

Fifth Sunday in Lent: March 22, 2026: *Prophet in a Dry Valley*



Our final portrait of Lent is of the Prophet Ezekiel. Scripture talks about the spiritual gift of prophecy, but to what extent are all believers supposed to live prophetic lives? Like us, Ezekiel lived in a time that was dark and uncertain. God's chosen people were in Babylonian captivity. One commentator writes, "Their confidence in themselves and in Yahweh was at an all-time low. The people needed to be reminded about the God who loved them and sustained them. The people needed to have their hope restored and their vision enlarged."

Have we been called to restore hope and enlarge our vision? God asked the prophet a compelling question: "Can these bones live?" Then God required a compelling action: He asked Ezekiel to take a personal part in reanimating the dusty corpses. Only when the Prophet spoke the word of God did the bones come to life. God still needs prophets in the valley these days. Look around, both far and very near: There are piles of bones, heaps of dead dreams and dusty visions. We must get up. We must speak a word of truth. It is through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ— who brought out Lazarus from the grave— that hope is restored, vision enlarged, and the dead are raised to life.

Scriptures to Ponder: Ez 37:1-14; Ps 130; Rom 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

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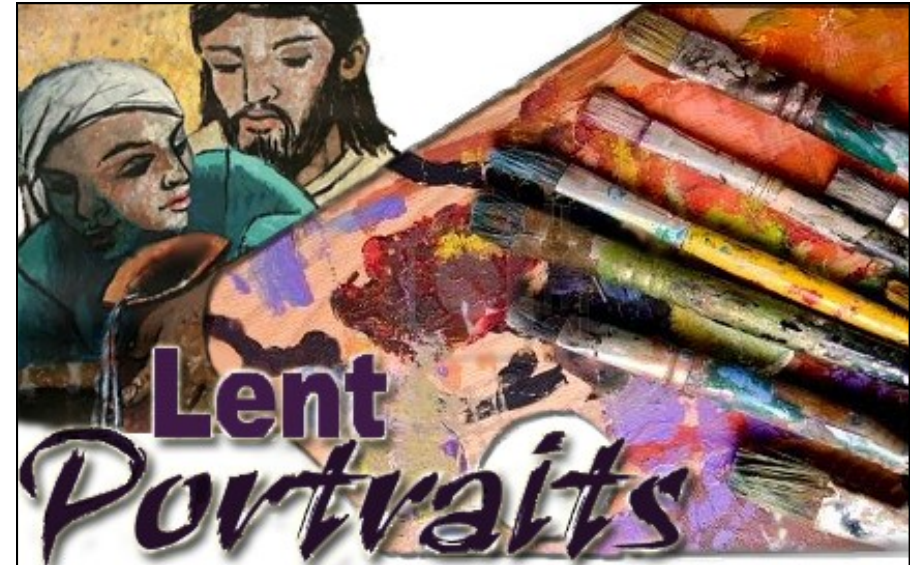
Cabanel: *The Fallen Angel* (detail). Fresco (1847).

Tanner: Study painting for *Nicodemus Visiting Christ*. Oil (c 1899).

Forte: *The Woman at the Well*. Acrylic (2004).

Justine Peterson: *And Now I See*. Medium and date unknown.

McBee: *Ezekiel*. Medium unknown (1979).



Sundays in Lent
2026
(Year A)

Worshiping Sundays at 10:30 AM at the Carmichael Chapel
4600 Winding Way; Sacramento, CA; 95841

www.Epiclesis.org

For more information: Info@Epiclesis.org

11230 Gold Express Drive, #310-214; Gold River, CA 95670-4484



About Lent...

When people think of Lent, they perhaps think of Roman Catholic observances. But Lent is not a Catholic thing or an Episcopal thing—*it's a Christian thing!* Lent has been observed

in one form or another since the early Christian church. What's more, growing numbers of historically non-liturgical churches are finding new meaning in the keeping of Lent. They are discovering that the journey of Lent helps prepare them more fully for the celebration of Easter.

