

Prayer Candles

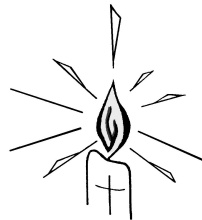
You may be fortunate enough to worship in a church which has a PRICKET STAND, or stand for holding VOTIVE or prayer candles. If you do, or when you go into a church which does, one will usually be found near a statue/shrine of a Saint or near to the Reserved Sacrament. Lighting a candle in prayer is a powerful symbol, full of meanings. Here are some helpful ideas:

1. The lit candle reminds us of our Baptism, and the way that we share in the life of Christ by sharing in the life of the Church.
2. When we go, leaving the burning candle behind, we are reminded that our souls never leave the presence of God, in company with His Saints.
3. Prayer is not self-centred, it is God-centred, and an important element is prayer for other people and causes. When lighting your candles, it is a very good idea to light a candle for those others you want to pray for. The candle will not be a substitute for the prayer of your heart, but an accompaniment. A small offering which, in honouring the Saint and giving glory to God, speaks both from the heart and to the heart. Lighting votive candles in church, when asking the prayers of the Saints and thereby to the greater glory of God, is growing in popularity in the Church of England. It is a devotional practice in which many millions of Christians the world over have found inspiration.



Lord Jesus, Light of Light,
You have come among us.
Help us who live by your light
To shine as lights in your world.
Glory to God in the highest!

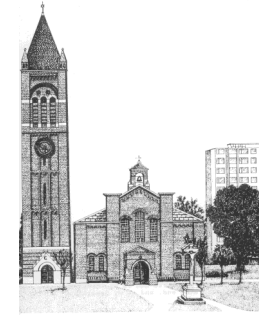
*This leaflet was largely the work
of Fr Ian Booth—grateful thanks
to him*



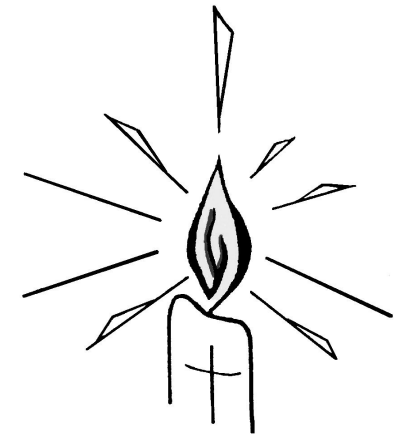
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Holy Trinity Church



What we do in Church and Why!



Lighting a Candle

Background

Light is something that most people take so much for granted, that we hardly give it a second thought. Nowadays most of our houses are lit by electricity, but not so long ago people relied on gas, oil, and candle power for artificial light.

The need for light is fundamental. There can be no life without light. It will come as no surprise, then, to learn that images of light and darkness recur throughout the Bible.

Almost the first thing that we read in the Old Testament (Gen. Ch.1 v.2) is that in the beginning "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The very first action of God in creation was to say "Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good." (v.3).

In the New Testament too, light is a key image. The Gospel according to St. John describes Our Lord as "the light". Not the 'light' created by God, but the Creator Himself! Our Lord, too, uses the image of light to teach His disciples, when He says that we should shine as lights exposed on hilltops, and not hide our faith under buckets.

Candles in Church

The Paschal Candle

A Paschal Candle can be found in most churches, and it is easy to identify. It could well be taller and fatter than any other candle in church, but it is certain to be the only candle to be decorated either with a transfer or by being painted. From Easter to Pentecost, or Whit Sunday, it will be in a prominent position in the Sanctuary near to the High Altar.

The Paschal Candle is named after the PASCH, the passion, death and resurrection

of the Lord. The candle is blessed at the Easter Vigil ceremonies, and represents Christ the light of the world. The Easter Vigil includes the first Eucharist of Easter, and is a dramatic re-presentation of the mysteries of creation and redemption. It begins in total darkness, but ends in a flood of candle-lit glory!

Two of the ceremonies are of particular interest here: 1. Immediately after lighting, the Paschal Candle is carried in procession through the darkened church. As the Paschal Candle approaches, the ministers and congregation in turn light candles they are holding from the Paschal Candle, and from each other. This is a powerful image of the way in which we come to share in the living light of Christ, and also spread that light throughout the world.

2. Towards the end of the Vigil, before the Eucharist, the Paschal Candle is taken in procession to the font. There, using the candle as a symbol of Christ, waters of Baptism are blessed as the candle is dipped three times into the font. This reminds us that in Baptism we enter into the tomb of death with Christ, only to rise again with Him whose Resurrection we are about to celebrate.

After Pentecost the Paschal candle is kept in the Baptistry for use during Holy Baptism.

Altar and Processional Candles

The number of candles used to decorate altars can vary, but traditionally they are in combinations of two four and six. A useful rule of thumb is that the more candles, the more important the altar is likely to be.

Side and Lady Chapel altars normally have two, or sometimes four candles (two being lit for low mass, all four only being lit on high feast days). The High Altar would have anything up to six candles, but with modern reforms and celebration facing the people, two

candles are becoming standard in most churches.

The more obvious symbolism is that the altar represents the throne of God, from which the light of Christ shines upon His gathered people. You may also find it helpful to meditate upon what the number and arrangement of the candles might suggest.

Candles carried in procession are a simple, but effective way of honouring both the cross which they accompany, and also the priest as he represents the person of Christ. Their use adds both dignity and colour to the Church's worship.

Baptism Candles

The Rite of Baptism now provides for the presentation of a lighted candle to the newly baptised person.

Before the service begins the Paschal Candle should be lit, and the baptismal candle is lit from this. The symbolism demonstrates clearly that, through the Rite of Baptism, the newly baptised person shares in the life of the Risen Lord, represented by the Paschal Candle. The words which accompany the candle also point to an important meaning: "This is to show that you have passed from darkness to light. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

