

Your Monthly Newsletter

WINDOW TO BGST MARCH

2021





WHY LENT IS NECESSARY

BY DR KWA KIEM KIOK

We mark time in various ways: as an educational institution, BGST marks time in semesters and with breaks as our down times. Parents with school going children will mark time according to the school terms and activities. We celebrate festive occasions and significant birthdays and anniversaries, like turning 50 or a 30th wedding anniversary.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

The Christian tradition marks time around the life of Christ. The year starts with Advent, which is the 4 weeks before Christmas when we celebrate Jesus' birth. After Christmas is Epiphany, which is 6 January and is the day when the Magi came to visit. The word "Epiphany" is from the Greek "epiphanos" which means revealing, for that is when Jesus is revealed to the wise men.

Lent is the 40 days before Easter Sunday, and begins with the Transfiguration of Jesus. The 40 days of Lent (not counting Sundays which are always observed as mini-Easters) lead up to Palm Sunday, Holy week, Good Friday and finally Easter Sunday, which marks Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

The season of Easter lasts for 50 days until Pentecost, which is the beginning of the church whose head is Christ. The season Pentecost, is called "Ordinary Time" or "Kingdomtide" which is a season for growth, until Advent comes around again. Connected with the Christian year is the Lectionary (see, for example, <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>), readings in



the Bible which follow this pattern. I have been using the Lectionary for my personal bible reading for some years now, and I find that I am slowly being shaped by the biblical story. I begin to see the story as whole, not just Jesus' life but also how the story of the Old Testament fits into God's grand narrative.

PREPARING

To prepare for something can seem to be a drudgery: before the Lunar New Year, those of us who celebrate will throw out the past year's clutter, clean windows, and clear out cupboards. Lent, as a season of preparation before Easter can also seem like a drudgery or an obligation, but should not be so.

I find that taking on a discipline at Lent has helped me to appreciate in more profound ways Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. Over the years of observing Lent, for instance, as I fasted from food, I became more aware that I was depending on the easy availability of food to sustain myself, rather than to discipline my own eating habits. I have also experienced inexplicable joy at Easter Sunday sunrise service when I was convicted, "Yes, He is alive, and I know that he is King!" I doubt I would have come to got these lessons with such depth if I hadn't been especially attuned to the season.

May I encourage you to observe this season of Lent, so that we may all have growth in Christian maturity.



DR KWA KIEM KIOK

Kiem-Kiok is BGST Lecturer in Missiology and Interdisciplinary Studies. She brings her legal and theological training, as well as work experience in marketplace, church and para-church organisations into this role. Previously she was lecturer and registrar at East Asia School of Theology where she taught a variety of courses in intercultural studies. She has published on a diverse range of subjects including a contextual commentary on *Matthew* (ATA, 2017), contributed to the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Zondervan, 2011) as well as on religious harmony in *Faith in an Age of Terror* (BGST, 2018).

Shrove Tuesday (by Wikipedia)

Is the day before Ash Wednesday (1st day of Lent), observed in many Christian countries through participating in confession and absolution, the ritual burning of the previous year's Holy Week palms, finalizing one's Lenten sacrifice, as well as eating pancakes and other sweets.

It is observed by many Christians, including Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and Roman Catholics, who "make a special point of self-examination, of considering what wrongs they need to repent, and what amendments of life or areas of spiritual growth they especially need to ask God's help in dealing with." "Shrove Tuesday" comes from the word shrive, meaning "absolve".

As this is the last day before the penitential season of Lent, related popular practices, such as indulging in food that one might give up as their Lenten sacrifice for the upcoming 40 days, are associated with Shrove Tuesday



**A PANCAKE RACE IN OLNEY,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, 2009**

By Lestalorm; Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0

[Wikipedia Commons](#)

The term *Mardi Gras*

is French for "Fat Tuesday", referring to the practice of the last night of eating richer, fatty foods before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season, which begins on Ash Wednesday.

Many Christian congregations thus observe the day through the holding of pancake breakfasts, as well as the ringing of church bells to remind people to repent of their sins before the start of Lent.

On Shrove Tuesday, churches also burn the palms distributed during the previous year's Palm Sunday liturgies to make the ashes used during the services held on the very next day, Ash Wednesday.

