

Why Do We Do That...?

For first-time visitors to Church (and for those who have been coming for years!) there are sometimes questions asked about what we do in Church - and why. Here some of the customs associated with our worship are explored.

‡ Lighting a candle

Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.

These familiar words are said at each baptism as the parents or god-parents receive a lighted candle on behalf of the newly baptized. The theme of light is central to the Christian life. In Baptism God calls us to be lights; that is, our lives must shine with his love in the world. In all that we do we are to show his light and glory.

For the Christian Church candles are important. We use candles to help us pray. Lighting a candle is a powerful sign of prayer. Sometimes a candle is lit as a sign of our prayer for a particular person or concern. It may be lit for ourselves.

Sometimes we find it difficult to pray or to find the right words to say. Lighting a candle can help. We sometimes light a candle because we need help to pray. As the candle burns away in the darkness, so our prayer, or our desire to pray, burns before God. Children in particular enjoy lighting candles. We should encourage them to do so regularly and to use candles as a sign of prayer.

Sometimes people light candles as they enter church as a sign of their preparation for the service. Others like to light a candle as they leave church in thanksgiving for the worship they have shared in. In some churches, people light a candle on their way back to their place after receiving Holy Communion. Please feel free to do that here at Saint Mary's. Children in particular, who do not come to the altar to receive Holy Communion, often feel more included if they are able to light a candle at communion time. It is a sacramental act. Just as we touch the body of Christ as the host is placed into our hands, so too the physical act of lighting a candle can help us to feel more involved in the liturgy. The movement of people from the altar rail, to the candle-stand, to the pew can be a powerful expression of how life is a pilgrimage with prayer and action and movement all combined.



In recent years many cathedrals, such as our own, have realised that it is helpful for visitors and regular worshippers alike to light candles. The opportunity of lighting a candle in a hospital chapel can be enormously helpful to people, especially at times of great anxiety and stress.

The Eucharist – or any service - celebrated by candlelight can be a very moving experience. The votive candle-stand at St. Mary's is an important aid to our worship and many of us are grateful that it is there. I hope that it will continue to be a genuine aid to prayer and devotion for years to come as we seek to draw closer to God.

These words are to be found in Salisbury Cathedral and reproduced near the votive candle stand at S. Mary's:

Lighting a candle is a prayer:

when we have gone, it stays alight,
Kindling in the hearts and minds
Of others the prayers we have
Already offered for them
And for others, for the sad,
And the sick,
And the suffering,
And prayers of thankfulness too.

Lighting a candle is a parable:

Burning itself out,
It gives light to others.
Christ gave himself for others.
He calls us to give ourselves.

Lighting a candle is a symbol:

Of love and hope,
Of light and warmth.
Our world needs them all.

Lord Jesus Christ,

For the salvation of the world you went up to the cross

To give light to the world which was in darkness;

Shed that light on us, we pray, that we may come to your eternal light,

And, through the merits of your passion,

Enjoy life with you in heaven,

For you are alive and reigning now and for ever. Amen.

¶ Processions

Christian tradition has always regarded pilgrimage as a way of life, the earthly existence seen as a continuing journey towards a heavenly goal. People sometimes speak of the journey from the cradle to the grave.

From the earliest centuries Christians have made devout journeys to shrines, holy places and other special sites. Journeys to the Holy Land, for example, were ways of not just reading the Scriptures but seeing the events of the Bible unfolding before them. The Church is often called a pilgrim body.

Processions often form an integral part of pilgrimages, as those who have been to such places as Walsingham or Lourdes will know. In both Old Testaments there are accounts of people journeying towards God. Their stories find echoes in our own lives and in the life of our church and world today.

Processions form an essential part of what we do in the liturgy. At the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration the servers, choir and sacred ministers may pass through the main body of the people towards the Altar. For the proclamation of the Holy Gospel the Book of the Gospels is held high and carried in procession. It is sometimes given due honour and reverence with acolytes bearing tapers because in the Gospels we hear the very words of Our Lord.

At the offertory the gifts (bread, wine and water, money representing our talents and skills) are brought up by members of the congregation in a procession. These processions serve as a visual reminder: a reminder that each baptised person is on a journey. We are all fellow pilgrims travelling together towards the fullness of life which God offers.

Some processions include a specific ceremony (walking into Church on Palm Sunday bearing palm crosses, carrying the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of Repose after the Maundy Thursday liturgy or processing with lighted candles at Candlemass). Other processions are simply a natural part of the ceremony to add dignity to a special occasion (Patronal Festivals, Christmas or Easter).



