

MARDI GRAS, ASH WEDNESDAY
AND LENT

Mardi Gras is French for “fat Tuesday”. It concludes a period called “Carnaval” which is the period we call Epiphany. It had its origins in ancient pagan traditions such as the Roman celebrations of Spring and fertility – Saturnalia and Lupercalia.

When Christianity came to Rome it was thought easier to combine some of these holidays and celebrations into the Christian Year. So in the days leading up to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent people needed to use up all the rich fatty foods that were forbidden during Lent: meat, eggs, lard and cheese. As this was the last opportunity for merrymaking the Celebrations on Fat Tuesday became more raucous than usual. Parades, dancing etc. became the norm.

In the UK Fat Tuesday became a day of penitence and seeking forgiveness in readiness for Lent. Believers often went to the Priest to have their sins shriven (forgiven) and they would eat a simple meal of eggs, sugar and flour – Pancakes. So Mardi Gras in the UK became Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day.

Ash Wednesday

This is the beginning of Lent. During solemn Church services worshipers would have ashes applied to their foreheads in the shape of a cross. These ashes were a sign of penitence. In Biblical times a penitent sinner would often cover him/herself with ashes. Today the ashes are made from the burning of Palm Crosses people were given the previous Palm Sunday.

Lent

Lent symbolises the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, fasting and holding out against the temptations of Satan. The Lent Season is spent seeking mercy, praying and practicing penance. Fasting is not required on Sundays as these are “feast days”.

In our day it is customary to give up something such as tea/coffee, chocolate, alcohol, social media, going to the movies/theatre, swearing as our penance.

The Uniting Church organises a **Lent Event**. This is where people who are giving up one of those things mentioned above, put aside the money usually spent on them during the 5 weeks of Lent and donate it to a worthy cause. In 2019 the money raised from Lent Event is going to be used by Uniting World to relieve poverty in Timor Leste.

Often people guess how much they would have spent and then make a donation of a similar amount. It adds up. One cup of coffee per week day at \$4 is \$20 per week which is \$100 during Lent. One visit to the Movies per week is about the same amount.

May Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday and Lent be very special to you this year.
