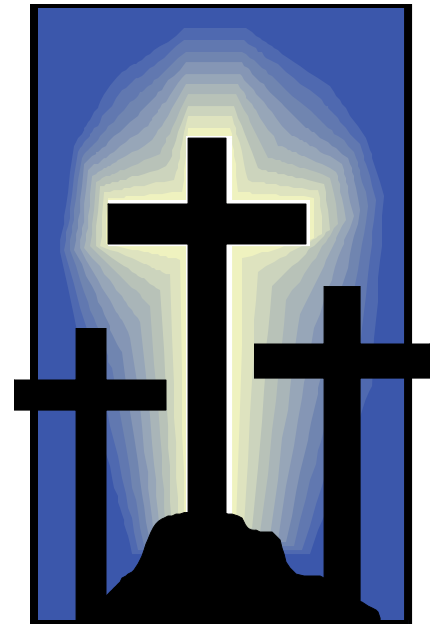


## THE LENTEN SEASON

Heavenly Father, during this holy season of Lent show us the way home through works of prayer and fasting. Open our minds and attitudes to change so that as we die to ourselves we may rise with You by putting behind us all that keeps us from You. Use our hands to do your work; and our words to lead others to You. Remind us throughout these forty days that the destiny of the cradle was the cross, the purpose was our salvation and the reason was for us. AMEN



### THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LENT

Lent is a period of forty days, during the church's liturgical year. It begins on Ash Wednesday when pastors mark the foreheads of Christians with ashes as a reminder that we are created from dust and we shall return, and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). Easter is Christianity's most ancient and important yearly feast. By the 3rd century a preparatory season of forty days - Lent - was joined to this holy time. The word Lent comes from the Middle English *lente* and the German *lenz* which means spring. In many languages, the word "Lent" actually means "fast." This is where the custom of giving up something for Lent originated. Lent is a time for *metanoia* (conversion or re-conversion to the Christian way. It is a time for prayer, penance, and works of charity for others. It is also a time for Christians to turn away from sinfulness and evil - to have a change of heart as they prepare for the joyous feast of Easter.

Why 40 days? Because, Jesus fasted, prayed and was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days while preparing for his ministry. Lent then, is our time of fasting, prayer, temptation and repentance. Lent is not required anywhere in scriptures, but it has been a custom, which Christians have practiced for most of the last two thousand years. In every case, it is a time for serious, disciplined self-examination, a time spent in intensive prayer and repentance before the cross of Calvary.

For this reason and to represent the serious side of Lent, one custom has been to strip the sanctuary of all flowers, candles, and colors during Lent. The custom continues today and invites each one of us to turn inward and examine ourselves. It is a reminder of the dark and colorless day when Christ lay dead in the tomb.

For those teachers who are using the NOCCC teacher resource, "*Designing Prayer Centres*," the colour for your table cloth throughout this season is purple.

## **THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LENT**

**The focus of Lent is threefold:**

- 1. It is a time to prepare new converts for baptism through intensive classes and instruction.**
- 2. It is a time for long-standing Christians to review their lives and renew their commitment to Jesus Christ.**
- 3. It is a time for backsliders to be restored to the faith.**

**Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Scripture tells us that on Easter morning he rose from the dead, appearing to his followers . Jesus' followers were taught by the Risen Lord and interpreted his death and resurrection in the light of the Exodus story. "Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7)**

**The ancient Jewish Pasch was fulfilled in Christ. The lamb slain by the Jews in Egypt was a sign from God of their redemption from slavery. Jesus, who sacrificed his life, now offers all people an escape from death and a way to freedom.**

**Today Lent and Easter are special times when each one of us can draw near to the Risen Lord; a time for hearing the "Good News" once more and celebrating the sacraments that are signs of the power of Christ's death and resurrection. As pilgrims on an earthly journey, we are called to believe and recall our baptismal commitment.**

**Let us bow our heads and think for a moment about the following:**

- Do I share all that I have with others, especially the elderly and the stranger?**
- Do I have a kind attitude, especially with those who irritate me?**
- Do I feel the power of connection to God and the church in corporate worship?**
- Is my prayer life as substantial as it should be?**
- Am I thoughtful and forgiving of family and others?**
- Do I speak up for the oppressed or remain quiet for my own sake?**

**Throughout these forty days, may each one of us focus on just one of these questions, so that on Easter morning when we stand before the tomb, just as we stood in awe before the cradle, and we can shout, Alleluia He is risen, in unison with joy to the world, the Lord is come!**

