

February / Lent 2021

Give me Jesus <https://youtu.be/9rZ8k9m2hwo>

Lent is an old name for Spring. It now describes the forty days which lead to Easter; from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day excluding the Sundays. For us as Christians, Lent marks the time when Jesus went into the wild hills about Jerusalem until he found the way he could carry out his mission in his public ministry.

A hymn from Singing the Faith, 236, **Forty days and forty nights.**
<https://youtu.be/9N29ZnwU4LM>

For us lent begins on Ash Wednesday with a time of repentance, asking for forgiveness, perhaps for our lack of faith and asking for a change of heart on our part. A chance to begin again as we think of Jesus' time in the wilderness and all the events that led to the first Easter.

In the past people put on dark- coloured clothes which they continued to wear until Easter Day, as a sign of mourning for the death of Jesus. Repentant sinners donned coarse sackcloth and prickly hair-shirts. They walked about in bare feet, showing that they wanted to reform.

People went to church on Ash Wednesday and during the service their foreheads were marked with ashes in the sign of the cross, in memory of Jesus. Small crosses made from the strands of palm fronds and kept almost a year from the previous Palm Sunday were burned to make the ashes which are an old symbol of grief and mourning. Some Christian churches still follow this custom. There is a service for Ash Wednesday in our service book which gives a prayer if there is to be an "ashing" ceremony. I'd like to quote it here.

*Almighty God,
You created us from the dust of the earth.
Let these ashes be for us a sign of our repentance and a symbol of our mortality.
May we always remember that by your grace alone we are given eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The presiding minister goes on to say,

In the name of Christ, I invite you to receive on your forehead the sign of the cross.

I don't remember ever attending such a service, but knew it was a day to especially ask for forgiveness.

Two prayers from the Holy Communion service for Lent.

Lord, you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy; you welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests.

We confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us.

Lord have mercy.

Almighty God, whose son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

You may wish to say *The Lord's Prayer* at this point.

The following hymn reminds us of how Jesus was tempted.

Singing the Faith 237 **Jesus, tempted in the desert**

<https://youtu.be/PoJZDCPcHuU>

For many people today they feel they are living in a wilderness, during this pandemic. They feel alone and isolated from all they love and know. Life is so different. No coffee with friends, shopping sprees, even hugs from loved ones are not possible. The anxiety is slightly less as many are being offered the vaccine, but financial worries still abound. Job security is a thing of the past and home schooling puts pressure on already worried parents who are finding it hard to feed their children. We hear of fractured relationships, abuse and neglect or self-neglect.

Many people give up something like chocolate to test their will power. Some may have been tempted to break the Lockdown rules or over indulge themselves.

Is there a light at the end of this dark "tunnel"?

Of course there is for those of us who believe in a living God who loves each one of us unconditionally. We see the power of his creation all around as signs of spring begin to appear in our parks and gardens.

We know the Easter story. How Jesus lay down his life for us to reunite us with God the Father, so that we may feel his presence in our daily lives. We ask for his peace, strength and guiding hand as we face our present situations and try to help those who need reassurance of God's love for them whatever situation they find themselves in at this time.

Our final hymn is like a prayer for the suffering world and our part in it.

Singing the Faith 693 **Beauty for brokenness**

<https://youtu.be/3kVHKuldZyw>

Two collects to end.

Remember, O Lord, what you have wrought in us, and not what we deserve; and as you have called us to your service, make us worthy of our calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Gracious Father, your blessed Son Jesus Christ came from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world. Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us spend time to prepare ourselves this Lent for the joy of Easter to come. Amen.

You raise me up <https://youtu.be/2DorNUsi5LE>

Maureen Crilley.