

## Signs & Symbols: Candles



Have you ever considered all the symbolic meanings there are for having candles in church?

Often at a Baptism service where there are many non-church people, the vicar will use the reading where Jesus says he is the 'Light of the World'.

To explain the value of this, one vicar even built an obstacle course in church and invited the children to have a go at it. Then they were made to do it again blindfolded; with the help of the godparents to hold their hand and talk them through it.

At the end the vicar asked: 'Which was easier? When you could see the obstacles or when you were in the dark?' Needless to say one helpful child loudly said the answer not wanted! But the point? Having God in our lives does not make the obstacles go away, but we can see them better and so deal with them or avoid them.

Candles can represent the light of life itself; hope, like a single flame flickering in the darkness. We light a candle to help us think of someone special; we keep a light burning to help others guide their way home. Lights direct people's attention to what we want them to notice – perhaps to a person speaking or to an item on display.

The candle can be an illustration of Christ - the wax symbolizes Jesus' body born of Mary, the wick his soul, the flame his divinity, thus giving us the Mystery of the Incarnation; the presence of God, who gives light to us, who enlightens us by his word.

The flickering candle flame can show the fragility of life, and the ease with which it can be snuffed out. Or it can be burning love; consuming love; the easy passing of love one to another as the flame is easily passed to another candle; we are not alone.

It's light to lighten our darkness; moving out of darkness into light, for we make progress in our faith - we do not stay still.

From as far back as the second century the church has used lights to represent the spiritual side of our nature and of Christ's. Tertullian wrote: "We never hold a service without candles, yet we use them not just to dispel night's gloom - we also hold our services in daylight - but in order to represent by this Christ, the Uncreated Light, without whom we would in broad daylight wander as if lost in darkness."

And so it goes on. This month: Light a candle in church or at home and just think and watch it for a while. Just enjoy being in the light of God's presence.

*by The Rev Dr Jo White*

**You cannot starve a man who is feeding on God's promises.**

**Anon**