

Order of Church Fasts

Fasting is abstinence from all things that the body desires. The purpose of fasting is to control the desire of the body to obey the will of the soul, to seek forgiveness, and to increase the reward of the soul.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church this is done by abstaining from eating animal products. Individuals also abstain from food for certain amounts of time until the period of fasting is over. (Fetha Negast 15, Mt. 6:16)

Fasting has a broader religious meaning and it does not only mean abstaining from food only. As written in the Bible "Blessed are those who fast to feed the poor." Individuals are encouraged to share what they have been blessed with. This can be done by helping those that are less fortunate in various ways including giving alms, sharing their knowledge, time, and kindness.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has its own laws and orders of fasting. Accordingly, these are seven fasting periods.

The Great Fast (Lent): This is the Fast that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ fasted to serve as an example for us for forty days and nights after his baptism. (Mt. 4:1)

Wednesdays and Fridays: Wednesday and Fridays are should always be observed every week in prayers and fasting (The Law of Kings article 15; Didas 29). These two days signify the remembrance of our Saviour Christ who died for the sake of mankind.

Nineveh Fast: It is a three day fast, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. It falls sometimes in January and at another in February. Thus it is one of the rotating fasts. The reason behind the decision of our Church Fathers, that this fast be observed is that as the people of Nineveh were saved from the wrath of God through prayer and fasting, so the faithful fast in seeking to receive mercy and blessings through this fast. (Jonah. 3:5-9; Mt. 12:39).

Gehad Fast: This Fast is observed on the eves of Nativity and Epiphany. On Nativity and Epiphany, the Holy Liturgy is celebrated starting at midnight until 3:00 am.

Fast of the Prophets (Advent): This period of fast extends from November 15 - December 29. It is observed following the examples of the prophets who were fasting and praying in their times longing for the Advent of Christ.

The Fast of the Apostles: The Apostles observed this fast after they received the Holy Spirit and before they set out to proclaim the Gospel. This period extends from May to July (Ethiopian Calendar). It is one of the rotating fasts.

The Fast of Assumption of the Virgin Mary: The fasts last from August 1-15th. In Ethiopia this fast is observed by all Orthodox Christians including children. This fast is observed following the examples of the Apostles who fasted and prayed so that the lord will reveal the body of our Lady. On the 14th day her body was revealed to them by the angels and on the 16th day her assumption took place.

Order of Church Feasts

In Accordance with the canons of the Church, there are nine Major Feast Days of Our Lord.

Tsinset (Annunciation Feast of Incarnation)

Lidet (Nativity)

Timket (Epiphany)

Debre Tabor (Transfiguration)

Hosanna (Palm Sunday)

Siqlete (Crucifixion)

Tensae (Easter)

Ereget (Ascension)

Paracletos (White Sunday).

Apart from the nine Major Feast Days, there are other nine Minor Feast Days.

Sibket (the First Sunday before Nativity)

Birhan (the second Sunday before Nativity)

Nolawi (the Third Sunday before Nativity)

Genna (Nativity Eve)

Gizret (Circumcision)

Lidete Simeon (Presentation of the Lord)

Kana Ze Gelila (Feast of Cana of Galilee)

Debere Zeit (Fifth Sunday of Great Lent - Mt. Olives)

Mesekel (Finding of the True Cross)

Great Lent & Holy Week

Zewerede: He who comes down (First Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 3:16

The first theme teaches us about the incarnation; that God came down from Heaven, became man in Bethlehem through the Holy Virgin Mary and by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

God came down from Heaven to teach us that he loves us and therefore we should love one another. Only in the person and work of Jesus Christ can we find God, His love and eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Kedest: Holy/Sanctify (Second Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. Matthew 5, 6, 7

The second theme teaches us about separation from sin and evil. To be Holy means cut off or separated from sin, the devil and the world as Christ our Lord separated himself in the wilderness of Judea, fasting and praying, thus establishing example of the Great Lent Fast of the Church. However sanctification not only consists of putting off the old nature of Adam and sin but putting on the new nature of Jesus Christ by practicing the positive mean of holiness through fasting, prayer, spiritual reading of the Holy Bible, good works, practicing virtue, receiving penance and the Holy Communion.

