

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Repent, and believe the gospel.

Greetings everyone!

Today is Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days that precede Easter. (The 40 days excludes Sunday's because the first day of the week serves as a glorious celebration of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ).

All throughout the Bible, the number 40 is spiritually significant.

- Noah's life was transformed in the Ark during the 40 days of rain. (Genesis 7:4)
- Moses was transformed by his 40 day encounters with God on Mount Sinai. (Exodus 24:18, Deut. 9:15-18; Exodus 34:28).
- The spies were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land. (Numbers 13:25)
- The nation of Israel was transformed by 40 years in the wilderness. (Numbers 14:33)
- Young David was transformed by Goliath's 40-day challenge. (1 Samuel 17:16)
- Elijah was transformed by his fasting and his 40 day journey. (1 Kings 19:4-8)
- The people of Nineveh were transformed when God graciously gave them 40 days to repent. (Jonah 3:4)
- Jesus was empowered by 40 days of fasting and prayer in the wilderness where He endured the temptation of Satan just prior to beginning His ministry. (Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2)
- The disciples were transformed by 40 with Jesus after His resurrection. (Acts 1:3)

It later became a custom in the early Church that before the Easter celebration, there should be a 40-day season of spiritual preparation. In the early church, Lent was also a time to prepare new believers for baptism and when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.

The season of Lent is an invitation of renewal and new life. The word "Lent" actually comes from the Anglo Saxon word *lencten*, which means "Spring."

In many churches, ashes are used to draw a cross on the forehead of people to mark the beginning of their Lent fast. Ashes are the traditional sign of sorrow and repentance (see 1 Kings 19:4-8, 1 Chronicles 21:16, Nehemiah 9:1, Esther 4:1, Jonah 3:5-9). The ashes represent a person's grief and mourning for their sins — the same sins that Christians believe Jesus Christ gave his life for when he died on the cross.

The drawing of a cross is often done on this day while a pastor recites the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19) and “Repent, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

While Advent is a celebration and a time of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently seen as a time of solemn observance. In Lent, many Christians commit to fasting, as well as giving up certain luxuries in order to replicate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ's 40 days of fasting in the desert.

Lent was first mentioned as a 40-day season of preparation in AD 325 by the First Council of Nicaea. **The Lenten Fast is not commanded or even mentioned in the Bible. Nevertheless,** throughout history, God often responds in significant ways when his people earnestly seek him. Remember his promise that “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (*2 Chronicles 7:14, NIV*).

Thus, I'm inviting you to join me and many others around the world in the next 40 days in a fresh encounter with God during this Lenten season as we prepare for the single most important event in the history of the world – The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Lent is a time of repentance, self-examination and reflection certainly; but the season ends in glorious realization of God's love and forgiveness through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father God, we thank you for this time to humble ourselves before you and prepare our hearts for Passion week. We pray that as the body of Christ we will be unified during this time. We know that you love when Christians dwell in unity and that your presence dwells there. We unite our hearts in you Christ Jesus and we ask you to reveal yourself to us during these 40 days so that we may get into a closer relationship with You. At the end of this season we pray that we will be changed and fully ready and equipped to do your work. Thank you for your sacrifice and most of all thank you for the miracle of eternal life through Christ Jesus, Amen!