

SPECIAL LENTEN EDITION 2006

THE SEASON OF LENT By Dennis Bratcher



The season of Lent has not been well observed in much of evangelical Christianity, largely because it was associated with "high church" liturgical worship that some churches were eager to reject. However, much of the background of evangelical Christianity, for example the heritage of John Wesley, was very "high church." Many of the churches that had originally rejected more formal and deliberate liturgy are now recovering aspects of a larger Christian tradition as a means to refocus on spirituality in a culture that is increasingly secular.

Originating in the fourth century of the church, the season of Lent spans 40 weekdays beginning on Ash Wednesday and climaxing during Holy Week with Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding Saturday before Easter. Originally, Lent was the time of preparation for those who were to be baptized, a time of concentrated study and prayer before their baptism at the Easter Vigil, the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord early on Easter Sunday. But since these new members were to be received into a living community of Faith, the entire community was called to preparation. Also, this was the time when those who had been separated from the Church would prepare to rejoin the community.

Today, Lent is marked by a time of prayer and preparation to celebrate Easter. Since Sundays celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays that occur during Lent are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent, and are referred to as the Sundays in Lent. The number 40 is connected with many biblical events, but especially with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for His ministry by facing the temptations that could lead him to abandon his mission and calling. Christians today use this period of time for introspection, self examination, and repentance. This season of the year is equal only to the Season of Advent in importance in the Christian year, and is part of the second major grouping of Christian festivals and sacred time that includes Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost.

Lent has traditionally been marked by penitential prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Some churches today still observe a rigid schedule of fasting on certain days during Lent, especially the giving up of meat, alcohol, sweets, and other types of food. Other traditions do not place as great an emphasis on fasting, but focus on charitable deeds, especially helping those in physical need with food and clothing, or simply the giving of money to charities. Most Christian churches that observe Lent at all focus on it as a time of prayer, especially penance, repenting for failures and sin as a way to focus on the need for God's grace. It is really a preparation to celebrate God's marvelous redemption at Easter, and the resurrected life that we live, and hope for, as Christians.

Carnival, which comes from a Latin phrase meaning "removal of meat," is the three day period preceding the beginning of Lent, the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday immediately before **Ash Wednesday**, which is the first day of the



Lenten Season (some traditions count Carnival as the entire period of time between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday). The three days before Ash Wednesday are also known as **Shrovetide** ("shrove" is an Old English word meaning "to repent"). The Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday is called **Shrove Tuesday**, or is more popularly known by the French term **Mardi Gras**, meaning "Fat Tuesday," contrasting to the fasting during Lent. The entire three day period has now come to be

known in many areas as Mardi Gras.

Carnival or Mardi Gras is usually a period of celebration, originally a festival before the fasting during the season of Lent. Now it is celebrated in many places with parades, costumes, dancing, and music. Many Christians' discomfort with Lent originates with a distaste for Mardi Gras. In some cultures, especially the Portuguese cul-

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ture of Brazil, the French culture of Louisiana, and some of the Caribbean cultures such as Trinidad, it has tended to take on the excesses of wild and drunken revelry. There has been some attempt in recent years to change this aspect of the season, such as using Brazilian Carnival parades to focus on national and cultural history. Many churches now observe Mardi Gras with a church pancake breakfast or other church meal, eating together as a community before the symbolic fasting of Lent begins.

Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is



the first day of the Season of Lent. Its

name comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on worshippers' heads or foreheads as a sign of humility before God, a symbol of mourning and sorrow at the death that sin brings into the world. It not only prefigures the mourning at the death of Jesus, but also places the worshipper in a position to realize the consequences of sin. Ash Wednesday is a somber day of reflection on what needs to change in our lives if we are

to be fully Christian.

In the early church, ashes were not offered to everyone but were only used to mark the forehead of worshippers who had made public confession of sin and sought to be restored to the fellowship of the community at the Easter celebration. However, over the years others began to show their humility and identification with the penitents by asking that they, too, be marked as sinners. Finally, the imposition of ashes was extended to the whole congregation in services similar to those that are now observed in many Christian churches on Ash Wednesday. Ashes became symbolic of that attitude of penitence reflected in the Lord's prayer: "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" (Luke 11:4, NRSV).

