

WHY?

THE LENTEN ALTAR

During Great Lent the sanctuary is closed off by a special dark curtain. A special lenten altar is set up in front of the curtain. It is several steps in height and has a picture of the crucifixion. It has candles on the steps. But why do we have this arrangement?

The lenten period before Easter is a time of introspection, reflection, and penance. The main altar represents the door of God's kingdom and the curtain cuts us off from that door. It is a self-imposed separation from God brought on by our sinfulness. The picture of the crucifixion on the special lenten altar reminds us that Jesus paid the debt of our sinfulness with the sacrifices of his own life.

Lent gives us time to put our lives in order again. It gives us time to think about what is really important. It gives us time to work on our relationship with God and each other. It gives us time to do something about ourselves, our sinfulness. Sin separates us from God just like the curtain separates us from the altar. The lenten lessons teach that the consequence of sin is separation from God. They also teach us how to reconcile ourselves with God.

The picture of the crucifixion reminds us that our debt to God for our sinfulness was paid at a very high cost—the life of Our Lord. Jesus sacrificed himself for us, to pay our debt, out of love for us. He did not transfer the debt to himself. In other words, he did not pay our debt and then turn around and say we owe him now. It was a gift given to us without any strings attached.

