

Readings for Michaelmas Embertide

Compiled by Kelli Ann Wilson
September 2015



A Prayer for Ember Days

Lord of creation,
whose glory is around and within us:
open our eyes to your wonders,
that we may serve you with reverence
and know your peace at our lives' end,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Published by Steve Benner & Simon Kershaw at Oremus.org

A Few Notes About Ember Days

*Fasting days and Emberings be
Lent, Whitsun, Holyrood, and Lucie.*

-- Old English Rhyme

If asked to name times during the year that are of great importance to Christians, most people would suggest Christmas and Easter; not many of them would say "Ember Days." But, in fact, Ember Days are an ancient tradition that predates Christmas, Advent, and many other Christian celebrations, and can be traced all the way back to the time of the Hebrew Scriptures, when a fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months was prescribed. During Jesus's time, there was also a Jewish custom of fasting every Tuesday and Thursday of the week. The first Christians carried on these two traditions, but chose to fast instead on Wednesday and Friday, the day Jesus was betrayed and the day he died, respectively.ⁱ

There are several different explanations for the origins of the name "Ember Days." Some say it is a corruption of the Latin name *Quatuor Temporum*, which means "Four Times" or "Four Seasons."ⁱⁱ It's also possible that the term could be derived from the ancient Saxon language, where *Emb*, or *embe*, means a "course" or "circuit."ⁱⁱⁱ The Ember Days are a quarterly series of Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, taking place at the beginning of each natural season, that are set aside as a time of fasting and prayer: Michaelmas Embertide in September, signaling the beginning of autumn; Advent Embertide in December, ushering in the winter season; Lenten Embertide, which arrives in spring; and Whit Embertide comes at the start of the summer season.^{iv} These three days each season provide the faithful with an opportunity to contemplate the wonder of God through His creation – that is, the natural world – and to engage in self-reflection. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived in the 4th Century CE, provides an excellent model for Embertide contemplation. He writes,

If any man attempt to speak of God, let him first describe the bounds of the earth. Thou dwellest on the earth, and the limit of this earth which is thy dwelling thou knowest not: how then shalt thou be able to form a worthy thought of its Creator? Thou beholdest the stars, but their Maker thou beholdest not: count these which are visible, and then describe Him who is invisible, Who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names.^v

In addition to their associations with the changing seasons, Ember Days also correspond to other feasts during the Christian Year. Michaelmas Embertide follows the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14th); Advent Embertide comes on the heels of St.

Lucy's Day (December 13th); Lenten Embertide is paired, of course, with the start of Lent; and Whit Embertide, as its name suggests, is associated with Whitsunday (Pentecost). By observing the Ember Days at the beginning of each season, we are retrieving this ancient aspect of our ecclesiastical history, which is said to have originated with the Apostles themselves, as well as our shared cultural history. Even those who are not practicing Christians can appreciate the historical significance of the Ember Days — anyone with European roots will be in good company with their ancestors, for whom these four weeks during the year were of great importance. So, let's take this opportunity to pick up where the collective "we" left off. Let's spend a little bit of time: fastingⁱ, using our skills or resources for the benefit of others, and contemplating God and His creation (which was placed in the care of our most distant ancestors, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden — so the story goes).



Selected Sources:

ⁱ **"Ember Days, Rogations Days, and Station Churches,"** Holy Trinity (German) Catholic Church, www.HolyTrinityGerman.org, 5/13/15

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ **"Ember Days,"** by John Henry Hobart, *A Companion for the Book of Common Prayer*, published online by Anglican Bible & Book Society, www.AnglicanBible.org, 9/19/12

^{iv} Ibid.

^v **"Ember Days"** by Tracy Tucciarone, *Fish Eaters*, www.FishEaters.com, 7/30/06

¹ Fasting provides an opportunity to consider God's gifts and how to use them in moderation. Fasting on Ember Days means one regular meal per day (two smaller meals in morning and evening, no snacks) on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, with the addition of abstaining from meat on Friday.



Sleeping in the Forest

I thought the earth remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds. I slept
as never before, a stone
on the riverbed, nothing
between me and the white fire of the
stars
but my thoughts, and they floated

light as moths among the branches
of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds
who do their work in the darkness. All
night
I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling
with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.

*From **Twelve Moons** by Mary Oliver, copyright 1972*

A Poem from the Missal of Sarum

They ever adore the Almighty,
and bless Him through every age.