The color used in the sanctuary for most of Lent is purple, red violet, or dark violet. These colors symbolize both the pain and suffering leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the suffering of humanity and the world under sin. But purple is also the color of royalty, and so anticipates through the suffering and death of Jesus the coming resurrection and hope of newness that will be



celebrated in the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Some churches use grey for Ash Wednesday or for the entire season of Lent, or for special days of fasting and prayer. Gray is the color of ashes, and therefore a biblical symbol of mourning and repentance. The decorations for the sanctuary during Lent should reflect this mood of penitence and reflection. Some churches avoid the use of any flowers in the sanctuary during Lent, using various dried arrangements. This can be especially effective if a flowering cross is used for Easter. Other churches use arrangements of rocks or symbols associated with the Gospel readings for the six Sundays in Lent.

Some church traditions change the sanctuary colors to red for Maundy Thursday, a symbol of the disciples and through them the community of the church. Since Eucharist or communion is often observed on Maundy Thursday in the context of Passover, the emphasis is on the gathered community in the presence of Jesus the Christ.

Traditionally, the sanctuary colors of Good Friday and Holy Saturday are black, the only days of the Church Year

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An Opportunity By Fr. Joe+, Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, Baton Rouge, LA

The season of Lent is a real gift to the Church. In the beginning, it was a time to teach and bring candidates into the Christian faith. One of the main teachings is on the sacrificial nature of being a follower of Jesus. To follow Him, one would need to make some sacrifices of one's own affairs to be able to be a follower or a disciple. Through the years the Church began to ritualize this period of time. There are 40 days in Lent. Sundays don't count for all Sundays are a celebration of the resurrection. Intense prayer and fasting became a norm. In the ninth century, the ritual of applying ashes on the heads of the clergy and people began on the first day of Lent, thus Ash Wednesday; giving Lent more of a season of mourning and penitence. So through the years, Lent has been a season of "giving up something" for Lent. Some give up chocolate, dessert, meat, and the like to enter a type of fast during Lent. Some in recent years like to "take on something." Do an extra good deed for the week or day, go to church services more frequently and such things. (Heaven forbid we do such things outside of Lent.) I love the season of Lent, because it does give us an extra opportunity to give of ourselves to the one who gives us life. Lent gives us the opportunity to reflect and compare our life to that of Jesus. When we are open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our life, this enables us to make the proper adjustments that are needed for us to be the person that the Father created us to be. We are being given an opportunity to reflect, to make changes, to let go, to add on, to sacrifice. Let us take advantage of this opportunity to grow closer to Jesus.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The **Stations of the Cross** often refers to a series of depictions, usually either paintings or sculpture, that coincide with the Stations of the Cross along the *Via Dolorosa* ("Way of Suffering") in the Old City of Jerusalem. The *Via Dolorosa* is the traditional route that Jesus followed from his condemnation in Pilate's Hall to Golgotha and his death and burial. It is marked at fourteen places or "stations" that are associated with biblical or traditional events along the route. Following the path and stopping at the Stations to pray and meditate is as an exercise in devotion and piety.

Since many people could not make the arduous pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in the medieval period there developed the practice of using depictions of these Stations in local cathedrals to allow worshippers to make the same devotional journey. They came into general use by the seventeenth century and are present today in nearly all Catholic churches. The popularity of the Stations of the Cross as a devotional exercise has been fostered by these traditional depictions.

In the form of paintings or sculpted plaques they are usually spaced around the walls of Catholic

churches or are located in a prayer garden. In Protestant churches that use them, they are usually located in a prayer chapel. While historically these depictions have been paintings or sculptures, they can be anything from banners to various kinds of art or plaques in most any medium, from large and elaborate to small and simple. The number of scenes (stations) in the series can vary from eight (the events specifically mentioned in the Gospel accounts) to fifteen (including a final Station for the resurrection). Some of the Stations vary in different traditions. Traditionally, there have been fourteen Stations.

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that black is used. It symbolizes the darkness brought into the world by sin. It also symbolizes death, not only the death of Jesus but the death of the whole world under the burden of sin. In this sense, it also represents the hopelessness and the endings that come as human beings try to make their own way in the world without God. Black is always replaced by white before sunrise of Easter Sunday.

There are many ways for a congregation to mark the journey of Lent. One of the most effective ways that can be expanded in many variations is to use a rough wooden cross as a focal point for the season. The type of cross and how it is constructed will depend on exactly how it will be used. The cross is usually erected in the Sanctuary on Ash Wednesday as a visible symbol of the beginning of Lent. It is usually draped in black on Good Friday. The same cross can also become a part of the congregation's Easter celebration as it is then draped in white or gold, or covered with flowers.

