



# What is the meaning behind Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent – a special time of the year that Christians have been observing since the 4th century. We celebrate Ash Wednesday with the distribution of ashes on a person's forehead. The ashes are a symbol to remind us of our human mortality and our sinful nature without God.

In the Old Testament, the ashes represent our physical mortality and an outward sign of repentance.

**Genesis 3:19** *By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return.*

**Job 13:12** *Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay.*

**Job 42:6** *Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

**Daniel 9:3** *So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.*

**Jonah 3:6** *When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth, and sat on ashes.*

The shape of the ashes placed on the foreheads is a cross to represent the one Jesus died on for us. The reason we keep them on our foreheads is to remind us and others that we are getting prepared for Easter. Lent is a tradition about preparing our hearts and drawing near to God to celebrate Easter. The ashes show us that we are nothing without God, all we are is ashes. It allows us to admit how much we need God and need to change (repent). In order for a person to change over the 40 days of Lent, Christians commit to three things: fasting, prayer, and giving. It allows us to draw near God and to become a better version of ourselves that is more like Jesus.