

ASH WEDNESDAY EXPLANATION

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time when many Christians prepare for Easter by observing a period of fasting, repentance, moderation and spiritual discipline. Although Ash Wednesday has ancient roots, it does not appear in the rituals of The United Methodist Church or our predecessor denominations until the 20th century.

Ash Wednesday emphasizes two themes: our sinfulness before God and our human mortality. The service focuses on both themes, helping us realize that both have been triumphed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ashes are an [ancient symbol](#). In Genesis, we read that God formed human beings out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). After expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the first human beings are told by God, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19 NRSV). The Hebrew word translated dust, is occasionally translated ashes elsewhere. Throughout scripture, ashes are part of rituals when people seek forgiveness and mourn their sin (see Numbers 19:9, 17; Hebrews 9:13; Jonah 3:6; Matthew 11:21, and Luke 10:13, among others).

The imposition of ashes on the heads of Christians to mark the beginning of Lent can be traced at least to the 10th century. Marking the forehead with the sign of the cross is a more recent adaptation. . . . Since the tenth century, the observance of Ash Wednesday has become a general rite for all in the Western church. The Orthodox churches have never observed this rite.

United Methodists first adopted an official ritual for Ash Wednesday that involves the use of ashes in the 1992 Book of Worship. Prior to that time, Methodists either had no official service at all for this day (through 1964) or an "ashless" Ash Wednesday Service (1965 Book of Worship). The use of ashes remains optional in the current Book of Worship, and, indeed, in all rites for this day. Ashes are an "accessory" that demonstrates an awareness of mortality and an intent to repent. The actual awareness and the corporate and personal acts of repentance are the substance of services for the first day of Lent.

An excerpt from "When did Ash Wednesday begin and why do we celebrate it?" found at <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-when-did-ash-wed-begin-and-why-do-we-celebrate-it>.

Lakeside United Methodist Church



February 22, 2023
12:00 Noon
6:00 p.m.

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<https://Lakesidepb.org>

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