The stars of heaven, every sort of men,
and the sun and his sister, the lights of heaven.
They ever adore the Almighty.

So also all the waters in heaven above,
the dew and the rains, and every wind.
And bless Him through every age.

Fire and heat, warmth and cold,
chill and burning and the frost.
They ever adore the Almighty.

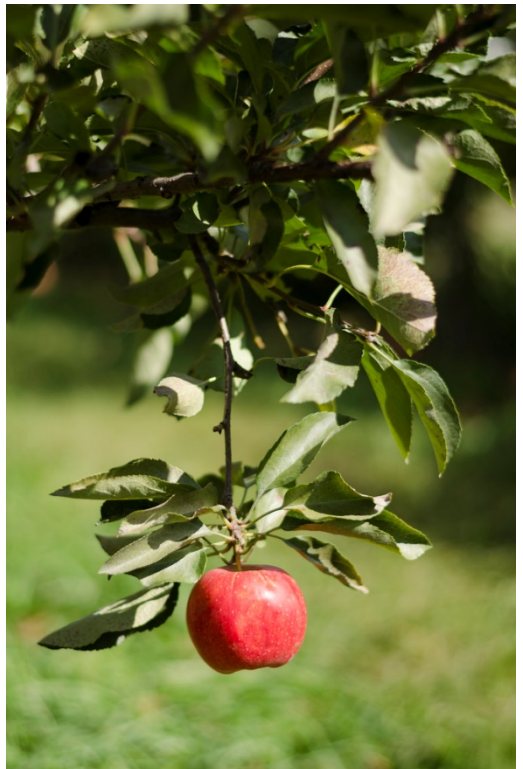
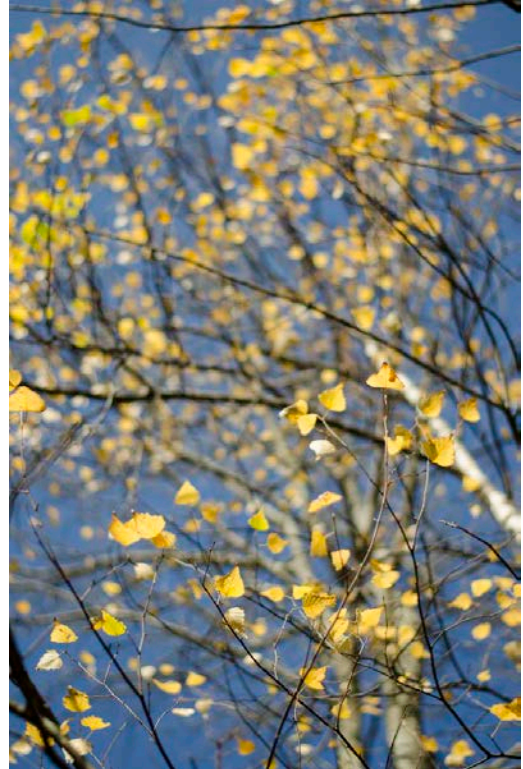
Snow and ice, night and day,
light and darkness, lightnings and clouds.
And bless Him through every age.

Deserts, mountains, plants, hills,
rivers, springs, the seas and the waves.
They ever adore the Almighty.

All things that live and are born on the waters,
that the air quickens, and the earth nourishes.
And bless Him through every age.

Every sort of men, Israel itself,
and the worshipers of Christ, and all His servants.
They ever adore the Almighty.

The holy, the humble, the gentle of heart,
and the three little ones in their triumph.



Readings for Michaelmas Embertide

And bless Him through every age.

Justly ready to disdain the flames
of the fiery furnace, and the tyrant's orders.
They ever adore the Almighty.

Praise to the Father, and to the Son,
and praise to the blessed Holy Spirit.

Written in Latin by German monk, poet and scholar Walafriid Strabo, 9th Century CE

*Published in translation by Gregory DiPippo at **NewLiturgicalMovement.org**, copyright 2013*





The Creation

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one
side,

And the light stood shining on the
other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the
light in his hands,
And God rolled the light around in his
hands
Until he made the sun;
And he set that sun a-blazing in the
heavens.
And the light that was left from making
the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and
stars.

Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his
head,
And the earth was under his feet.
And God walked, and where he trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then he stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of
the world
And he spat out the seven seas—
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings
flashed—
He clapped his hands, and the
thunders rolled—
And the waters above the earth came
down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the
sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the
hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;

And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around his shoulder.

Then God raised his arm and he
waved his hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And he said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop his
hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at his sun,
And he looked at his moon,
And he looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—
On the side of a hill where he could
think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till he thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river

Readings for Michaelmas Embertide

God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far
corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle
of his hand;

This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

*From **God's Trombones** by James Weldon Johnson, 1927 (public domain)*





Canticle of the Sun

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord,
Praise, glory and honor and benediction all, are Thine.
To Thee alone do they belong, most High,
And there is no man fit to mention Thee.
Praise be to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures,
Especially to my worshipful brother sun,
The which lights up the day, and through him dost Thou brightness give;
And beautiful is he and radiant with splendor great;
Of Thee, most High, signification gives.

Praised be my Lord, for sister moon and for the stars,
In heaven Thou hast formed them clear and precious and fair.

Praised be my Lord for brother wind
And for the air and clouds and fair and every kind of weather,
By the which Thou givest to Thy creatures nourishment.
Praised be my Lord for sister water,
The which is greatly helpful and humble and precious and pure.

Praised be my Lord for brother fire,
By the which Thou lightest up the dark.
And fair is he and gay and mighty and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our sister, mother earth,
The which sustains and keeps us
And brings forth diverse fruits with grass and flowers bright.

Praised be my Lord for those who for Thy love forgive
And weakness bear and tribulation.
Blessed those who shall in peace endure,
For by Thee, most High, shall they be crowned.
Praised be my Lord for our sister, the bodily death,
From the which no living man can flee.
Woe to them who die in mortal sin;
Blessed those who shall find themselves in Thy most holy will,
For the second death shall do them no ill.

Praise ye and bless ye my Lord, and give Him thanks,
And be subject unto Him with great humility.

*Written by St. Francis of Assisi, translated and published by Father Paschal Robinson in **The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi**, 1905 (public domain)*

A couple of Bible verses...

While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. — Genesis 8:22

10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. — Isaiah 55:10-11

God's World

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists, that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

*From **Renaissance and Other Poems** by Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1917 (public domain)*



Autumn Movement

I cried over beautiful things knowing no beautiful thing lasts.

The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck of the copper sunburned woman,
the mother of the year, the taker of seeds.

The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full of holes, new beautiful things come in the first spit of snow on the northwest wind, and the old things go, not one lasts.

*By Carl Sandburg, published in **Poetry Magazine**, Oct 1918 (public domain)*



A Reading for Wednesday

Amos 9:13-15

- 13 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord,
 "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper
 and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
 and all the hills shall flow with it.
14 I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
 and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
 and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
15 I will plant them upon their land,
 and they shall never again be plucked up
 out of the land which I have given them,"
 says the Lord your God.

A Reading for Friday

Hosea 14:2-9

- 2 Take with you words
 and return to the Lord;
say to him,
 "Take away all iniquity;
accept that which is good
 and we will render
 the fruit of our lips.
3 Assyria shall not save us,
 we will not ride upon horses;
and we will say no more, 'Our God,'
 to the work of our hands.
In thee the orphan finds mercy."

Assurance of Forgiveness

- 4 I will heal their faithlessness;
 I will love them freely,
 for my anger has turned from them.
5 I will be as the dew to Israel;
 he shall blossom as the lily,
 he shall strike root as the poplar;

6 his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.
7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden;
they shall blossom as the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
8 O E'phraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress,
from me comes your fruit.
9 Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the Lord are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.

A Reading for Saturday

Leviticus 23:39-43

39 "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month,² when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. 40 And you shall take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations; you shall keep it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days; all that are native in Israel shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

² September was originally the seventh month of the calendar, and the 15th is the earliest day on which the Michaelmas Ember Days can begin.

Suggestions for Further Reading

"Ember Days," by John Henry Hobart, *A Companion for the Book of Common Prayer*, accessed at Anglican Bible & Book Society, www.AnglicanBible.org, 9/19/12

"Ember Days" by Tracy Tucciarone, *Fish Eaters*, www.FishEaters.com, 7/30/06

"Ember Days, Rogations Days, and Station Churches," Holy Trinity (German) Catholic Church, www.HolyTrinityGerman.org, 5/13/15

"Liturgical Notes on the Ember Days of September" by Gregory DiPippo, *New Liturgical Movement*, www.NewLiturgicalMovement.org, 9/20/13

"Timely Ember Days" by Derek Olsen, *Episcopal Café*, www.EpiscopalCafe.com, 9/21/07