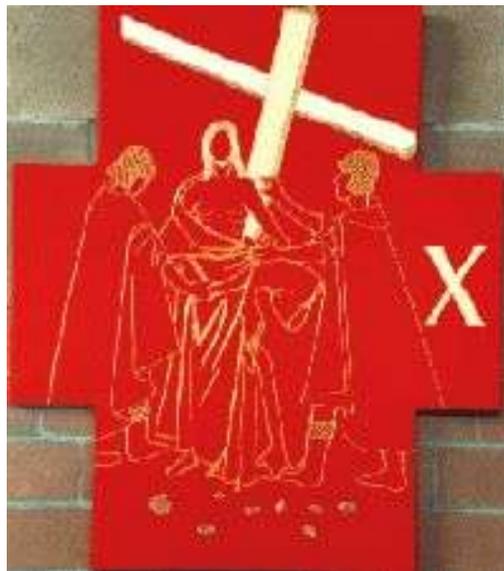
† Stations of the Cross

The name denotes both fourteen selected representations of incidents in the last journey of Christ and the devotion which consists in pausing at them in sequence for prayer and meditation. The devotion probably arose out of the practice recorded from early times of pilgrims to Jerusalem following the `way of the cross` from Pilate's house to Calvary, and wishing to re-enact it when they returned home.

The first record of this pilgrim practice, walking the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Christ, comes from the Spanish pilgrim Egeria. In 381 and 384 AD she made a Good Friday pilgrimage from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church, built over the site of Christ's crucifixion and burial, was already the Christian focal point in Jerusalem during Holy Week that it is today. On Good Friday, during Egeria's two visits, everyone spent three hours in the church hearing the Psalms and readings from the Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, and other prophetic words connected with the Passion. Such outdoor processions as Egeria's did not thrive in subsequent non-Christian rule in Jerusalem. Still, six liturgical stations on a processional route from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were described in tenth-century Holy Week records. The processional cross would then be carried within the church, from the Calvary site on the mezzanine floor to a small cave in the ancient stone quarry pit below, a cave known as the `holy prison`.

When the European Crusaders reached Jerusalem, in the eleventh century, they found the Passion honoured only as a Good Friday ceremony in a partially rebuilt Church of the Holy Sepulchre whose original had been destroyed in 1009. What had once been outdoor Stations of the Cross were now interior chapels honouring Christ's scourging, his crowning with thorns, and the dividing of his garments. The Crusaders enthusiastically rebuilt the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and added others between it and the Mount of Olives, including one in Gethsemane, where the Church of All Nations now stands. The Crusaders focused on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, however, because they preferred the story of Christ's death and resurrection to his Passion. No public procession was ever scheduled for Good Friday during the Crusader period.

Devotion to the holy places and to Christ's passion received an extra fillip with the return of the Crusaders, who often erected tableaux of places they had visited in the Holy Land. And when the Franciscans were given custody of the holy places in 1342 they saw it as part of their mission to promote the devotion and to encourage the erection of series of such tableaux. From their own churches the practice spread widely into parish churches too.



The tenth Station at St Faith's.

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The subjects of these `Stations` varied widely, as did the number (anything from five to over thirty). The number fourteen seems to have appeared first in the sixteenth century in the Low Countries, and when the devotion was regulated by Clement XII in 1731 it stabilised at this number, comprising nine gospel scenes and five from popular tradition. By the nineteenth century virtually all Roman Catholic churches tended to have a set of fourteen ranged around the internal walls (or occasionally out of doors in the church grounds).

When the Church of England produced its liturgy resource book entitled "Times and Seasons" in 2006 it included the Stations of the Cross which is now widely used in many Church of England parishes.

Lord Jesus, our Saviour, be our guide as we follow in the steps of your Passion; be our strength in our sorrow for having offended you; be our joy in whatever sufferings await us in this life, that we may come to share eternal joy with you. For you are Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

† Liturgical seasons

One of the many innovations which has come from the Church of England's new liturgical Material, known as Common Worship 2000, is a re-thinking of the liturgical seasons during the Christian Year.

The liturgical year begins on Advent Sunday and ends on the Sunday before Advent with the Feast of Christ the King.

The four weeks of Advent prepare us with joyful anticipation for the season of Christmas. The season of Epiphany continues until Candlemass (40 days after Christmas). Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter, and Eastertide lasts for 50 days, culminating with the Feast of Pentecost.

After Pentecost we journey into "Ordinary Time". This phrase is new to the liturgical life of the Church of England and is one which has developed from the Roman Catholic Church and from other parts of the Anglican Communion.

