



# Why doesn't Lent start on a Sunday?

SHUTTERSTOCK



Why do we still celebrate Ash Wednesday on a Wednesday? We've moved Ascension Thursday to the following Sunday. Why not this too?

Margaret

Dear Margaret,

Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (first day of spring). *Lent*, derived from a word meaning "spring," refers to the forty-day penitential season determined each year by counting backward from the date of Easter. "Lent lasts from Ash Wednesday to the Mass of the Lord's Supper exclusive" (General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, 28; Pope Paul VI, 1969). The six Sundays in Lent are excluded from the count, since each represents a "mini-Easter."

While some rites calculate the days of Lent differently, in Western Christianity Lent was transferred to a Wednesday to align the number of days of Lent to the forty days Jesus fasted in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–2).

Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting and abstinence that begins a period of prayer, penance, and almsgiving in preparation for Easter, but it's never been a holy day of obligation. An obligatory holy day like the Ascension can be transferred to a Sunday, "the primordial holy day of obligation" in the universal Church, only by the national conferences of bishops "with the prior approval of the Apostolic See" (*Code of Canon Law*, 1246).

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**Monday**

February 20

Weekday



Jas 3:13–18 • Mk 9:14–29

**Tuesday**

February 21

Weekday



Jas 4:1–10 • Mk 9:30–37

**Wednesday**

February 22

Ash Wednesday



Jl 2:12–18

2 Cor 5:20—6:2

Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

**Thursday**

February 23

Lenten Weekday



Dt 30:15–20 • Lk 9:22–25

**Friday**

February 24

Lenten Weekday



Is 58:1–9a

Mt 9:14–15

**Saturday**

February 25

Lenten Weekday



Is 58:9b–14

Lk 5:27–32

**Sunday**

February 26

First Sunday of Lent



Gn 9:8–15

1 Pt 3:18–22

Mk 1:12–15