all events, fasting is about letting God have control over our lives, rather than being controlled by our diet, our self-oriented schedules, or our desire for media entertainment. We want to identify, in many small ways, with the ultimate sacrifice our Lord made for us as He went to the Cross for the sake of the world.

During Lent, we worship using what the Book of Common Prayer calls "Rite I." It is full of Thees and Thous, and, through that older language, breaks us out of our familiarity with our normal worship services and reminds us of the deeply penitential nature of the season. Along these same lines, our services become more "stripped down" during this season, with no altar flowers and no "Alleluias." Our priests wear purple vestments, in remembrance of the purple robe with which our Savior was arrayed in the midst of His passion. Our services begin with a somber Tolling of the Angelus, three sets of three tolls of a bell followed by nine tolls in honor of the Trinity.

After the Angelus, we chant the Ten Commandments, reminding ourselves of our duty to obey God's law, and then confess our constant failure to obey His law. We also sing the Kyrie, one of the earliest penitential supplications used in the Church. It is a song full of Lenten hope: Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!

In addition, we allow this season of austerity to extend throughout our lives, foregoing parties, slowing down our usual, frantic lives to listen to the voice of God and to honor the sacrifice of His Son, our Lord. And why do we do all of this? So that the joy of Easter might be felt more powerfully within our often cluttered hearts and minds. For when the joy of that great day arrives, our hearts will have been prepared for the celebration, through the observance of a Holy Lent!