One effective way to make use of the cross is to use it as a Prayer Cross during Lent. A hammer, square nails, and small pieces of paper are made available near the cross. At a designated time of prayer during the Sundays in Lent, people are invited to write their prayer requests on the paper, and then nail them to the cross. The quiet time of prayer with only the sounds of the hammer striking the nails can be a moving time for reflection on the meaning of Lent, and a powerful call to prayer. The prayer requests can be removed and burned as part of a Tenebrae or Stations of the Cross service during Holy Week to symbolize releasing the needs to God.

Some churches have a special time of prayer or meditation one night of each week during Lent. Often Catholic and high church traditions pray the Stations of the Cross. Some Protestant churches have a special series of Bible studies followed by a time of meditation and prayer. Often, in both Catholic and Protestant traditions, the prayer time is followed by a simple meal of soup and bread to symbolize the penitence of the Season.

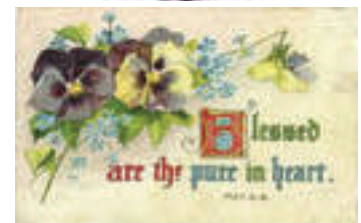
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HEIFER
INTERNATIONAL

Please remember our Heifer International project during

this Lenten season. See Mary Pasko, Sue Sulzman or Mother Lorri if you have any questions. The heifer is located on the wall in Dwyer Hall.

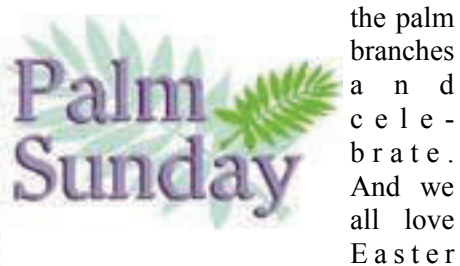


In
Christ
Alone

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We enjoy celebrating Palm Sunday. The children get to make paper palm branches and for many is one of the few times they get to take an active role in "big church."



We wave the palm branches and celebrate. And we all love Easter Sunday! It is a happy time, with flowers, new clothes, and the expectation of Spring in the air.

But it is too easy and promotes too cheap a grace to focus only on the high points of Palm Sunday and Easter without walking with Jesus through the darkness of Good Friday, a journey that begins on Ash Wednesday. Lent is a way to place ourselves before God humbled, bringing in our hands no price whereby we can ourselves purchase our salvation. It is a way to confess

our total inadequacy before God, to strip ourselves bare of all pretense to righteousness, to come before God in dust and ashes. It is a way to empty ourselves of our false pride, of our rationalizations that prevent us from seeing ourselves as needy creatures, of our "perfectionist" tendencies that blind us to the beam in our own eyes. Through prayer that gives up self, we seek to open ourselves up before God, and to hear anew the call "Come unto me!" We seek to recognize and respond afresh to God's presence in our lives and in our world. We seek to place our needs, our fears, our failures, our hopes, our very lives in God's hands, again. And we seek by abandoning ourselves in Jesus' death to recognize again who God is, to allow His transforming grace to work in us once more, and to come to worship Him on Easter Sunday with a fresh victory and hope that goes beyond the new clothes, the Spring flowers, the happy music.

But it begins in ashes. And it journeys through darkness. It is a spiritual pilgrimage that I am con-

vinced we must make one way or the other for genuine spiritual renewal to come. I have heard the passage in 2 Chronicles 7:14 quoted a lot: ". . . if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." This usually is quoted in the context of wanting revival or renewal in the church, and the prayer is interpreted as intercessory prayer for others. But a careful reading of the passage will reveal that the prayer that is called for here is not intercessory prayer for others; it is penitential prayer for the faith community, for **us**. It is not to call for others to repent; it is a call for **us**, God's people, to repent. It is **our** land that needs healed, it is **our** wicked ways from which we need to turn, **we** are the ones who need to seek God's face.

Perhaps during the Lenten season we should stop praying for others as if we were virtuous enough to do so. Perhaps we should take off our righteous robes just long enough during this 40 days to put ashes on our own heads, to come before God with a new humility that is willing to confess, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Maybe we should be willing to prostrate ourselves before God and plead, "Lord, in my hand no price I bring; simply to the cross I cling." That might put us in a position to hear God in ways that we have not heard Him in a long time. And it may be the beginning of a healing for which we have so longed.

O Lord, begin with me. Here. Now.