Prior to Vatican II in the 1960's the Roman Catholic Church didn't have 'ordinary time' they had Sundays after Pentecost – that system had been established in the Roman Catholic Church by probably about the end of the 8th century. This practice was largely the result of the work of Alcuin of York who in 769 became Abbot of Tours where he died in the year 804. Alcuin revised the lectionary, compiled a sacramentary and was involved in significant liturgical revision work.



In another part of the world, Sundays after Trinity had been the custom of the Roman Catholic Church on the Continent and a system which Cranmer followed in the BCP. However in 1980 the ASB returned to Sundays after Pentecost. Unlike Eastertide, for example, the Trinity Season didn't focus on the Trinity each week; the Pentecost Season didn't focus on the Theme of the Holy Spirit each week. They were simply convenient ways of marking the Sundays, the 'green' Sundays if you like, but they weren't specifically celebrating a season as we would with Lent or Advent or Eastertide where the theme is maintained each week. In the C of E's volume entitled "The Christian Year" the Note (p.15) on 'Ordinary Time' is as follows: "Ordinary Time is the period... (when) there is no seasonal emphasis."

† Liturgical colours

In the early church there was no particular significance in liturgical colours; the robes worn reflected what was customary among the Roman middle and upper classes. Not until the 12th century is there evidence of significant colours for various feasts. In one of the first known sequences of liturgical colours, somewhat surprisingly, black was suggested for Christmas and festivals of the BVM (often the most ornate vestment was worn for the major feasts, whatever the colour). Blue for Epiphany and Ascension.

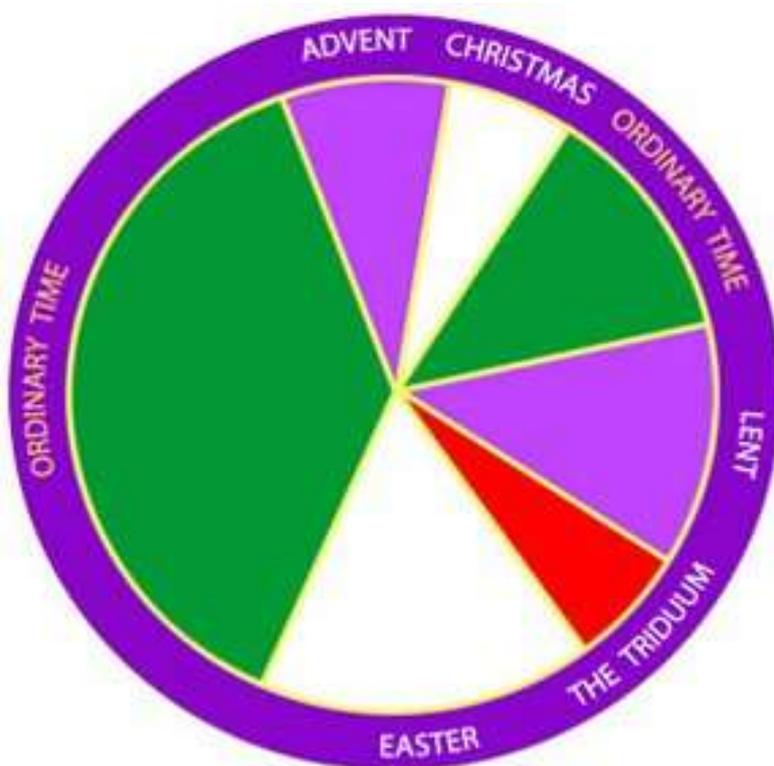
In a missal of 1570 White/Red was suggested for Baptism/confirmation. Yellow was an alternative to white for Saints who were not martyrs. In pre-Reformation England green and yellow were regarded as interchangeable.

Today, **WHITE** or **GOLD** is used for Christmas, Easter, The Blessed Virgin Mary, Corpus Christi, Dedication Festival, All Saints Day, Christ the King and Saints who are not martyrs. **RED** is used for Palm Sunday, Pentecost, the Apostles and Saints who are martyrs (i.e. S. Faith). **PURPLE** (the colour associated with penitence) is used during Advent and Lent, for All Souls Day, for funerals and Requiem masses. **GREEN** is used on the 'ordinary' Sundays and Weekdays of the year.

BLACK may be used for funerals and requiems. **ROSE-PINK** may be worn on the third Sunday in Advent and the fourth Sunday in Lent.

In some churches there may be a **BLUE** set of vestments which are worn in for celebrations of Mary and during Advent (symbolising the important role of Mary in the Advent Season). Also, some churches may wear a **SACKCLOTH** vestment during Lent.

Common Worship 2000 suggests **RED** for baptisms, celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit (as per the missal of 1570).



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Return to the [home page](#)
