

# LENTEN



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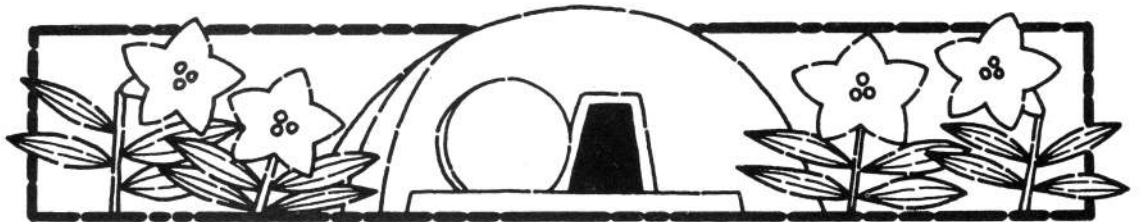
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## GREAT LENT

*This year Great Lent begins on February 10, as always the day after Poon Paregentan (and not on Ash Wednesday as in the Western Church). Below is some background information and ways to observe Lent which can be shared with your students.*

### How Lent Came to Be

The Lenten period and its emphasis on penitential practices evolved slowly over the centuries. In the early Church, baptism and penance were key lenten themes. During Lent, candidates prepared for Easter baptism and people did public penance for serious sins. In later years, the emphasis gradually shifted to private penance. Lent became a time of forgiveness and reconciliation for those who acknowledged their sinfulness. Strict 40-day fasts (abstinence from meat and other foods), not attending festivities, etc., were obligatory for Christians. Gradually these practices became less rigid. Today the emphasis has shifted from long periods of fasting to prayer, meditation and reflection on the meaning of Easter. Lent remains important as a time of preparation for, and renewal of, baptism and prepares us to fulfill the promises of Easter.



### Sources of Lenten Practices

Fasting and prayer have been important observances since Biblical times. They have often preceded great religious revelations or events. For example, the Bible tells about:

**Moses:** Moses fasted and prayed for 40 days. During this time God gave him the code of law known as the Ten Commandments. Read Exodus 34:27-28.

**Elijah:** Elijah fled for his life through the wilderness, fasting 40 days and nights until he came to Mt. Horeb. There God appeared and instructed him on how to overcome his enemies. Read 1 Kings 19:1-18.

**Jesus:** After baptism, Jesus withdrew to the desert to fast and pray for 40 days before beginning his public ministry. Read Matthew 4:1-2; Luke 4:1-2.

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