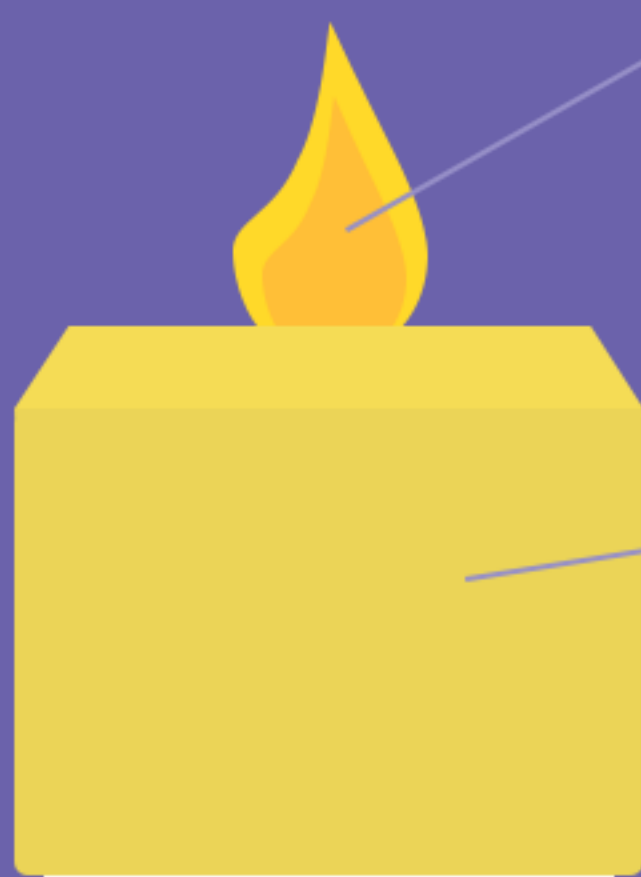


AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE PASCHAL CANDLE



BY JONATHAN TEIXEIRA FOR THE FOCUS BLOG

That candle in the front of the Church isn't just really big, it's also really special. Let's take a look.



THE FLAME

symbolizes the light of Christ. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) The lit candle also recalls the pillar of fire and cloud the Israelites followed in the desert.

THE CANDLE FOLLOWER

helps the candle burn evenly and prevents wax from dripping everywhere. This practical widget is used on many candles in the church and has no particular symbolism.

THE CANDLE

must be at least 51% beeswax. This is because beeswax is precious stuff (it takes a lot of bees' work to make it) and the sacraments are precious, serious things. It also brings God's creation into the celebration.

DECORATIONS

other than those mentioned below can be very elaborate, quite simple, or even nonexistent. The elements listed below can be presented in a variety of ways. The candle at left is one example.

ALPHA & OMEGA

are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and are used to symbolize Christ as the "beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:13)

THE CROSS

of Christ, the symbol of Christianity. Signifies that this is the paschal candle, and it's all about Jesus.

THE YEAR

reminds us that Jesus is king of all time, even this year! He's with us, right here, right now.

5 GRAINS OF INCENSE

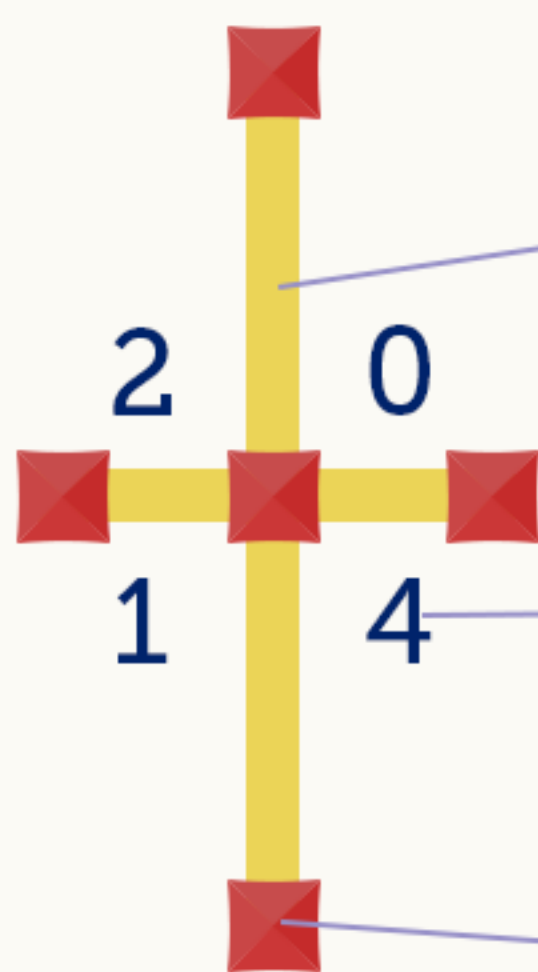
(often formed into wax nails) are inserted into the candle, symbolizing the 5 wounds of Christ.

THE TYPICAL PASHCAL CANDLE

is between 3-5 feet tall, weighing between 4-10 pounds. The cathedral in Salisbury, England is said to have had a candle measuring 36 feet tall in the Middle Ages.



A



Ω



The paschal candle is blessed and lit for the first time at the Easter Vigil. The deacon carries it into the dark church, stopping three times to sing "Christ be our light!" to which the people respond, "Thanks be to God!" It is the candle from which all others are lit that night, and it is also used to bless the baptismal font.

The paschal candle is lit for all liturgies during the Easter season as well as at baptisms and funerals all year round. The unused portions of paschal candles are often melted down to make new ones.