

How to Celebrate Lent with Your Family



Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. As a child, I remember the solemn mass of Ash Wednesday and being anointed with ashes in the sign of the cross on my forehead. As an adult, I attend a Protestant church, but I've always loved the traditional church calendar recognized by the Catholic Church. There is something special about marking the start of church seasons, don't you think?

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. It is called Ash Wednesday because of the practice of putting ashes on worshipers foreheads as a sign of humility before God and as a sign of mourning for the death and destruction that sin brings

into the world.

What Is the Purpose of Lent?

The season of Lent spans 40 weekdays beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending with Holy Week: Holy Thursday, (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding the Saturday before Easter. Today, Lent is used as a time of prayer and preparation for Easter. We can look inward to see what needs to be confessed and changed in our lives. Some Christians fast and/or give up something for Lent as a sacrificial offering, while others focus on doing good deeds to help others.

I love author Ruth Haley Barton's take on Lent. She makes us think deeply by recommending we all ask ourselves this question, "Where in my life have I gotten away from God, and what are the disciplines that will enable me to find my way back?"

Ideas to Make Lent Special

As Ruth's question suggests, marking the time of Lent in a thoughtful way will help you to prepare your heart for Easter. Perhaps you could even invite a family member or friend to join you in this journey. If you have young children, they may enjoy starting their own mini-ministry (see the last bullet point) or reading short prayers or scriptures with you. Here's a list of suggestions, or feel free to try one of your own.

- Give up a favorite food as a sacrifice to God.
- Work on breaking a bad habit you have.
- Add a new beneficial habit that you've been meaning to start that will improve either your body, soul, or spirit.
- Practice Lectio Divina, also called sacred reading.
- Practice a spiritual discipline that sounds interesting: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, self-denial,

simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, or celebration.

- Read Lent selections from the Book of Common Prayer or other prayer books.
- Start a mini ministry of encouragement. Each day find some way to encourage others: a quick note, a piece of candy, a hug, and so on. (More on mini ministries coming soon).

Let's all take some time to settle in with God during the season of Lent. We'd love to hear your ideas on making this a sacred season. Please share below in the comments.

Blessings,

