

Most Jews believe that Christmas is the most important Christian holiday. This might be an unavoidable conclusion based on the expansive hold of secular commercialism. Yet from a religious point of view, it is in fact Easter that ranks as number one in the Christian mind.

The times leading up to Easter can be quite fascinating to a Jewish onlooker. We see Mardi Gras, also known as Fat Tuesday, and marvel at the expanse of the celebrations, with its parades, dancing and abundance of foods. We Jews tend to think of it in terms of an audacious party. In Christian terms this celebration actually begins in January and is connected to the three kings story. Although the celebration had its historical origins in the Middle Ages in Europe, the connection to New Orleans can be traced to the explorer Jean Baptiste Le Moyne Sieur de Bienville who on March 2, 1699 landed in the area of New Orleans. When his men realized it was the eve of the festive holiday, they celebrated America's very first Mardi Gras and established a tradition that took root in this locale and expanded over the years.

This time of celebration leads to Ash Wednesday. Again, Jewish people sit back in amazement. People walk around with ashes on their forehead. If I walked into my home with ashes on my forehead, I would have been greeted by my mother with a slap in the face with a wet washcloth and an exclamation of, "how can you walk around with such a dirty face?" But for Christians it is the beginning of Lent, a season devoted to repentance. In an act of atonement, they give up something for the season, analogous to Jews giving up food for Yom Kippur.

All of this eventually lead to the holiday of Easter. Jewish people see the proliferation of church services, expansive family meals and a stop in the normal operations of our society – not to mention a