

BETHANY REFORMED CHURCH
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

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PASTOR



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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It is hard to believe but we are on the cusp of leaving the Season of Epiphany. Epiphany is the time of new insights and new understandings. We learned that God extended an invitation to some non-Jewish astrologers to come and see his new born son in Bethlehem. So we understand that from the beginning, Jesus came to save not only the Jews but the Gentiles (all non-Jews) as well. Jesus revealed who he was to some fishermen with the invitation to come and I will teach you how to fish for people. We have been winding up Epiphany through the teachings of Jesus as He reveals to us what the Kingdom of God truly is. And what we must do if we are to be truthful to our name as "Christians" or "Christ bearers." Our final Sunday in Epiphany, March 3, is Transfiguration Sunday.

Ash Wednesday is on March 6 and is the first day of Lent. We will have our Ash Wednesday Service at 1:00 PM. Its official name is "Day of Ashes," because of the practice of rubbing ashes on one's forehead in the sign of a cross. Since it is exactly 40 days (excluding Sundays) before Easter Sunday, it will always fall on a Wednesday—there cannot be an "Ash Thursday" or "Ash Monday." The Bible never mentions Ash Wednesday—for that matter, it never mentions Lent.

Lent is intended to be a time of self-denial, moderation, fasting, and the forsaking of self-indulgent activities and habits. Ash Wednesday begins this period of spiritual discipline. Ash Wednesday and Lent are observed by most Catholics and some Protestant denominations. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not observe Ash Wednesday; instead, they start Lent on "Clean Monday."

While the Bible does not mention Ash Wednesday, it does record accounts of people in the Hebrew Scriptures using dust and ashes as symbols of repentance and/or mourning (2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1; Job 2:8; Daniel 9:3). The modern tradition of rubbing a cross on a person's forehead identifies that person with Jesus Christ.

Lent is our journey with Jesus as He goes to Jerusalem for the last time. Every year our journey is different. This year the Deacons have decided that our focus will be on the RCA's *Gift of Hope*. It is any exciting program and it is our hope that all will participate in some way. Please take note of the specific article on *The Gift of Hope*.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened new insights for you during this Epiphany Season and will continue with leading us through Lent.

Blessings to All, *Pastor Peggy*