

Lent at Christ Church

A Time of Renewal

Christ Church has been blessed with many new people, some who have joined us in recent months. Some folk have a background in the Episcopal Church; others do not. For those with little or no background in the Episcopal Church, here is a brief introduction to Lent and how we celebrate it at Christ Church.

What is “Lent?”

Lent is a period of 40 days before Easter (not counting Sundays) during which the Church (that’s us!) opens itself to spiritual renewal. (The traditional word is “repentance,” but since that word is associated in some people’s minds with “hellfire and brimstone” preaching, “spiritual renewal” or “transformation” is perhaps better understood.) In the early Christian Church, Lent was a time of preparation for baptism, which was principally celebrated at the Great Vigil of Easter service as the sun rose on Easter morning. Lent has traditionally been observed with certain spiritual practices such as fasting or abstinence from some food or activity (watching TV, for instance), almsgiving (giving time and/or money to charitable causes), intentional prayer practices (Scripture reading, daily devotions, time set aside each day to pray, etc.), and self-examination and reflection (including reflection on our own mortality), all toward the goal of changing our minds and hearts (the literal meaning of “repentance”) and being renewed and transformed in the spirit of Christ.

We walk the journey of Lent with Jesus, particularly remembering the times in his life when he suffered (his 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, his betrayal and abandonment by his own disciples, his crucifixion and death), which reminds us how completely he identified with us humans, sharing even humanity’s worst sufferings. In Lent, we try to strip away the noise and clutter of our outer and inner lives so that we can hear more clearly the voice of God. In our worship, we outwardly symbolize this “stripping away” by not having any flowers on our altar, not using triumphant language (such as the using the word “alleluia” or singing the “Gloria in Excelsis”), and (here at Christ Church) using the more penitential Rite I form of our Eucharist service. In ancient times, many crosses in churches were inlaid with expensive jewels – an extravagance inappropriate to the humble simplicity of Lent; so it became the custom in many churches to veil all the crosses in the church with purple cloth (purple being the Church’s color of penitence).

How does Christ Church observe Lent?

Here at Christ Church, our Lenten traditions include:

Devotional booklets supplied at the beginning of Lent

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper (the Anglican equivalent of the French *Mardi Gras*)

Ash Wednesday liturgies at 12:00n and 7:00pm

Fridays in Lent, which includes:

5:30pm Stations of the Cross in the Chapel

6:00pm Soup Supper in the Parish Hall

6:45pm Lenten Study in the Parish Hall

Our “**Lenten Journey**” almsgiving (Each year we specify a particular charity toward which we direct our almsgiving.)

Holy Week liturgies (more on that as we approach Holy Week)

If you are new to Christ Church, and any of the above confuses or puzzles you, you are not alone! The observance of Lent in the Christian Church has accumulated centuries of traditions and customs. Please feel free to ask Fr. Mark if you have any questions! May you have a Holy Lent!