

Biblical Topics

Lent

So from where did this six week Lent thing we observe come?

As Christians, it is extremely important that we understand where we have come from. We are Christians who live almost 2000 years after the ascension of Jesus Christ. We are quite a ways removed from the historic moments of Christ's life on this earth. Even so, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, we belong to the Holy Christian Church that was created by Jesus and led by His apostles. Knowing this, we never desire to be ignorant of the history of God's Church of which we are members. In preparation for the season, let's take a look at the historic time of Lent.

As early as the Third Century, Christians devoted themselves to prepare for the celebration of Easter. In the early generations, two days before Easter were dedicated to the Christian practice of fasting. From the end of the worship service on Good Friday to the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ on Easter – equaling the time Jesus spent in the tomb – Christians would fast. Generation that followed increased the period of fasting to six days which was also the amount of time students who wanted to join the Christian Church spending humble preparation for the reception of Baptism and the Lord's Supper that they would receive at the Easter service.

History shows that the length of preparation for Easter increased from one week to three weeks to six weeks, usually excluding Sundays, which were held by Christian as mini Easters. In Jerusalem, as early as the Fourth Century, Christians fasted forty days in preparation for Easter. The forty days consisted of five days a week for eight weeks. These forty days symbolized the forty days that Moses dwelled on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:18), the forty days that Elijah journeyed to Mount Horeb (11 Kings 19:8), and the forty days that Jesus fasted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2).

In the Seventh Century, the western church arrived at a forty day preparation period for Easter. They were fasting for six weeks as six days a week for a total of 36 days. Beginning in that century, they decided to include the four days that preceded the first Sunday of preparation. The first day of Lent, then, was known as Ash Wednesday.

During the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther continued to observe this preparation period. Lutheran Churches continue this practice. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with its conclusion being Holy Saturday, the day before Christ's resurrection. And that dear friends is how we have come to a six week Lenten season.

(This is from the newsletter "Concordia Connections" written by Pastor Doug Croucher of Concordia Lutheran Church, Ft. Wayne, IN)