**Times and Seasons**

**Part 2 – Lent, Holy Week and Easter**

**Section 1**

**A Pastoral and Liturgical Introduction**

It is important to emphasise that Lent, Holy Week and Easter are all one season: a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which we enter the wilderness and the Passion, without losing sight of the Easter promise of eternal life. It is only in the light of the resurrection that the wilderness and the Passion have meaning. Through our liturgy, we do not seek to commemorate separate events in the life of Christ, but to celebrate the mystery of the whole of Jesus' saving work.

Lent now begins on Ash Wednesday, the sixth Wednesday before Easter, but has many different origins.[[1]](#footnote-1) From the fourth century onwards, it became standardised as a forty day fast in anticipation of Holy Week as a separate preparatory fast for 'Pascha' – Easter. Originally, however, it had been a three week fast linked to preparation for baptism[[2]](#footnote-2) and this connection was maintained as Easter became a preferred date for baptism.

The 'Triduum' (three days from Maundy Thursday to the Easter Vigil) also developed from the fourth century. Origen,[[3]](#footnote-3) in the mid third century, had seen the 'Pascha' in terms of passage, using images of the Red Sea to illustrate the resurrection as passage from death to life. Other writers focussed more on the Passion, and these two ideas became combined,[[4]](#footnote-4) so the feast emerged as a three day unity, reinforced by liturgical practices in Jerusalem in the late fourth century, such as the veneration of the Cross, vigil and lucenarium recorded in Egeria's Travels.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Later, the final days of Jesus' earthly life began to be commemorated on other days of Holy Week. Palm Sunday, already celebrated in fourth century Jerusalem,[[6]](#footnote-6) became the start of the *Great Week* we still keep today.

As early as the end of the second century,[[7]](#footnote-7) the Easter season was kept as a fifty day feast, beginning on Easter Day and ending with Pentecost. Ascension as a feast emerged at the end of the fourth century, and shortly afterwards was celebrated across a wide area.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Remaining true to this tradition, the Church in Wales’ liturgical resources for Lent, Holy Week and Easter aim to ensure that the Christian community continues to maintain the overall unity of the Easter season.

Specific guidance on use of the resources is set out in the notes at the beginning of each section. However, it is also important that the needs of the local church should be taken into account when planning services. For example, consideration of available space and resources may be a factor in the organisation of processions on Palm Sunday; community involvement in the ceremonies of Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday can provide a focus for reconciliation and renewed commitment to service; opportunities for ecumenical collaboration may be explored through sensitive use of Good Friday, Easter Vigil and Pentecost Vigil services; and local traditions, such as Sul y Blodau, may be incorporated into the liturgy.

All these resources can, and should, be contextualised to provide a 'living tradition' of worship, which draws on the liturgical riches of the past and brings the season of Lent, Holy Week and Easter alive for all God's people in their own generation.

1. Bradshaw, P.F & Johnson, M.E., *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 2011), 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, chapter 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Origen, *Peri Pascha*, 1, quoted in Bradshaw & Johnson, *Origins,60.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. e.g., Didymus of Alexandria, Ambrose and Augustine (4th cent) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bradshaw & Johnson, *Origins,* 60-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wilkinson, J., *Egeria's Travels* (Warminster, Aris &Phillips, 1999), 151-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As evidenced by the *Acts of Paul*, and the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons and Tertullian. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bradshaw & Johnson, *Origins,* 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)