In some Christian countries, especially those where the day is called Mardi Gras or a translation thereof, it is a carnival day, the last day of "fat eating" or "gorging" before the fasting period of Lent.

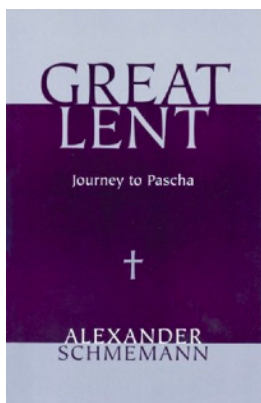


**PIETER BRUEGEL
THE ELDER,
THE FIGHT
BETWEEN
CARNIVAL AND
LENT, 1559**

QUARANTINE AND LENT

BY DAVID SAYSON

Quarantine is a Latin word (*quarantina*) that means 40 days. It is a reference to Jesus' solitary time in the wilderness. The church historically has viewed Lent (*quadregesima*) as the Christian's way of entering into Christ's journey in the desert and was viewed by ancient Christians as one of the most important events of the year. But in modern times, Lent has almost been forgotten and the focus has been primarily on Christmas and Easter. Perhaps during this time of quarantine, it might be beneficial to revisit why Lent was so important to early Christians.



The best resource I have come across is Alexander Schmemmann's "Great Lent: Journey to Pasha" which I am drawing on for this reflection. If you would like to go deeper, I highly recommend using this book every year as a guide for the entire season (which includes the

five weeks leading up to Lent). As the subtext of the book suggests, Lent is the spiritual journey and its destination is Easter. Lent and Easter go

together, so when we ignore Lent, we lose something with regards to Easter. It is akin to reading the New Testament without any knowledge of the Old Testament. Lent is the necessary precursor to Easter just as dying to ourselves is necessary so that we can receive new life in Christ.

Lent reveals something crucial and paradoxical about our Christian faith and life. The gospel we received declares the "Kingdom of God has come near" (Mt 4:17), yet we must still pray "Thy Kingdom come" (Mt 6:10). Even though we have been saved and Christ has defeated sin and death, the sad reality of our daily experience is that we still sin, and a pandemic can still keep us up at night. Just when we managed to 'forget death' and were enjoying ourselves, Covid-19 manages to remind us of our inescapable and seemingly senseless demise. Covid-19 also manages to expose our nominal faith for what it has become, a sort of moral, therapeutic, deism. But do not despair because the Church has given a precious gift as an antidote. The annual cycle of Lent and Easter provide a repeating spiritual renewal. Schmemmann tells us that Lent is "a spiritual journey whose purpose is to transfer us from

one spiritual state into another.” It does this by teaching us the *what*, *why* and *how* of repentance. This was Christ’s command in His gospel “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Mat 4:17) But repentance (μετανοέω; *metanoeō*) is not merely saying or feeling sorry for the things we have done wrong. It is a complete transformation of mindset, principles and practices. So, we need Lent because it is the school of *metanoeō* every Christian must go to every year to deepen faith, re-orient life, and to be transformed.

What we learn at this school is not something you can study in a book. It is *tacit knowledge* as Michael Polanyi puts it. Learning therefore requires both time and spiritual disciplines such as fasting, solitude, and prayer. So we must wander for forty days through the desert of Lent, but at the end, Easter, the light of the Kingdom will shine all the more brightly. But the journey is also well lit. Schmemmann calls Lenten worship a *bright sadness* that softens our hearts and opens it to the realities of the Spirit, and shows our hearts what hunger for communion with God feels like.

It is sad because we are confronted with what our sin truly is, but *bright* because of God’s constant presence and forgiveness. Schmemmann tells us that biblical sin has a depth and density that we modern and post-modern people cannot comprehend because we have flattened everything. This makes it hard for us to experience true repentance. This is a long quote, but I had to include it entirely because it is so good.

