

## The Christian Story

- ◆ Lent is a six-week (40 day) fasting period beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding with Easter. Traditionally Sundays are not included in the fast. It is a time of penitence and preparation and is linked to the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness.
- ◆ The day before Lent is Shrove Tuesday – its name comes from the custom of “shriving” (confessing) one’s sins and receiving a penance to complete over Lent.
- ◆ The fourth Sunday of Lent is Mothering Sunday when one traditionally returns to one’s “mother church” and servants visited their mothers.

## The Beliefs

- ◆ The celebration of Easter – the resurrection of Jesus – is the most important festival of the Christian Year; Christians need to be spiritually prepared for this event by renouncing their sins and demonstrating their penitence through physical and spiritual discipline.

# Lent

Matthew chapter 4 verses 1-11, Luke chapter 4 verses 1-13

*Note: the name “Lent” has nothing to do with the Christian story, but is an ancient variant of “lengthen” to remind us of the lengthening Spring days*

## The Customs

- ◆ Churches - vestments purple for penitence, no flowers.
- ◆ Shrove Tuesday is traditionally a time for feasting and eating up fats and delicacies in the form of pancakes – this includes the fun of pancake races, and in some countries colourful Mardi Gras street processions.
- Ash Wednesday includes a service of imposition of ashes when the congregation are marked with ash made from burning last year’s palm crosses.
- Mothering Sunday has been overtaken by a more secular “Mothers Day”, but the traditional gift for mothers – simnel cake – is still made.
- Nowadays the Church only expects a strict fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

## The Christian Experience

- ◆ Whilst often not observing a strict fast, nor following a rigorous regime of abstinence, many Christians use the opportunity of Lent to “give up” certain foods or observe a stronger spiritual discipline (e.g. Lent Bible Study Groups). This is frequently associated with the giving of money to particular charities which will launch “Lent Appeals”.
- ◆ Spiritual self-examination and penitence
- ◆ Fasting and self-denial
- ◆ Prayer
- ◆ Resisting temptation
- ◆ Self-sacrifice
- ◆ New beginnings and making a fresh start
- ◆ New challenges