

## What does Lent really mean?

The season of Lent is a Catholic liturgical season consisting of forty days of fasting, prayer, and penitence beginning on **Ash Wednesday, concluding at sundown on Holy Thursday**. Catholics attend Mass and Reconciliation, make personal sacrifices (such as fast and abstinence), and perform additional acts of service and devotion. The official liturgical colour for the season of Lent is violet.

There is biblical support for doing penance, in both the Old and New Testaments. The season of Lent builds on this biblical support, but like all Catholic liturgical seasons, it developed over time. In its early three-week form, Lent was the period of intense spiritual and liturgical preparation for catechumens before they were baptized at Easter. Many members of the community imitated this time of preparation with the catechumens.

By the fourth century (when Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire), Lent had developed into its current length of forty days. Forty days is significant for Christians because it is the length of the fast and temptation of Jesus in the desert (cf. Luke 4:1-13).