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The Roots of Lent



A long-awaited respite

The Cundiffs actually logged off their computers for work and school for a whole four days in February to go on a much-needed and much-deserved vacation to Edinburgh, Scotland.

As you will likely read in Carter's Corner, we went to Edinburgh Castle (shown above), the Scott Monument, Advocate's Close (by accident, actually), St. Giles Cathedral, the National Museum of Scotland, and, of course, lots of tourist shops and bookstores – somehow, we even enjoyed some sunny weather!

We learned quite a lot about its history, such as the early Celtic tribes, Roman presence, the Kingdom of Scotland (9th century), invasions by the Vikings, conflicts and then union with England, the Black Plague, the Reformation, terrible city planning and graverobbers, industrialization, and strong cultural identity.



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Imposition of ashes during Ash Wednesday. Photo from <https://calendar.lcms.org/event/ash-wednesday-series-c-and-one-year-series/>.

Dear friends in Christ,

We now find ourselves in the season of Lent once again. I am reminded of the presentation that I made to the students of Concordia Theological Seminary in Nagercoil, India when I was there two years ago. On Ash Wednesday, the whole student body gathers for a day long special presentation. As I was there that month as a guest lecturer, I was asked to give the address that day. In it, I shared a paper I wrote titled, "The Roots of Lent" an excerpt of which is below:

In the period leading up to Easter, the final stage of formation would be started for those who were training in the faith. The catechumens now became pupils of the bishop who would lecture and examine the candidates. This final process was accompanied with a fast that would be concluded at the Easter Vigil which culminated with sunrise on Easter Sunday. At the Easter Vigil, the catechumen would be given the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and then be admitted for their first celebration of the Lord's Supper. On that day, the person became a full confessor of the Christian faith and made a part of the Church.

Over time, the fast leading up to Easter was expanded. Those who had committed a grievous public sin would also join in on

the fast. For example, these might be people who fled during a persecution or who denied the faith to save their lives. These Christians would be expected to fulfill a period of repentance to show their devotion to Christ before being admitted once again to the altar to receive the holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eventually, the practice of Lenten fasting became common among Christians in general.

Due to the lack of uniform practice, the length of the fast as well as the exact nature of the fast could be different. Some of the fasts may be for as little as a single day while others would be over the course of days or even weeks. Further, some of the shorter fasts were a complete abstaining from food while the longer fasts necessitated a change in food consumption. Some fasts consisted of eating only a single meal each day. Others allowed the Christian to only eat after 3pm while other fasts were simply a denial of certain foods such as meat, eggs, and dairy.

Of interest is that Sundays were never included in these fasts. Sunday has always been seen by the Church as a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore are exempt

(continued on the next page)



A memorial cross at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh.

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- One of our students, whose mother just passed away.
- One of our students who is waiting to hear if he will be drafted into the war in Ukraine.
- Safety in our upcoming travels over the next few months.
- The continued work of Lutera Akadēmija.
- Good health and well-being for the family and friends of all missionaries.

PRAISE GOD FOR:

- Safe travels to and from our recent destinations.
- YOU - our generous donors and prayer warriors, along with the steadfast workers of Mission Central and Mission Advancement, without whom this mission would be impossible.

A greener option?

If you would like to help us save on paper and postage by getting our newsletters in digital form, please email Lindsay at Lindsay.Cundiff@lcmsintl.org. We would be happy to make that quick and simple change for you. Thank you!

The Roots of Lent (continued)



Crucifixion relief over one of the doors of St. Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle, taken in 2024.

from fasting. One of the Church Fathers would even speak of these Sundays as “rest stops” along the Lenten journey as it was a day wherein people could eat freely.

One of the earliest references to a full 40 day fast in the days leading up to Easter was from St. Athanasius in 330 AD, though he is likely quoting a tradition that he had inherited, which would indicate that the practice was older. St. Tertullian would suggest that the length of 40 days represents the number of hours that the Lord lay in his tomb. One day of fasting for each hour the Lord lay in the tomb. This would be a logical extension of the earliest likely fast of preparation that may have taken place from Good Friday until the Easter Vigil.

As the political situation that the Church found herself in changed, liturgical and pastoral practice began to become more uniform as the Church moved “above ground.” There are existing examples of what may have been lectures given by Bishops in the 4th century still to prepare the catechumen. The final significant development of Lenten practice would come around 595 AD when St. Gregory the Great instituted Ash Wednesday to round out and formalize the 40-day length of Lent.

May the Lord richly bless your Lenten observance this year and bring to mind those who have come before us and set the stage for our observances and who have shared our faith in ages past!

In Christ's service,
Pastor Cundiff

Be sure to follow our Facebook page, “The Cundiffs in Latvia,” for even more photos and stories of the Lord’s work in this beautiful country!

Carter’s Corner

Sveiki (hello)! In February, we had some pretty cool developments. Firstly, I had a trip to Warsaw, Poland, for a basketball tournament. My first-ever international trip without my parents! I had some cool times with my two buddies there, so it was a pretty memorable trip. Next, our family went to Scotland. We went to Edinburgh Castle and the National Museum of Scotland. We also went on an evening walking tour of the city’s underground vaults and Greyfriar’s Graveyard; Edinburgh’s history is fascinating!

- Carter (age 13)



There are many opportunities to serve as short-term or GEO missionaries. Check out the current list and download an application at [lcms.org/service](https://www.lcms.org/service). Click on “Service Opportunities.”

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