The culture in which we live and which shapes our world view excludes in fact the

concept of sin. For if sin is, first of all, man’s fall from an incredibly high altitude, the rejection by man of his ‘high calling,’ what can all this mean within a culture which ignores and denies that ‘high altitude’ and that ‘calling,’ and defines man not from ‘above’ but from ‘below’ – a culture which even when it does not openly deny God is in fact materialistic from the top to the bottom, which thinks of man’s life only in terms of material goods and ignores his transcendental vocation? Sin here is thought of primarily as a natural ‘weakness’ due usually to a ‘maladjustment’ which has in turn social roots and, therefore, can be eliminated by a better social and economic organization. For this reason even when he confesses his sins, the ‘modern’ man no longer repents; depending upon his understanding of religion, he either formally enumerates formal transgressions of formal rules, or shares his ‘problems’ with the confessor – expecting from religion some therapeutic treatment which will make him happy again and well- adjusted. In *neither* case do we have repentance as the shock of man who, seeing in himself the ‘image of the ineffable glory,’ realizes that he has defiled, betrayed, and rejected it in his life; repentance as regret coming from the ultimate depth of man’s consciousness; as the desire to return; as surrender to God’s love and mercy. This is why it is not enough to say: ‘I have sinned.’ This confession becomes meaningful and efficient only if sin is understood and experienced in all its depth and sadness.

The Lenten journey starts with a true understanding of sin and repentance, and then trains us for battle against passions, flesh, sin, and evil through the spiritual disciplines. The weapons in this fight are faith, hope and love (Heb 6:9-12), and we are trained in the use of these through prayer and fasting. The second half of the journey invites to look forward to the light prepared for us, even though this part of the journey must take us through the mystery of Christ's suffering, His Cross and Death. This is the full liturgical experience that many modern churches are missing. Schmemmann tells us that we have traded this in for is either *rationalism* or *sentimentalism*. Our modern liturgies are designed more to feed our intellects or to give us a vehicle to express ourselves, whereas the older liturgies were designed more to mold us into Christ's image. That is all I will say about that here but you can read more in *Great Lent*.

In order for Lent to do its work in our lives, we must take it seriously. It is not enough to say "I will give up chocolate for Lent" or to do whatever fits us. Schmemmann tells us this will render the whole notion of the Lenten effort meaningless. He refers us to Matthew 17:21 – after the disciples had witnessed the transfiguration and come down from the mountain, they were unable to cast the demon

out because "this kind can never come out except by prayer and fasting." Some evil in our lives are so rooted that it cannot be defeated without prayer. But there is also no Lent without fasting. That is because fasting is not a mere custom or obligation; "it is connected with the very mystery of life and death, of salvation and damnation."

Schmemmann demonstrates this by connecting the original sin of Adam, eating what he was not supposed to eat when tempted (breaking his fast) to Christ's overcoming temptation in the wilderness by refusing to eat (keeping his fast). In other words, human life became mortal "because man rejected life as it was offered and given to him by God and preferred a life depending not on God alone but on bread alone." Food (and all of creation) is supposed to be a means of communion with God, and this is the only way eating can give us life. Only God has Life and is Life. Our modern scientific view misleads us into thinking that food as fuel is what gives us life. Fasting is the entrance and participation in that experience of Christ by which he liberates us from this false view. Fasting offers "not a theoretical but truly a practical challenge to the great Liar who managed to convince us that we depend on bread alone and built all human knowledge, science, and existence on that lie."



The solitude of our quarantine this Lent can also be of spiritual benefit. It would be a great time to meditate on the character of our relationships and our work (how superficial are they?). It is also a good time to search for meaning in our vocations, friendships, and responsibilities. But our modern world, even in

our quarantined state, makes this difficult because the world is in our homes through technology. Our eyes are bombarded by images from screens and our ears never experience true silence. Therefore, we must also fast from our technological addictions. Schmemmann puts it this way "It is impossible to split our life between the 'bright sadness' of Lent and 'The Late Show.'" Fasting from speech is also beneficial because it can teach us to control our speech, and to recover its sacredness.

Lent is the very beginning, the recovery by man of his faith, it is also his recovery of life, of its divine meaning, of its sacred depth. It is by abstaining from food that we rediscover its sweetness and learn again how to receive it from God with joy and gratitude. It is by "slowing down" on music and entertainment, on conversation and superficial socializing, that we rediscover the ultimate value of human relationships, human work, human art. And we rediscover all this because very simply we rediscover God Himself - because we return to Him and in Him to all that which He gave us in His infinite love and mercy...



DAVID SAYSON

David is a businessman with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of British Columbia and a Masters of Theological Studies from Regent College. He desires to see Christians integrate their faith and work, with a special interest for those who work in the fields of business, engineering, science, and technology.

