

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH



February 26, 2017 – Last Sunday after the Epiphany (A): What is Lent?

Today is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, which means this week the church will begin observing Lent. The beginning of Lent is marked by Ash Wednesday, which falls on March 1 this year.

The Lenten period of 40 days, which, traditionally, does not include Sundays, commemorates the “40 days and 40 nights” (Matthew 4:2) that Jesus fasted in the desert and then resisted temptations from Satan.

The season now known as Lent (from an Old English word meaning "spring," the time of lengthening days) has a long history.

Early Christians observed "a season of penitence and fasting" in preparation for the Paschal feast, or Pascha (BCP, pp. 264-265).

Originally, in places where Pascha was celebrated on a Sunday, the Paschal feast followed a fast of up to two days. In the third century this fast was lengthened to six days. Eventually this fast became attached to, or overlapped, another fast of forty days, in imitation of Christ's fasting in the wilderness.

The forty-day fast was especially important for converts to the faith who were preparing for baptism, and for those guilty of notorious sins who were being restored to the Christian assembly.

In the western church the forty days of Lent extend from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday, omitting Sundays. The last three days of Lent are the sacred Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Today Lent has reacquired its significance as the final preparation of adult candidates for baptism. Joining with them, all Christians are invited "to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word" (BCP, p. 265).



The Episcopal Church invites us to observe Lent “by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 265).

How will you observe a holy Lenten season this year?



“The Temptation of Christ,” illustration circa 1411 by the Limbourg Brothers