



What is Ash Wednesday?

Lets define some words used during this Lenten season:

- ❖ Ash Wednesday- Marks the beginning of Lent
- ❖ Lent- 40 day period before Good Friday
- ❖ Good Friday- The day Christ was crucified
- ❖ Easter- The day Christ resurrected

Why do Christians receive ashes on their forehead?

In the Bible a mark on the forehead is a symbol of a person's ownership. By having their foreheads marked with the sign of a cross, this symbolizes that the person belongs to Jesus Christ, who died on a Cross.

Why use ashes?

1. Because ashes are a biblical symbol of mourning and penance
2. They also symbolize death and remind us of our mortality. Thus when the pastor uses his thumb to sign one of the faithful with the ashes, he says, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," which is modeled after God's address to Adam (Genesis 3:19; cf. Job 34:15, Psalms 90:3, 104:29, Ecclesiastes 3:20).

All in all, it's a beautiful tradition that Christians have kept since around A.D. 900 (that's a long time!). Remember, Lent is a season of repentance and reflection on what it means to live as a child of God.

Q. Would you please explain the significance of Ash Wednesday. I've seen some people in the past with black ash crosses on their foreheads

A. Lutheran Worship: History and Practice, the recent commentary on Lutheran Worship, one of our Synod's hymnals, says this about ashes on Ash Wednesday: "Other customs may be used, particularly the imposition of ashes on those who wish it. This ancient act is a gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day. Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness and remind worshippers of the need for cleansing, scrubbing and purifying. If they are applied during an act of kneeling, the very posture of defeat and submission expresses humility before God."

The use of ashes on Ash Wednesday is a more recent custom among most LCMS (and LCC) congregations, although some have done it for decades. The ashes are usually derived from the burned palms from the previous Palm Sunday. Experience will show, however, that in obtaining ashes this way, it doesn't take many ashes to "ash" a whole congregation. Like sin, they are very dirty and go a long way. One palm leaf will produce enough ashes for several years.

Usually the pastor takes the ashes on the end of his thumb and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of each worshiper, saying these words: "Remember: you are dust, and to dust you shall return." This follows most effectively prior (or as part of) the Service Corporate Confession and Absolution on [p. 290ff of *Lutheran Service Book*.]

Q. What is the significance of Lent?

A. Early in the Church's history, the major events in Christ's life were observed with special observances, such as His birth, baptism, death, resurrection and ascension. As these observances developed, a period of time was set aside prior to the major events of Jesus' birth and resurrection as a time of preparation.

During Lent, the Church's worship assumes a more penitential character. The color for the season is purple, a color often associated with penitence. The "Hymn of Praise" is omitted from the liturgy. The word "Alleluia" is usually omitted as well. By not using the alleluia--a joyful expression meaning "Praise the Lord"—until Easter, the Lenten season is clearly set apart as a distinct time from the rest of the year. Additionally, it forms a powerful contrast with the festive celebration of Jesus' resurrection when our alleluias ring loud and clear.

Finally, the penitential character of Lent is not its sole purpose. In the ancient Church, the weeks leading up to Easter were a time of intensive preparation of the candidates who were to be baptized at the Easter vigil on Holy Saturday. This time in the Church's calendar was seen as an especially appropriate time for Baptism because of the relationship between Christ's death and resurrection and our own in Holy Baptism (see Romans 6:1-11). This focus would suggest that the season of Lent serves not only as a time to meditate on the suffering that Christ endured on our behalf but also as an opportunity to reflect upon our own Baptism and what it means to live as a child of God.

Using Luther's Catechisms for Lent

The concept for this midweek Lenten series was inspired by the Book of Concord:

Such matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls. Therefore we also confess Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms as they are included in Luther's works. They are "the layman's Bible" because everything necessary for a Christian to know for salvation is included in them, which is handled more extensively in the Holy Scriptures. ^(FC Ep 15)

As part of our Lenten emphasis on Luther's catechisms, you are asked to make the catechism a part of your daily Lenten routine. Each of the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine could be read through each week in Lent, and the Large Catechism could be read once in its entirety during the Lenten season.

Spiritual Growth in Lent: Many people choose to give up something for Lent. Instead, you may want to take on something for your Lenten discipline. You may want to read the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine from Luther's Small Catechism each day according to the following schedule:

Monday—The Ten Commandments

Tuesday—The Apostles' Creed

Wednesday—The Lord's Prayer

Thursday—The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Friday—Confession

Saturday—The Sacrament of the Altar

Sunday—Daily Prayers, Table of Duties,

or Christian Questions with Their Answers

The Small Catechism is found on page 321 in *Lutheran Service Book* (p. 300 in *Lutheran Worship*). You may also choose to read Luther's Large Catechism during Lent, focusing on one chief part each week. (It is available online) If you choose to read through the Large Catechism, there is an interesting note about the Exhortation to Confession. The Large Catechism, first published in 1529, did not originally contain this exhortation, but before 1529 ended, a revised edition came out that did include it. Nevertheless, the original 1580 German and 1584 Latin editions of the Book of Concord do not include the Exhortation to Confession. So if you have *Concordia: Book of Concord*, you will find the exhortation instead in Appendix B.

To support his catechetical teaching, Luther wrote hymns for each of the six parts of the catechism. This series presents an excellent opportunity to use these solid hymns. The hymns are as follows:

"These Are the Holy Ten Commands" (*LSB* 581)

"We All Believe in One True God" (*LSB* 954)

"Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" (*LSB* 766)

"To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord" (*LSB* 406)

"From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee" (*LSB* 607)

Lenten Midweek Series
Taking On Something for Lent:
Luther's Catechisms

Introduction to the Series: Using Luther's Catechisms for Lent

1. Ash Wednesday: The Greatest of These Is Love: The Ten Commandments,
Exodus 20:1–17
2. Lenten Midweek 2: This I Believe: The Apostles' Creed, 1 Corinthians 15:3–8
3. Lenten Midweek 3: Our Father Who Is in Heaven: The Lord's Prayer,
Matthew 6:9–13
4. Lenten Midweek 4: The Washing of Regeneration: Holy Baptism,
Matthew 28:18–20
5. Lenten Midweek 5: We Are Forgiven: The Office of the Keys, John 20:19–23
6. Lenten Midweek 6: We Eat a Holy Supper: The Sacrament of the Altar,
Matthew 26:26–28
7. Maundy Thursday: On the Night When He Was Betrayed,
1 Corinthians 11:23–32
8. Good Friday: It Is Finished, John 19:30
9. Easter Sunday: Don't Seek the Living among the Dead, Luke 24:1–6a