In January 2019, David was a guest lecturer at our BGST-IMT (Institute for Marketplace Transformation) collaboration on the Marketplace Seminar, and also Aging Matters.

MARCH & COURSES APRIL

MM/CS226

Spiritual Adulthood: Nurturing Emerging Adults in an Intergenerational Context

STARTS 19 MAR 2021

Rev Dr Tan Soo-Inn

Info & Registration
bgst.edu.sg/course/145

ID204

Knowing your Buddhist Neighbour II

STARTS 5 APR 2021

Rev Ng Seng Chuan

Info & Registration
bgst.edu.sg/course/131

OT365

1 & 2 Kings: An Anatomy of Religious Decline in Israel & Judah

STARTS 30 MAR 2021

Dr Philip Satterthwaite

Info & Registration
bgst.edu.sg/course/133

BGST.EDU.SG/COURSES

2021

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BGST.EDU.SG/EVENTS

27 Mar

ALUMNI
STUDENT
NETWORK
(ASN)

BGST ASN FELLOWSHIP WALK IN CLEMENTI FOREST

Time: Meet at 8:30am Kopitiam (Food Park, Block 107), Sunset Way.

Register with Ray Kwok via WhatsApp at 9455-9187

7, 14,
21, 28
Apr

EWL
CERTIFICATE

(M1) EXECUTIVE CERTIFICATE IN WORKPLACE LEADERSHIP

Module 1: Leadership in the Workplace
Lecturers: Dr Jeremy Gwee & Mr Michael Low

Time: 7:30pm - 10:00pm

Information & Registration at bgst.edu.sg/engage

24 Apr

PUBLIC
LECTURE

WORKPLACE DISCIPLESHIP IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Speaker Dr David W. Gill

Time: 9:30am - 11:30am

Register at bgst.edu.sg/events/details/223

ANNOUNCEMENTS

STUDENT ORIENTATION

BGST is conducting a student orientation on Fri, 5 March 2021

APPLICATION TO GRADUATE FOR 2021

Please be informed that applications to graduate this year will close on 31 March 2021.

WE ARE HIRING!

BGST is looking for a **Technical Assistant with skills in recording and video editing**. Available on full or part time basis at \$17 per hour. For enquiries, please write to yap_foon_lyn@bgst.edu.sg

BGST Gift Vouchers

Valid till 31 December 2021

Available in \$200, \$100, \$50, and \$20

To purchase, email yap_foon_lyn@bgst.edu.sg



mar-apr

FACULTY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

DR PHILIP SATTERTHWAITE



21
MAR

BETHESDA CHAPEL

28
MAR

BETHESDA CHAPEL

MR QUEK TZE-MING



2
APR

BETHESDA CHAPEL

Good Friday

4
APR

BETHESDA CHAPEL

Easter Sunday

DR LAI PAK WAH



20-21
MAR

MT CARMEL BP CHURCH

Sermon on Mark 15:1-15

23
MAR

NTU CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Ministry in a Digital World

24
APR

SINGAPORE LIFE CHURCH

Sermon on Exodus 19:3-6

DR KWA KIEM KIOK



5
MAR

SCGM BREAKFAST MEETING

Asian Theology

20
MAR

SINGAPORE LIFE CHURCH

Sermon on Mark 10:32-45

11
APR

LIVING HOPE METHODIST CHURCH

Ephesians 3:1-3

MR LEOW WEN PIN



5
MAR

METHODIST CHINESE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Seminar on Mental Health "Finding Your Place" Programme

20
APR

TRINITY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Guest Lecture (Pastoral Theology and Praxis)

21
MAR

LIVING HOPE METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon on Special Needs

24
APR

PAYA LEBAR METHODIST CHURCH

Seminar on Special Needs

**Help BGST grow to achieve
its vision of training the
whole people of God!**

Consider donating today

**DONATE
MONTHLY**

**ONE-TIME
DONATION**



2021

WINDOW TO BGST



Biblical Graduate School of Theology

www.bgst.edu.sg

50 Kallang Pudding Road, #07-01, AMA Building

Singapore 349326

Tel: 065-6227-6815

Follow us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/BGST1989

Follow us on Instagram

@BGST1989