

The bishop or priest standing before the people gathered speaks these words, “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word (BCP p. 265).” So, a season that seems all too familiar to some and all too strange to others begins.

The holy season of Lent (a word drawn for the Anglo-Saxon word for “spring”) has been around since at least the time of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), though in the Eastern and Western Churches there has been some variation in form over the centuries. The fasting has ranged from very strict: one meal at or after 3:00 without flesh-meat, fish, eggs, or dairy, to any number of less stringent expressions. The Church of England, the forbearers of our Christian tradition, saw Lent fall into comparative disuse in the 18th century, but 19th century Tractarians were generally responsible for its revival. It is now widely kept.

While fasting and self-denial were, and are, important acts of devotion more than discipline, an important distinction, they are only one component of the call to the observance of a holy Lent. You are encouraged to engage in the other elements of self-examination, repentance, prayer, and the reading and study of Holy Scripture. The investment can return great rewards.

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