Mekurab: Temple (Third Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 2:19

The third theme remembers the strong and powerful preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple. It teaches us the proper use of the Temple/Church as a place of worship, prayer and devotion. Our Lord also predicts His own resurrection by using the Temple as a symbol of his own body, which will be destroyed and raised after three days.

Metsagu: Infirmary, the Paralytic (Fourth Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 5: 1 - 15

The fourth theme teaches us that Christ came to this world not only to preach and teach concerning the kingdom of God but to heal the sick, infirm and those possessed with mental and spiritual diseases. Our Lord teaches us that the foundations of all these physical and spiritual illnesses are caused by sin. The power of forgiveness is available to us faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit through his church and the sacrament of penance.

Debre Zeit: Mount of Olives (Fifth Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 3: 18 - 20 St. Matthew 4:17

The fifth theme is based upon the second coming of Christ, which was announced by our Lord on the Mount of Olives. The signs of the end times spoken by our Lord will culminate in final judgement and resurrection of the living and dead, believers and unbelievers, righteous and sinners. It is in the knowledge of this truth of the second coming of Christ that all people must repent, believe and baptize in preparation for the arrival of God' Kingdom so that we will not be condemned.

Gebre Here: Faithful Servant (Sixth Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. Matthew 25: 14 - 25

In the sixth great theme in the fast we asked, "Who is the wise and faithful servant?" The answer to this question is what we do or don't do with our lives until we await Christ's return to this world in His second coming. The faithful servant is the person who hears and does or fulfills the word of God; it is the one who is faithful and loyal to God, the Church and its family; it is the person who has received the tradition and faith of Christ's Church and holds it steadfastly and

courageously. It is the person who is faithful over small things such as fasting, prayer, humility, devotion, our health and material wealth for use in God's work on Earth. The faithful and good servant is the one who builds his house on the rock and not the sand. The unfaithful servant is the opposite of all these.

Nicodemus: A Ruler of the Jews (Seventh Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 3: 1 - 13

The theme in the seventh Sunday in the Great Fast points to the new birth given by water and the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews came to our Lord by night seeking to escape the world of darkness and sin because he saw in Christ the light of salvation and life. Our Lord did not reject him but received him with Heavenly instructions. He explained to Nicodemus the preconditions of salvation in the Kingdom of God exists only if he believed that He was the God's own Son and that he was equal with God the Father and that the power to become children of God by rebirth is available only through the [mystery of Baptism](#), which is one of [the seven Sacraments](#) of the Church.

Hosanna/Saviour: Palm Sunday (Eighth Sunday of Great Lent)

Reading: St. John 12: 12 - 19

This is the eighth and final Sunday in the Great Lent Fast and is called Hosanna or Palm Sunday. This day is to commemorate our Lord's final journey into Jerusalem riding on a colt the foal of an ass whilst the people acknowledged him as the Son of David, King, coming in the name of the Lord and placing palms under Him. The whole event teaches us that Christ our Lord the good shepherd was about to lay down his life for the sheep. Christ had observed all the laws and was about to observe the Passover feast in Jerusalem and fulfil all righteousness. For Christ is to become our Passover, a pure sacrifice. The Lamb of God is about to be offered for us all and become the true eternal King of body, soul and spirit.

Holy Week: Passion Week

Holy Wednesday/ Judgement Day

Reading: St. John 18: 28 - 40

This day in Passion Week is also called Judgement Day in order to remember our Lord's trial before Pontius Pilate in the hall of judgement.

Holy Thursday/ Prayer Thursday

Reading: St. Matthew 26: 17 - 30; St. Mark 14: 12 - 26; St. Luke 22: 1 - 23

This day in Passion Week is called the day of prayer on Prayer Thursday. This is to commemorate the celebration of the eating of the Passover of Christ with his disciples during the last supper.

The ceremony of the washing of the disciples' feet and the mystery of the Holy Eucharist also took place on this day.

Information gathered from websites of St. Mary of Zion EOTC, London, England & Debre Bisrate St. Gabriel EOTC, Atlanta, Georgia

<http://stmaryofzion.co.uk/lent-week-by-week-meanings/4549164674>

<http://atlantagabriel.org/our-faith/#7>