

# The Paschal Candle

## Christ, Our Light



The use of candles is very important in the Catholic Church, on the altar during Mass, at Baptisms, in the sanctuary lamp, as vigils before statues, sometimes during processions. The reason why we use candles so much is because the candle, which gives forth light, reminds us of the Light of Christ which illumines our soul and which we share with others through our lives. Jesus is the Light of the World. Of all the candles which are used in the church, the most prominent candle is the Paschal Candle, also known as the Easter Candle. This is a very large candle which is blessed and marked with symbols and given great attention as it is lit each year at the beginning of the Easter Vigil. This candle represents Christ to us and the light of his resurrection, the light of new life as it dispels the darkness of sin and death.

The Paschal Candle is made of pure beeswax to represent the purity of Christ. In the center of the candle is etched a cross with the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, which means the beginning and the end. The numbers of the calendar year, currently 2024, are added onto the candle. Then five grains of incense are pressed into the wax of the candle, which represent the five wounds of Christ.

The Paschal Candle is then lit from the new Easter fire and carried into the darkened church by the priest or deacon as the congregation follows. Three times he stops to intone "Christ, our light." As the procession of congregants slowly fills the church, the light is passed on from the Paschal candle to small individual candles held by those in attendance as the church is filled more and more with the soft light of many candles in the darkness. When the Paschal Candle reaches the altar it is placed in a special, usually decorated, holder and incensed to show the great reverence we hold for this candle, as it represents Christ to us. Then the priest, deacon or cantor intones the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation, an ancient prayer chant that embodies the joy and exultation of this holy night of vigil of the Resurrection.

These phrases from the Easter Proclamation show the significance of the Paschal Candle to the celebration of this Easter liturgy.

*"Therefore, dearest friends, standing in the awesome glory of this holy light, invoke with me, I ask you, the mercy of God almighty, that he, who has been pleased to*

*number me, though unworthy, among the Levites, may pour into me his light unshadowed, that I may sing this candle's perfect praises."*

*"On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servant's hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church. But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God's honor, a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light, for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious."*

*"Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night."*

The Paschal Candle remains in the sanctuary of the church, close to the pulpit, and is lit at all liturgies from Easter until Pentecost. For the remainder of the year, the Paschal Candle is kept by the baptismal font of the church when it is lit at the celebrations of the Rite of Baptism throughout the year. The Paschal Candle is also placed at the head of the casket at a Catholic's funeral mass, thus reminding us that the promises of eternity received at our Baptism are fulfilled at the end of our earthly life when we share in the light of Christ's Resurrection. This is cause for rejoicing indeed! Alleluia!

- Plan to make a visit to your church with your students and find the Paschal Candle. You can get a close up look.
- These QR codes will connect you to web pages that contain Paschal Candle craft ideas to make with your students.

