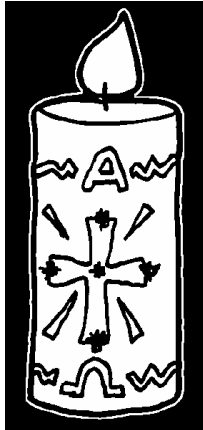


**Signs & Symbols: Signs & Symbols: Pascal Candles**

Ever had a police escort to church? Last year as I drove along the quiet country lanes on my way to a neighbouring parish, where I had been invited to join their service, I was followed and then stopped. Blue lights flashing and sirens blaring. I kid you not!

It was 4 am on Easter morning and apparently the police regularly stop any car on that road at that time of night. It was very helpful for me though, as the policeman knew the church and led me to the correct turn off. Wonderful.

Why so early, do I hear you asking? Well, the service began outside the church building with prayers around a bonfire, from the flames of which the Paschal Candle was lit and from that then each congregation member's candle. We then took the new light symbolising the Light of Christ into the dark building and continued our service. The candle represents Christ's resurrection, a light shining in darkness, a light that will dispel the darkness of a world without God.

And it really was a completely dark building except for the held candles; I remember as I held one for the organist as the usual light bulb over his music had gone out. The timing worked excellently with the first rays of the new day filtering through the windows as the Gospel reading of that empty tomb was being read.

If you get a chance have a close look at a Paschal (also spelled Pascal) Candle, also called an Easter Candle. They're tall and quite thick, lit on Easter Day for the first time and then lit at all main services until Pentecost. After this they are often kept near the font and lit at Baptisms so that the individual's Baptismal candle to take home is lit from it. Some churches also light them at funerals.

The candle is traditionally decorated with the sign of the cross, the symbol of life and death; alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, a reminder that Christ is the beginning and the end of all things; the date of the year, a reminder that the Lord of all ages is present here and now, as well as remembering how many years since he rose from the dead (however inaccurate the dating may be); and five 'nails' inserted in the shape of the cross to symbolise the five wounds of Christ.

This month

Have a close look at a Pascal Candle. What darkness do you want Christ's light to overcome or get rid of in your life or local community?

*by The Rev Dr Jo White  
a vicar in Derbyshire*

**The empty tomb of Christ has been the cradle of the church.**

WR Nicoll