Scholars are not entirely sure about the origins of the word "Lent" (it may be an Old English term meaning "spring"), but they do know that since the earliest days of the church, believers have observed a time of preparation in the weeks leading up to Resurrection morning. This time came to be known as Lent. Preparation for entry into the church would have taken two or three years, a lengthy process, with particular emphasis on the weeks leading up to Easter. On Easter morning, Christians who had completed the process would be baptized and receive their first communion.

Today, Lent is seen as much as a time of "taking things on" as "giving things up." Lent is a journey, an invitation to walk in Christ's own footsteps, to take on His likeness, and to follow Him even to the foot of the cross— and it's a time to focus on the need for repentance and cleansing. Doing that links us with countless believers across the ages who saw Lent as an opportunity for both discipleship and paying attention to the needs of others.

The season of Lent, a period of forty days, follows Epiphany. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy week, this season of both joy and sorrow is a time for the church to proclaim, remember, and respond to the atoning death of Christ. The traditional violet/purple color associated with the season is meant to convey the reflective, penitential tones of Lent.

Some questions and answers about Lent...



What is the Lenten season, and why is it set apart? It's a period of six weeks preceding the anniversary of Jesus' death and is set apart as a special season of reflection and prayer.

With what event in Jesus' life does the Lenten season correspond? Because Christ was in the wilderness 40 days, the early church chose it as an appropriate time for preparation for baptism which often happened at

Fourth Sunday in Lent: March 15, 2026: Blind No More

When Jesus healed the blind man, the religious leaders wanted to use the episode against both of them: against Jesus, to show that He was "sinful" for healing on the Sabbath, and against the blind man in order to prove their own assumptions about the consequences of sin. Compassion was nowhere to be found in their words or actions. Perhaps the best bit of dialog from the exchange between the man and the hypocrites is this one: "He answered them, 'I have told you already [how he opened my eyes], and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?'"



In the end, the man born blind understood more, saw more, than those who should have. "Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.'"

Lent is a time for us, like the blind man, to be sent by Jesus to the pool and be washed. Lent is a time for our healing and for our eyes to be opened. As the Ephesians passage reminds us, "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light...."

Scriptures to Ponder: 1 Sam 16:1-13; Ps 23; Eph 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

When we come to Jesus, He often takes our questions, our starting places, and points us in other directions that seem to amaze and confuse. But they always lead back to Him.

Something to think about: What does the Psalm passage for today have in common with Jesus' telling about the bronze serpent in the desert?

Scriptures to Ponder: Gen 12:1-4a; Ps 121; Rom 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17; Matt 17:1-9

Third Sunday in Lent: March 8, 2026: Slow to Believe

Wayne Forte's portrait (right) of the Woman at the Well shows, if you look carefully, two faces of the lady. There is the public face that she must have worn around the village as she went about her tasks. There is also the private, hidden face of her vulnerability, shame, and of barriers to God's love. But, ultimately, a drink of Living Water broke down barriers of prejudice, protocol, and pride. Just being with Jesus cleared away the questions and confusion in the woman's life. And, at once, she was compelled to share what she had learned, the water she had tasted, with those in her life.



Something to think about: Compare the Old Testament passage below about the need for water (and of the way Israel hardened their hearts and quarreled with God) to the description that Jesus gives about the kind of water He offers. Once again, Jesus has, in Himself, become our reconciliation.

Scriptures to Ponder: Ex 17:1-7; Ps 95; Rom 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Easter. And so the season of Lent gradually evolved into the penitential season we now know.

Why is the first day of Lent called "Ash Wednesday"? Because of the custom in the early church of sprinkling ashes on the heads of worshipers the first day of Lent to show sorrow for sin.

Are there any examples of this custom mentioned in the Bible? Yes, many. Some examples are Daniel and David and the people of Nineveh, to which Jesus Himself refers in Matthew 11:21.

If Lent only lasts 40 days, why does it begin 46 days before Easter? The six Sundays in Lent are considered "feast days" and so are not counted. Therefore, to make up for them, six days are added to the season.

