



February 25, 2026

MESSENGER

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FAITH AND FASTING¹

Many Christians are in the second week of **Lent**, the major Fast practiced by Christians, which began on Ash Wednesday and will end on Good Friday. Meanwhile, our Muslim friends are in the middle of **Ramadan**, the most important Fast in the Islamic faith. Lent is forty days long, to identify with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness in preparation for his public ministry. Ramadan lasts for thirty days and memorializes the first set of visions experienced by Mohammed, during which a large portion of the Koran was revealed to him.

Lent and Ramadan began the same day (February 18) this year, which is very rare. The date of Lent is determined from a solar calendar, but the date of Ramadan follows a lunar calendar, which makes it ten to eleven days earlier each year. For this reason, Lent is always in our Springtime, while Ramadan may be at any time during our year. The last time the two Fasts started the same day was in 1949. The next time this is scheduled to occur will be in 2189, when none of us is likely to be around.

Both Fasts are exercises in self-denial, as a way in which worshipers remind themselves of their humanity, frailty and mortality --- therefore, of their dependence on God. In Lenten traditions, there is an emphasis on simplicity in food and avoidance of over-indulgence. One major meal is allowed, but other meals are frugal, and snacks are discouraged. Many traditions encourage giving up certain specific favorite foods for Lent.

In Ramadan, the practice is quite different. Normal, healthy food intake is allowed before dawn and after sundown, but during daylight hours, neither food nor drink is consumed by observant Muslims. However, as with Lent, there is an emphasis on self-denial, repentance and total dependence on God. Both traditions also emphasize giving to people who are poor, needy or ill, and on renewing family connections.²

In both Lent and Ramadan, the Fast is accompanied by a **Feast**. But there's an interesting difference: Christians feast *before* the Fast; Muslims feast *after* the Fast. Some Christians celebrate Shrove Tuesday the day before Ash Wednesday, when celebrants eat and drink things that will be forbidden during Lent. Mardi Gras (French for "Fat Tuesday") is an expansion of this pre-Lent Feast idea.

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By contrast, it's at the *end* of Ramadan that Muslims celebrate with *Eid-al-fitr*, sometimes called the "Sugar Feast." At Sundown of the last day of the Fast, extended families join together and begin a celebration of life that can last for three days. Why don't Christians Feast after the Fast as Muslims do? I think it might be argued that Easter Sunday, when Christians rejoice over Jesus' Resurrection, is a celebrative Spiritual Feast for Christians.

The Christians who observe Lent are mostly from "high church" denominations: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, and, to some extent, Lutheran and Methodist. What about the rest of us "low church" Protestants, including Baptists? Well, we have **BreakFast** every morning, which means we see ourselves as fasting for up to eight hours every night, while we're Fast asleep!

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ For more background on fasting, see my January 28, 2026 article.

² It should be noted that both traditions exempt young children, elderly and sick people from fasting. Also, in both Christianity and Islam, extremists have taken self-denial too far, turning it into self-flagellation, self-blame and self-harm. Self-hate is not God-honoring, because it disparages the Image of God each of us bears.