

The Paschal Candle



Learn about the Paschal Candle and then draw or create one of your own.



A **Paschal candle** is a large, white candle used in liturgies. A new Paschal candle is blessed and lit every year at Easter, and is used throughout the Paschal season which is during Easter and then throughout the year on special occasions, such as baptisms and funerals. The Paschal candle is the largest candle in the worship space.

In most cases today the candle will display several common symbols:

1. The cross is always the central symbol, most clearly identifying it as the Paschal candle
2. The Greek letters alpha and omega signify that God is the beginning and the end (from the Book of Revelation)
3. The current year represents God in the present amidst the congregation
4. Five grains of incense (most often red) are embedded in the candle (sometimes encased in wax "nails") during the Easter Vigil to represent the five wounds of Jesus: the three nails that pierced his hands and feet, the spear thrust into his side, and the thorns that crowned his head.

In the medieval Church, Paschal candles often reached a stupendous size. The Paschal candle of Salisbury Cathedral was said to have been 36 feet (11 meters) tall. Today, in the United States and Southern Europe (e.g., Italy and France) the candle is approximately 2 inches in diameter and 36 to 48 inches tall; in Northern Europe the candle tends to be shorter in height (19 to 24 inches) and wider in diameter (3 to 5 inches).

At the opening of the Easter Vigil a "new fire" is lit and blessed. The priest will trace the symbols (mentioned above) on the Paschal candle, saying words similar to: "Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the ending. To Christ belongs all time and all the ages; to Christ belongs glory and dominion now and forever. Amen."

The Paschal candle is the first candle to be lit with a flame from this sacred fire, representing the light of Christ coming into the world. This represents the risen Christ, as a symbol of light (life) dispelling darkness (death). As it is lit, the priest may say words similar to: "The light of Christ, rising in Glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds."