

LIGHTEN UP FOR LENT



LENT DAILY
DEVOTIONS

FOR TEENS

Ash Wednesday

IN THE BEGINNING ... LIGHT

Lent begins with light.

Which seems a bit strange, considering this season is generally associated with darkness—with purples ... and grays ... and muted hues. This is the valley of the shadow, after all—the shadow of death. One would think that light has little to do with Lent.

But Lent begins with light—with a bright burning fire. That's where the ashes of Ash Wednesday come from. Traditionally, Ash Wednesday's ashes are made from the burned branches of last Palm Sunday's palms. They are saved for nearly eleven months, those palms of praise. And then they are burned to create ashes of repentance—ashes that represent sin ... and death ... and sorrow.

That sounds more like Lent, doesn't it?

Still, it's good to remember that Lent begins with warm, bright light. And hidden deep down beneath the sorry ashes of Ash Wednesday, there is the echo of Psalm Sunday praise.

There's light to be found here in Lent. It's about sorrow and passion—there's no denying that. But it's also about salvation and the God who sent his Son to enliven and enlighten us. And so this Lent, we'll be exploring that light ... even in this dark season.

Pray: That God would enlighten you over the next weeks.



Thursday

YOUR ASHES

“YOU are dust ... and to dust you shall return.” Those were God’s words to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. They were also the words spoken to YOU, yesterday, if you observed the imposition of ashes in worship. The ashes of Ash Wednesday come from YOU. YOU are ash, and you will become ash again. You will die, someday. There is no getting around it. The ratio of human beings to deaths is 1 to 1. That’s a time-proven statistic, solid and immovable as stone.

I read once about a strange phenomenon called “spontaneous human combustion.” On certain occasions human beings have simply burst into flame, for no apparent reason. The article I was reading freaked me out. Weird!

Or is it? Aren’t we all, eventually, going to be victims of spontaneous human combustion? We are ash, after all. And to ash we shall return.

Friday

TO COMBUST

“To LIGHT” can mean “to COMBUST.” The way you light a match ... or a campfire ... or a BBQ pit. As Lent begins, we’re looking at burning, at the concept of being consumed in flame, at the idea of becoming ash. We’re looking at DYING. Human life, it seems, is a short fuse to a certain death. Or, as Isaiah once wrote:

*All flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the
LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.*

—Isaiah 40:6-7

Saturday

FALSE ADVERTISING

I've already received my first subpoena and several threatening phone calls. Law firms are being activated. It appears I've been accused of false advertising.

According to the document I'm currently holding, "The party of the first part" (a concerned young reader like you) "has found the dark, dour and inflammatory publication created by the party of the second part" (that's yours truly, folks) "to be falsely represented by the light, loving and whimsical cover of the same. Issuant of this correspondence, blah, blah, blah, yadda, yadda ..."

It seems this dear reader was led astray by the lighthearted title of this booklet. And, admittedly, "Lighten Up for Lent!" probably doesn't prepare a person to confront their own death on day number three.

But first of all, this is Lent, friends. There's going to be some darkness in the book from time to time. So brace yourselves and be prepared for it.

Secondly, there's light (literally) around the corner. We're heading into a much happier week of devotions. (Spoiler alert: The theme will be "to SHINE.") So, hang in there.

And finally, to my dear reader, I sincerely apologize for any discomfort I have caused. Chin up, friend. Keep reading ... things will get better! And (my lawyer asked me to say this), "Please cease and desist with any further action." Thanks!

First Sunday of Lent

TO SHINE

“To LIGHTEN” can mean “to SHINE.” This week we will be focusing on that particular light side of Lent.

As we do, it might be helpful to note that during his miraculous transfiguration, Jesus was doing exactly that—he was shining. Jesus led his chief disciples up a mountain where they were visited by Moses and Elijah. There, the Bible tells us, Jesus shone like the sun, brighter than any laundry product could make a satin wedding dress. A voice burst from heaven, acknowledging Jesus as God’s beloved Son. The Father was beaming as Jesus was shining.

Here we are in Lent, descending into shadows. But our focus is on Jesus, shining bright with heaven’s glory. Before the darkness, there was light. It can sustain us in this shadowed season.

Remember: Despite the way things seem, regardless of where we head on this Lenten journey, Jesus is our shining Savior.

First Monday

T-MINUS SIX WEEKS

Lent has bookends. Have you ever noticed? Solid, golden bookends. The week before Lent begins, Transfiguration serves as one bright bookend. Six weeks from now, on Easter Sunday, we will find Jesus shining once again, bright with resurrection power.

Read: Mark 9:2-9. Watch Jesus shine!



GOD'S "LIGHT" MOTIF

In opera, a leitmotif is a little piece of music that identifies a character. If you've ever listened to Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf," you know that the flute identifies the bird, the drums the hunters, the oboe the duck and the swift melody on the violin could be nothing but our young hero, Peter.

They use leitmotifs in movies too. Good example: When the kettledrums thunder in booming military lockstep, you know that Darth Vader is just around the corner.

Our God has a leitmotif—a running melody that identifies him.

From the moment he steps onto the cosmic stage, in the very first chapter of Genesis, in fact, God's leitmotif is playing. And that leitmotif ... is LIGHT!

"Light!" is the first word out of God's mouth. And light shines whenever God shows up ... in whatever he does. Whether he's speaking out of a glowing shrubbery or pointing Abraham to the twinkling cosmos; whether he's throwing lightning bolts from Sinai or leading his people with a fiery pillar; whether bright angels are singing his Good News to Bethlehem shepherds or magi are following his star across a desert—our God IS Light. Even when Jesus is dying, it is the very absence of light that throws into high relief the leitmotif of our God.

"God is light," St. John tells us in 1 John 1:15. "In him there is no darkness at all." Good news during Lent, huh? Even in this dark season our God can't help but shine!

First Wednesday

TRICKY FIRE

That was some tricky fire Moses saw—the fire that glowed from the burning bush on Sinai’s heights, I mean. You can read about it in Exodus 3. Why don’t you go ahead and do that. Right now. I’ll wait.

Tricky fire, huh? It refused to consume a bush. That runs against the very physics of fire, folks. Tricky.

If you read on, however—through the rest of Exodus ... and then Leviticus (hard reading, watch out!) ... and then Numbers ... and finally to the bitter end of Deuteronomy—you’ll find that the fire did consume Moses. It consumed his heart. It consumed the whole rest of his life. Moses wandered up the mountain that day out of curiosity. Dangerous thing, curiosity. It killed the cat, they say. It ended up consuming Moses. Tricky.

God’s call does that. It grabs our attention. It consumes us. It changes our lives, our directions. It changes US. It is tricky in the best way. It tricks us out of death. It tricks us into life ... NEW life.

First Thursday

GOD’S FACE IS SHINING

Moses’ brother, Aaron, the first of God’s priests, was given a blessing with which to bless God’s people. We still use it today. I love the strong images of light it contains:

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.
—Numbers 6:24-26



LIGHTEN UP FOR LENT

There's light to be found in Lent. It is a season about sorrow and passion—there's no denying that. But Lent is also a season about salvation and the God who sent his Son to enliven and enlighten us.

Through the light-themed (and sometimes light-hearted) devotions in this booklet, teens and young adults can reflect on the light of Christ that shines—especially in this dark season—as we fix our eyes past the cross to the open tomb of Easter and the bright light that shines for us there.



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