



Ash Wednesday: It's All About Love

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Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day are on the same day this year, and you can blame the moon for that. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's talk about Ash Wednesday first.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, the season that prepares us for Easter. We get ashes on our foreheads to remind us that we belong to God. Ashes are in the shape of a cross because we are saved from our sins by Jesus' cross and resurrection.

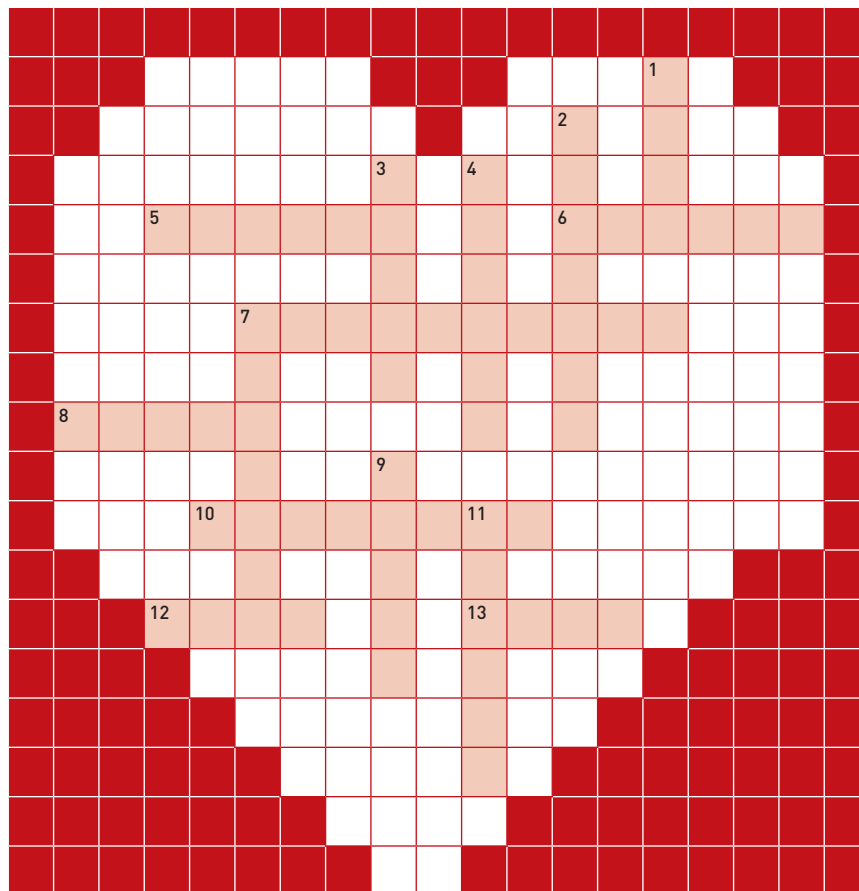


During Lent, we step up our Christian practices of prayer, almsgiving (that means helping others), and fasting. Fasting is when we go without something to show that God is all we need. We might give up treats and give the money to the poor, for example.

So why can't we just move Ash Wednesday to Thursday?



Have a Heart Puzzle Lent is all about love. You might even say it's a valentine to God that lasts 40 days. Try the crossword to see how much you know about Lent. The answer key plus more activities for this feast are on the next page.



Clues

ACROSS

- 5. A Lenten practice that might begin, "Our Father who art in heaven..."
- 6. The day of the week when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection
- 7. A practice of sharing what we have with the less fortunate
- 8. They're placed our forehead on the first day of Lent
- 10. Jesus' death and resurrection happened at the time of this Jewish feast

12. The season of preparation for Easter

13. Jesus forgives and saves us from these

DOWN

- 1. It helps us figure out when to celebrate Easter
- 2. A Lenten practice of going without something to show that God is all we need
- 3. Jesus suffered and died on this because he loves us so much
- 4. Easter happens in this season
- 7. Choosing not to eat a certain food or participate in something we usually like
- 9. Lent lasts _____ days
- 11. The biggest, happiest feast of the year; when Jesus was resurrected!

Lent is 40 days long because that's an important number for Christians. We remember that Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert to prepare for his ministry.



in springtime. Many years ago Church leaders decided that Easter Sunday would be celebrated every year on the first full moon after the first day of spring. This year, Easter falls on April 1 (and that's no joke). Counting 40 days back from Holy Saturday (skipping Sundays because they're not part of our Lenten fast), we arrive at Ash Wednesday, which falls on February 14 this year.

So why can't we just move Ash Wednesday to Thursday? That's where the moon comes in. It helps us figure out when Easter is. We don't know the exact date of Jesus' resurrection, but the Bible tells us it was on a Sunday, at the Jewish feast of Passover

Ash Wednesday isn't a day for parties and celebrating. In fact, many Christians abstain from

(that means give up) meat. Healthy Catholic adults fast or eat smaller meals. So if you're disappointed about missing some Valentine's Day fun this year, remember that the rewards of loving God and others are better than the sweetest valentine candy.



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ANSWER AND EXTRA ACTIVITIES

Try this!

Even though Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day are on the same day this year, you don't have to "give up" celebrating Valentine's Day. Here are some ideas:

- Combine your Valentine's Day celebration with a Mardi Gras party on the day before Ash Wednesday. Mardi Gras, also known as Fat Tuesday, is when we celebrate before beginning our Lenten fast.
- Learn a little about the real St. Valentine. (It's thought that there might actually have been two St. Valentines!)
- Bring valentine cards to a nursing home or hospital.
- Give winter birds a special treat by filling a birdfeeder with birdseed.
- Make a valentine for God. Draw a heart and write or draw all the good things you will do during Lent to show God how much you love him.

