**An Introduction to Lent and Easter**

**The date for Easter changes each year as it is the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox on March 21st.** Therefore, the date falls sometime between March 22 and April 25.

**The season of Lent consists of the 40 days, not including Sundays, before Easter.** The word Lent is derived from the Germanic root for long because it is observed in spring when the days get longer. Lent is a time to prepare for the holiest time of the Christian year by fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and other acts of penance. Many people give up something for Lent (a food, watching TV, etc.) or do something to bring them closer to God such as daily devotions or charitable donations. The church color for most of Lent is purple which symbolizes repentance as well as royalty. The word alleluia is not used during Lent and some churches perform a ritual called the putting away of the alleluias before Lent begins.

**Ash Wednesday** is the first day of Lent. Ashes are a sign of repentance and for centuries the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” have been spoken as the sign of the cross in made with ashes on Christians’ foreheads at special Ash Wednesday services.

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday and is a time of celebration and eating of rich foods made with eggs, sugar, and butter, which were traditionally prohibited during Lent. The term shrove is the past tense of shrive which means to obtain forgiveness of sins by confession and doing penance; in the past preparation for Lent included going to confession. Other names for the day are Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday, Tuesday of Carnival, Fastnacht Day, and Pancake Tuesday. Churches today celebrate Shrove Tuesday with Mardi Gras celebrations which may include pancake races and dinners of pancakes and other rich foods.

**Holy Week is the last week of Lent and the week before Easter; it commemorates the last week of Jesus’ earthly life. It begins with Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem, continues with Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday, and ends with Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday), Good Friday and Holy Saturday.** The word Maundy is thought to be derived from the Latin word for command and refers to the command Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper. **The time from the evening of Holy Thursday until the evening of Easter Sunday is called the Easter Triduum.** A Tenebrae service may be held on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday; the word Tenebrae is Latin for shadows and the service includes a gradual extinguishing of candles. In Roman Catholic and some other churches there is an **Easter Vigil between sunset on Holy Saturday and dawn on Easter Sunday which is considered the first official celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.**