

## Dear friends,

March this year sees the start of Lent with Ash Wednesday being the 5th, and so our Lenten journey begins, a time of prayer, reflection, study and for some fasting. What does Lent mean to you?

When I was younger, a question often asked was, 'What are you giving up for Lent'? I have given up many things over the years, chocolate, biscuits, cake, crisps, supper! My late wife gave up playing 'Spider Solitaire' on the computer one year and she found that the hardest thing ever to give up! I recall she made up for it though, with several hours of playing on Easter Day evening, whilst I was left to bath and settle the children to sleep!



Lent is a period of forty days, well, forty six, including the Sundays, although traditionally Sundays don't 'count'. Forty days is a significant period of time in both the Old and New Testament. In Genesis, the flood that destroyed the earth was brought on by forty days and nights of rain. In Hebrews, the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness before reaching the promised land. In Exodus, Moses fasted for forty days before receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The Synoptic Gospels tell us Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness fasting in preparation for his ministry. Jesus remained on earth forty days after the resurrection.

Giving something up for Lent can be a way of symbolically uniting yourself to the mystery of Jesus' own temptation in the desert. It is also a time to ponder your own priorities in your life, and to realign your will with God's, set things right.

However, taking something up for Lent can be good too! Set aside some time each day to spend in prayer, or even just in silence. The Church of England this year has produced a book of forty daily reflections, 'Living Hope: A Lent Journey'.

You could declutter your home. Donate forty things you haven't used or you don't need, to a charity shop. You could put a 'pound in a pot' each day as a thanksgiving gift and then donate it to charity. Do something nice for someone each day. There are many things you could do.

Whatever we do, let's prepare our minds and our hearts for Easter and make secure, fix firmly, the place of Jesus in our lives, and be further shaped in His image, as we walk together the Lenten journey.

**God Bless, Keith**