

FEBRUARY 18, 2026
ASH WEDNESDAY

taking⁺ faith home

Return to the Lord with all your heart.

ASH WEDNESDAY BIBLE READINGS

Take time to read and reflect on these Bible passages as part of your Ash Wednesday observances.

Wednesday	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17	A call to repentance
	Psalm 51:1-17	Have mercy on me, O God
	2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10	Messengers of Christ
	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21	Giving, praying, and fasting

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Joel 2:12-13 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday:

Dear God, create in us clean hearts, and put a new and right spirit within us for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen. (Psalm 51:10)

Mealtime Prayer:

Lord God, whether we are eating a meal this day or being strengthened by your word, feed us with love and mercy in Jesus' name. Amen.

A Blessing to Give:

May God have mercy on you. (Psalm 51:1a)

FEBRUARY 18, 2026
HYMN FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

Return to God

ASH WEDNESDAY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- What makes it hard to admit you made a mistake?
- The biblical term "return to the Lord" is a way of expressing regret for a broken relationship with God. When a relationship is broken, how does one seek forgiveness?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17.

The Old Testament prophets held out little hope for the goodness of public worship. Not Joel. He calls the people to hold a "solemn assembly" (v. 15) that brings all the people in, young and old alike, even newlyweds. Repentance is often imagined as an individual act but not here. Joel does not mention the reason for the people needing to repent. It should be obvious. What are the obvious sins of our communities, even our nation and world? Ash Wednesday provides an opportunity for all God's people to repent of our collective sins, like fear of people who are different and hatred that lashes out at others and attacks God's creation itself. What would you name as the collective sins against God's will? We are freed to come together and repent because we have the God who conquers divine justice with divine grace and mercy. We need not fear the judgment of God. It leads us to God's mercy.

Discuss: This Lent, where can you gather with God's people for worship to confess collective misdeeds and lack of faith in God? Why is this important?

Pray: Gracious and merciful God, bring us together that we may repent and receive the reconciliation only you can give, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERVICE

Jesus calls us to serve our neighbor in love. Based on the Ash Wednesday Bible Readings and theme for this day, who can you invite to join you in prayer during Lent to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

The church season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts for 40 days. It ends the Saturday before Easter. Lent is a time to focus on our relationship with God. Draw a large cross or use a cross you may have hanging on the wall. Take your finger and trace around the shape of the cross while saying the Lord's Prayer. Make this a daily practice throughout Lent this year.