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Our Own Opportunity

We have our own opportunity to make a difference this Lenten season.

On Page 2 of this newsletter Father Joe of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit in Baton Rouge, Louisiana talked about “giving up something” and “take on something.”

Locally, you can give up something and take on something and benefit the Heifer International’s “Milk Menagerie” campaign being conducted here at St. Michael’s.

Give up an occasional dessert, a pack of cigarettes, candy, or something else you really enjoy and

each week bring the money you saved into church and purchase a part of the heifer.

Your gift will go so far to help so many who so desperately need your help.

As New York state’s junior Senator in Washington, Hillary Rodham Clinton, so eloquently says, *“Heifer International is courageously addressing some of the most difficult problems facing our world today—ending hunger, preserving the environment, empowering women and building strong, self-reliant communities.”*

Show your love for the Father who gave his only son that you might have everlasting life and help others that they might come to learn of His sacrifice.

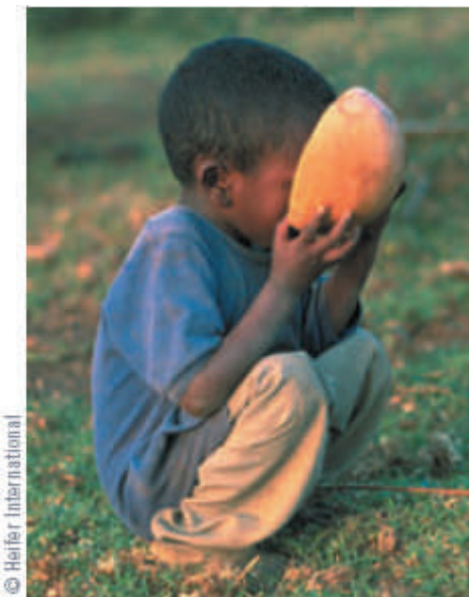


MILK MAKES A DIFFERENCE

With training for recipient families, each animal in your Menagerie will produce gallon after gallon of wonderful, life-sustaining milk. And as the families “pass on the gift” of offspring to neighbors in need, over time your Milk Menagerie will end hunger and despair one child, one family and one village at a time.



“Heifer International is courageously addressing some of the most difficult problems facing our world today—ending hunger, preserving the environment, empowering women and building strong, self-reliant communities.”



A Menagerie of Hope

Your gift of a Milk Menagerie includes a quality-breed heifer, two goats and a water buffalo—four milk-producing animals for hardworking families hoping to provide a better life for their children.

—Senator Hillary Rodman Clinton

To learn more about your gift, visit www.heifer.org

— the milk menagerie gift —

A little over a year ago St. Michael's Outreach Committee began discussing Heifer International as a potential outreach project. We requested information from them and ultimately decided on the Milk Menagerie gift as our project.

Founded in 1944, Heifer International is a humanitarian organization that works to end world hunger. To date they have helped more than seven million families in over 125 countries improve their quality



© Heifer International

of life. Through livestock, training and "passing on

the gift" they help build strong communities.

Families that once knew only generations of poverty, today have children who can go to school. Families build homes and start their own businesses. They no longer have to head out to the fields to do backbreaking work merely

to survive. Additionally they soon become in a position to help someone else and experience the joy of helping one another. This sharing of offspring of gift animals with others in need is called "*passing on the gift*". Recipients then become equal partners with Heifer in the fight to end world hunger.

We at St. Michael's wish to join with them in doing our part to make this a better world in which to live. Won't you contribute this Lenten season?

MINISTRY OPENINGS

Treasurer: Bruce Barnes would like to retire December 31, 2006 and asks that we take the time this coming year to find a replacement for him. Anyone interested in finding out more about this position should speak with Father Hart.

Clerk of the Vestry: The Clerk of the Vestry attends the monthly Vestry meetings and the Annual Parish meetings, takes minutes, and types them (or can give the notes to Linda Addison to type if necessary. Please see Father Hart if interested.



We continue to collect receipts from Hannaford and/or Price Chopper for donations to a needy family! Thank you to all who are participating in the this outreach effort. If you'd like to contribute to this family please place your bottle and/or receipts in the soda bottle on the bulletin board in the Narthex and we will mail them on a regular basis. Thank you for your continued support, compassion and generosity!



Sue and Tori Waldron would love to hear from everyone! Let's keep them in the loop.

Contact them via U.S. Mail: 2777 Mission Rd., Nashotah, WI 53058

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