Lent is the six week period leading up to Easter. It’s one of the most important times of year for many Christians around the world, particularly those within the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, held at a similar level of importance to Advent – the build up to Christmas.

While Advent is a celebration and a time of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently seen as a time of solemn observance and preparation for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. From its start on Ash Wednesday until its conclusion on Easter Sunday, Lent has been a traditional time for fasting or giving something up or abstinence. Just as we carefully prepare for events in our personal lives, as a wedding, or birthday; a commencement Lent invites us to make our minds and hearts ready for remembering Jesus’ life, death and body resurrection.

**When does Lent start?**

Because Lent follows the liturgical calendar, the exact date that Lent falls each year changes. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is always held 46 days (40 fasting days and 6 Sundays) before Easter Sunday.

Ash Wednesday is the day after Shrove Tuesday, which in the UK is more commonly known as Pancake Day. Elsewhere in the world Shrove Tuesday is known as Mardi Gras (meaning ‘Fat Tuesday’ in French).

**What do Christians do during Lent?**

These days, Christians around the world observe Lent in many ways. Many from more orthodox and traditional denominations will still observe the fast strictly, beginning with the wearing of ashes on Ash Wednesday and abstinence of meat, fish, eggs and fats until Easter Sunday.

Others will choose to give up just one item for Lent, more commonly a ‘luxury’ such as chocolate, meat or alcohol. It is also becoming increasingly common for people to give up other things in order to refocus their faith during this time; such as watching TV, going to the gym, even social media.

Many Christians also use Lent to study their Bibles and pray more intensively, making use of the many devotional books and courses now available to.

And, of course, more and more Christians are turning to the [40acts challenge](https://40acts.org.uk/?amp=1)s a way of doing Lent differently; using simple daily reflections and acts of generosity as a way of putting others first during preparations for Easter.

Sundays during Lent are very important to Christians around the world. Where the Monday to Saturday of each of the six weeks are concerned with fasting and abstinence, the Sunday is a celebration symbolic of Christ’s resurrection. Instead of fasting, Christians hold feasts in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice. The fourth and sixth Sundays are particularly important in the UK – the fourth because it is Mothering Sunday (Mother’s Day) and the sixth because it’s Palm Sunday.

**What does Shrove Tuesday mean?**

Shrove Tuesday comes originally from the word shrive (meaning “absolve”).

As the last day before the Lent, Shrove Tuesday was a day of self-examination where Christians would consider what sins they needed to repent of and what changes to their life or spiritual growth they would focus on during the fast.

While Shrove Tuesday was a day for the purification of the soul, it also had a practical significance too, from which would emerge our modern day tradition of pancakes.

In preparation for Lent centuries ago, those observing the fast would use Shrove Tuesday to also purify and remove from their house any of the items that they were foregoing for the 40 days. Traditionally this included meat, fish, eggs, fats, milk and sugar – so Shrove Tuesday became the final blowout before Lent began!

These ingredients combine easily to make pancake batter, hence why in the UK Shrove Tuesday is now synonymous with the making, tossing and racing of pancakes.

The gorging on rich foods on Shrove Tuesday also gives us the alternative name of Mardi Gras (meaning ‘Fat Tuesday’ in French), which in turn has grown into a whole carnival feast in Louisiana, USA.

**Why is Ash Wednesday called Ash Wednesday?**

Ash Wednesday begins Lent. The day gets its name from the traditional blessing of the ashes taken after the burning of Palm branches (or crosses made from Palm leaves) from the previous year’s Palm Sunday celebrations. In some churches the ashes are used to draw a cross on the head of people to mark the beginning of their Lent fast. The drawing of a cross is often done while repeating the words “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15) or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

**What is Holy Week?**

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week – the last week of Lent leading up to Easter. On Palm Sunday Christians everywhere remember Jesus’ triumphant arrival in Jerusalem. Church services will often include a procession of palm branches, symbolic of the ones laid at Jesus’ feet as he rode into the city. Palm crosses will also be distributed on this day, to be kept until the following year’s Ash Wednesday as a reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Palm branches can be quite hard to come across in colder climates like here in the UK, so many people choose to use branches from native trees instead, with willow, olive, box and yew branches all being common replacements.

As Holy Week draws to a close and Easter approaches, we have Holy Wednesday, commemorating Judas Iscariot’s intent to betray Jesus; Maundy Thursday, commemorating the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples in which he predicts his betrayal by the following denial by Peter; and Good Friday, the day on which Christians around the world remember Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.

With Good Friday over, Christians look forward to Easter Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from his tomb.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ” Mark 16:5-7

**What to Eat During Lent**

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Catholics fast, meaning they eat less than usual. Most adults give up snacking and generally eat only one main meal and two smaller meals during the day.

Also, on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays during Lent, adult Catholics over the age of 14 abstain from eating meat. During these days, it is not acceptable to eat lamb, chicken, beef, pork, ham, deer and most other meats. However, eggs, milk, fish, grains, and fruits and vegetables are all allowed.

There are exceptions. For example, pregnant women, the ill, the elderly and very young are exempt from Lent rules of fasting.

Many people also give up something for the entire Lent period. Some Catholics give up a favorite treat, such as chicken or chocolate, while others give up a habit, such as watching TV.

If you are giving up meat or food for Lent, you will not be able to eat this food for Ash Wednesday and the 40 days following.

**Alternatives to Eating Meat During Lent**

On Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays during Lent, when you cannot eat meat, there are many great options.

You can still enjoy your meals, even without meat. Forklift & Palate has a vegan and [vegetarian menu](https://www.forkliftandpalate.com/our-menu/vegetarian-and-vegan), and it includes everything you can enjoy during Lent.

Consider our Pear Bruschetta, Salmon, Veggie Pizza, Quesadilla, Shrimp Skewers, Fish and Chips, Ratatouille, or Pasta. Forklift & Palate also makes a mouth-watering Quinoa Salad and other salads that leave you satisfied without any meat. We even have options if you are observing Lent and also need to eat gluten-friendly or have food allergies. Just let us know about any allergies or menu needs when you order, and we can help you find something delicious to eat.