

Shrove Tuesday (also known in Commonwealth countries as Pancake Tuesday or Pancake day) is the day in February or March immediately preceding Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Shrove Tuesday is celebrated in some countries by consuming pancakes. In others, especially those where it is called "Mardi Gras", this is a carnival day and also the last day of "fat eating" or "gorging" before the fasting period of Lent.

This moveable feast is determined by Easter.

The expression "Shrove Tuesday" comes from the word *shrive*, meaning "absolve" for one's sins by way of Confession and doing penance. Shrove Tuesday is observed by many Christians, including Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Roman Catholics and orthodox, who make a special point of self-examination, of considering what wrongs they need to repent, and what amendments of life or areas of spiritual growth they especially need to ask God's help in dealing with.

The term "*Mardi Gras*" is French for "Fat Tuesday", referring to the practice of the last night of eating richer, fatty foods before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season, which begins on Ash Wednesday.



It's impossible to know when the tradition of marking the start of Lent began. Ecclesiastical Institutes (from around A.D. 1000) includes "In the week immediately before Lent everyone shall go to his confessor and confess his deeds and the confessor shall so shrive him as he then may hear by his deeds what he is to do [in the way of penance]".

Some suggest that Pancake Tuesday was originally a pagan holiday. Before the Christian era, ancient Slavs believed that the change of seasons was a struggle between Jarilo, the god of vegetation, fertility, and springtime, and the evil spirits of cold and darkness. People believed that they had to help Jarilo fight against winter and bring in the spring. The most important part of Maslenitsa week (the whole celebration of the arrival of spring lasted one week) was making and eating pancakes. The hot, round pancakes symbolised the sun. Ancient Slavs also believed that by eating pancakes, they got the power, light, and warmth of the sun. The first pancake was usually put on a window for the spirits of the ancestors. On the last day of Maslenitsa week some pancakes and other food were burnt in a bonfire as a sacrifice to the pagan gods.

In Iceland the day is known as *Sprengidagur* (Bursting Day) and is marked by eating salted meat and peas; In Lithuania the day is called *Užgavėnės*. People eat pancakes (*blynai*) and Lithuanian-style doughnuts called *spurgos*. In Sweden the day is called Fettisdagen (Fat Tuesday) and is generally celebrated by eating a type of pastry called *semla* and in Finland the day is called laskiainen and is generally celebrated by eating green pea soup and a pastry called laskiaispulla (sweet bread filled with whipped cream and jam or almond paste). The celebration often includes sledging.