

ALL ABOUT ASH WEDNESDAY AND LENT

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, which is a time of getting ready for Easter. Some people choose to give up something for Lent. Others choose to do something extra for Lent, such as extra Bible reading or prayer time. Lent lasts for 40 days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending at sunset on Holy Saturday (Easter Eve). Sundays are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent.

How did Lent begin?

The earliest observances of Lent were in the days of the apostles. At that time, Lent lasted for 40 hours between Good Friday and Easter morning to commemorate the 40 hours that Jesus laid in the tomb before the Resurrection. (These 40 hours equate to three days according to the Biblical method of keeping time.) Lent was extended to 40 days during a big meeting of Christians called the Council of Nicaea that took place in 325 A.D.

How did Ash Wednesday begin?

In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicaea changed Lent so that it lasted for 40 days. Many important events in the Bible lasted for 40 days. Christians did not begin putting ashes on the forehead until around the year 960 A.D. In the Bible, putting ashes on your head or wearing ashes is a way of saying “I’m sorry” to God.

Where in the Bible are there stories of events which lasted for 40 days?

- Noah’s ark floated in the rain for 40 days and nights (Genesis 7:4).
- Moses prayed for 40 days before he received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:18).
- Elijah walked for 40 days to climb the holy mountain (1 Kings 19:8).
- Jesus prayed in the wilderness for 40 days (Mark 4:13).
- Jesus walked with the apostles for 40 days between Easter and Ascension Day (Acts 1:3).

Where in the Bible are there stories of people wearing ashes to say “I’m sorry” to God?

- Mordecai mourns for the Israelites (Esther 4:1).
- Job repents for questioning God’s wisdom (Job 42:6).
- God instructs the Israelites on how to fast (Jeremiah 6:26).
- Ezekiel sings about the proper ritual for mourning (Ezekiel 27:30).
- Daniel prays earnestly to God (Daniel 9:3).
- The people of the city of Nineveh repent before God (Jonah 3:6).
- Jesus talks about the right way to repent (Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13).
- Jesus wears ashes for us to help us say “I’m sorry” to God (Hebrews 9:13).

Where do the Ash Wednesday ashes come from?

The ashes are made from the palm branches that we waved at last year’s Palm Sunday worship.