

MORAVIAN MOMENT #92

What is the significance of Lent?

Lent is a forty-day period before Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday. In the Western Church the Sundays are not counted in the forty days, because Sundays commemorate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Roman Catholic Church, Lent officially ends at sundown on (Holy Thursday), with the beginning of the mass of the Lord's Supper.

Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance, where one reflects and takes stock of himself or herself. Lent originated in the very earliest days of the Church as a preparatory time for Easter, when the faithful rededicated themselves and when converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism. By observing the forty days of Lent, the individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days. All churches that have a continuous history extending before AD 1500 observe Lent. The ancient church that wrote, collected, canonized, and propagated the New Testament also observed Lent, believing it to be a commandment from the apostles. (See *The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book V, Section III.)

In many countries, the last day before Lent (called Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday, or Carnival) has become a last fling before the solemnity of Lent. For centuries, it was customary to fast by abstaining from meat during Lent, which is why some people call the festival ***Carnival***, which is Latin for ***farewell to meat or the flesh***.

The sixth Sunday of Lent is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week or Passion Week. A Moravian custom is to **hold Adult baptism and confirmation** services on Palm Sunday. In Moravian churches, the decorations for Lent are **Violet/Purple, the royal color, to prepare for the King**. The Moravian Church celebrates Lent for it is convinced that Jesus Christ went through this period of renewal in prayer and fast on our behalf.

It is said that the Eastern Church does not skip over Sundays when calculating the length of the Lent. Therefore, Lent always begins on the seventh Monday before Easter, and ends on the Friday before Palm Sunday—using of course the eastern date for Easter. In the Eastern Church also, Lent is followed by Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, which are feast days, then the Lenten fast resumes on Monday of Holy Week. Technically, in the Eastern Church, Holy Week is a separate season from Lent.

Roughly speaking, the western Church consists of Protestants (including the Moravian Church), Catholics, and Anglicans. The Eastern Church consists of the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Oriental Orthodox churches, and the eastern-rite churches affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church.

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