

The Lord's Service Explained *Lenten Season*

What does Lent mean? The word “Lent” comes from the Middle English *lente* (“spring”) and from the Old English *lengten* (“to lengthen”), referring to the time of lengthening daylight from Christmas (around the Winter solstice) to Easter (Spring equinox). The Lenten season lasts 40 days, beginning with Ash Wednesday (March 5). In anticipation of the great Paschal mystery (the resurrection of Jesus celebrated on Easter Sunday) we are encouraged to examine ourselves anew in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We follow his example and seek for 40 days to wage a more earnest struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Our desire in this is increased sanctification and growth in Christian maturity and obedience. At the heart of any worthy Lenten observance is a cultivated attitude of repentance. A true repentance means a genuine change in heart and mind, a change of disposition where ever in our lives we need to return to God. That is why true repentance and a true Lent can never be satisfied with silly little “fasts” from trivial things like chocolate or TV. On the other hand, repentance is not morbid introspection or a “guilt trip” in which we become bound up in ourselves, turned inward to the point of unhealthy despair. Rather, it has to do with God, who is both holy and compassionate. Therefore, Christian repentance always means faith in God, trusting him, responding to his grace. That is why whatever guilt or sorrow we may feel does not crush us. For we know and trust his goodness toward us.

The color for Lent is purple or violet—a rich color made with the costliest dyes in the ancient world. It appropriately symbolizes deep, heartfelt, and therefore costly repentance. Lent is not merely a time to remember and think about the history of our Lord’s suffering and death, but is intended primarily as an opportunity for intense self-examination and repentance, even fasting (Luke 5:34-35). The high point of Lent is reached on Good Friday, when we remember that our sins crucified Christ. In the words of Johann Heermann’s great hymn, “Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee. ’Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee” (*Trinity Hymnal* #179). Lenten hymns can be found in the *Trinity Hymnal* #171-196.