What is the object of keeping Lent? To deepen the religious life, to purify the heart from sin, and to unite us more closely with the Savior.

Why do some churches suggest that fasting be observed? Because repentance and humility are essential to spiritual growth. In the Bible, fasting is often coupled with repentance. Jesus Himself fasted, as did the disciples.

Some ways to observe Lent?



Searching the Scriptures: Lent is the perfect time for common Bible study, as well as a time to renew personal reading. One good place to start is to read in preparation for Sunday worship during Lent. You'll find a listing of each Sunday in Lent, together with its scriptural theme, here in this booklet.

Prayer and Fasting: Over the years, prayer and fasting have been the most visible aspects of Lent. More frequent and intense personal prayer time is something that most Christians could use. Perhaps Lent could be a time for you to make good on some well-meaning resolutions to spend more time in prayer.



Many people find it helpful for personal discipline to have a season intentionally dedicated to simplify the way they live. For example, Lent can be a meaningful time for learning how to eat in less indulgent ways. But merely giving up food for physical self improvement is not the point. Rather,

we want to learn about the connections between living more simply to unclutter our lives and showing solidarity with those who have less.



Acts of Love and Devotion: Historically, the season of Lent has been a time to focus on the needs of others, especially the poor and needy. Acts of love and devotion, also called acts of piety, have been overlooked by many in their Lenten observances. Of course, acts of love and devotion are not for show but rather for God's glory and for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ.

Lent Portraits

Sundays in Lent, 2026

This year's journey through Lent introduces us to a few key Bible characters. Think of it like a stroll through an art museum where portraits hang on the walls, some well known, some more obscure, and all of them colorful and complex. In the gallery, the same portrait subject can be interpreted in many ways, depending upon the artist. Of course, the interpretive lens that we will use to see these Lenten portraits is Scripture itself. But like masterpieces in the museum, our biblical subjects will reveal many layers of complexity as we look at them with a creative and discerning eye.

First Sunday in Lent: February 22, 2026: *The Deceiver*



Today's character, the first portrait of Lent, is Satan, the Deceiver. Scripture references for today take us back to the very beginning, Genesis, to remind us that Satan is at first a deceiver, one who calls into question God's ordering of things. Sometimes he is also referred to as the "Author of Upside Down Things." Why? It was in the garden long ago that he tempted humankind to exchange worship of the Creator with that of the creature. But as Romans tells us, through one man's disobedience came sin, through the obedience of one Man comes righteousness to many.

There are many theological interpretations of the temptations of Christ. *Here is one that may especially speak to us:* The three things that Satan tempted Jesus with (food, the protection of angels, and dominion over all kingdoms) were things that were ultimately to be Christ's after He walked the path of obedience. So, the Deceiver attempted to offer Jesus a shortcut to reward without obedience— a premature and shallow reward that would have left us unrighteous before God.

Here's some application: Jesus was willing to defer God's reward until after He had been obedient. To what extent do churches today try to experience God's reward without first walking a path of obedience? Are we striving in our own strength, are we adding this or that program, in expectation of God's blessings without first having been obedient to the hard task? Satan's temptings are especially potent because they seem, on their surface, so reasonable, alluring, and even righteous. A portrait of Satan is not necessarily only painted with dark colors and angry brushstrokes.

Scriptures to Ponder: Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Ps 32; Rom 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11

Second Sunday in Lent: March 1, 2026: *One of Us*

In some ways the portrait of Nicodemus looks much like us— or at least we should be able to see part of ourselves in his likeness. Nicodemus was a respected member of the community, a regular "church-goer," you might say. And, like us, he was drawn to the person of Jesus. One commentator talks also about him being confused by Jesus. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and was willing to at least attribute great teaching ability to the Master: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God." But Jesus' reply must have surely confused Nicodemus, for He spoke of spiritual birth, of spiritual wind, and of the lifting up of the Son of Man, so "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life"— most likely not the answer that Nicodemus was expecting.

