



Lent is part of the rich history of the Christian Church, dating back to the third century CE.

Lent is the 40 days prior to Easter (not counting Sundays).

Lent is the Anglo-Saxon word meaning “lengthening of the days” as spring appears.

The season began as a 40 hour fast of preparation for those who were going to be baptized on Easter, to coincide with the belief that Jesus spent 40 hours in the tomb.

Over the years, it was expanded to include all the faithful and was lengthened to 40 days.

The number 40 was chosen for its significance in the Bible: Moses fasted 40 days on Mt. Sinai, Elijah fasted 40 days on his way to the mountain of God, the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness, and Jesus was in the desert for 40 days.

Lent has been a time of penitence - mourning, solemnity and sadness. The mood is expressed in the colour purple for the season, and churches will drape their sanctuary in what is now the liturgical colour for Lent.

In keeping with the somber mood, weddings were forbidden during Lent, organs were stopped, public entertainment was outlawed and royalty dressed in black. Lent was a time to be sorry for your sins.

Today, few Christians observe a fast for 40 days or any of the old traditions. Instead, Lent has become a period of introspection and self-evaluation, a time of spiritual preparation.

Lent is often likened to a “wilderness time,” recalling other biblical wanderings and times of trial and repentance. Yet, wilderness times can be wonderful, positive times as well, with many examples in the Bible.

While the focus for the first week of Lent is traditionally on Jesus’ temptations, it is important to note that Jesus was strengthened by this wilderness time. Thus, Lent can be a time to focus on growing profoundly in our faith.

Lent offers us the opportunity to slow down, enter our own “wilderness” to reflect, pray and find ourselves renewed in God’s presence. People give extra time and energy to their prayer lives and study of the Bible.

The symbol for Lenten prayer is the pretzel. In Lent, Christians made dough of flour, salt and water and shaped the dough in the form of two crossed arms to remind themselves to pray.

Often people will “give up something” for Lent, or “take on a discipline” or activity.