

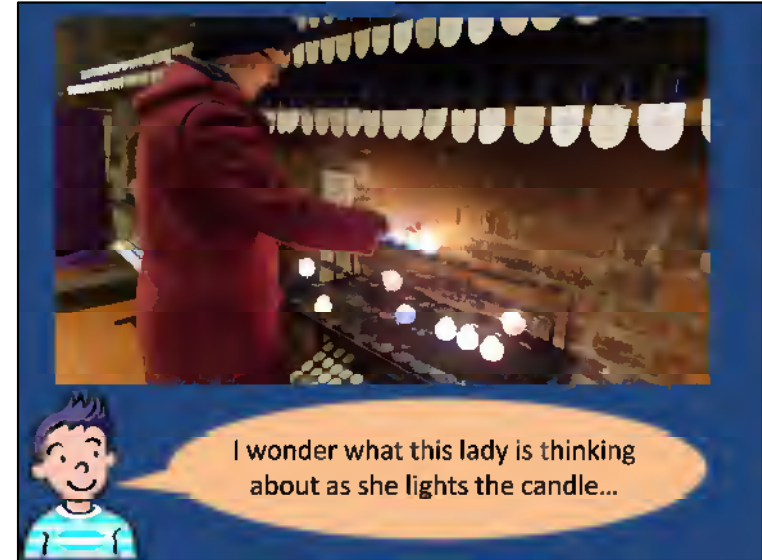
Candles

When I went into a church last week I saw lots of candles. Can you help me to discover why they were there?

What are your first ideas?



This is intended to help children think about the role of candles in Christian prayer. Ask children what they already know or think they know and why they think the candles are there.



I wonder what this lady is thinking about as she lights the candle...

This is a picture of a candle being lit in the Holy House at The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. It is traditional to light candles for prayer intentions in the Holy House and to ask Mary for her intercessions. The lamps above are now electric (they used to be candles!) and each is dedicated for a different intention. These are often parishes but can be individuals or institutions. The candles burn for about 3 hours and are regularly refreshed. When a candle is lit people often think about either:

- Worries** that they would like God to help with
- Thanksgiving** for something that has happened – e.g. cure from illness
- Commending family or friends to God and asking for his **blessing** on them.

Intercession: to say a prayer on behalf of another person.

Intention: A reason for saying the prayer e.g. to say thank you for cure from illness.

Holy House: At Walsingham this is a special chapel where it is said the Lady Richeldis had a vision of the Virgin Mary and where a spring rose which has holy water in.

Parish: An area served by a church.

Shrine: A place regarded as holy because of its associations with a divinity or a sacred person or relic, marked by a building or other construction.

Relic: an object that belonged to someone holy e.g. a part of the true cross on which Jesus was crucified.

Some Christians light candles to help them pray.

The light of the candle is seen as being like the light of Jesus.

It reminds Christians of their baptism.

Leaving the candle burning reminds Christians that they are always in the company of God.

The lit candle is a visual reminder of the prayers that have been offered.

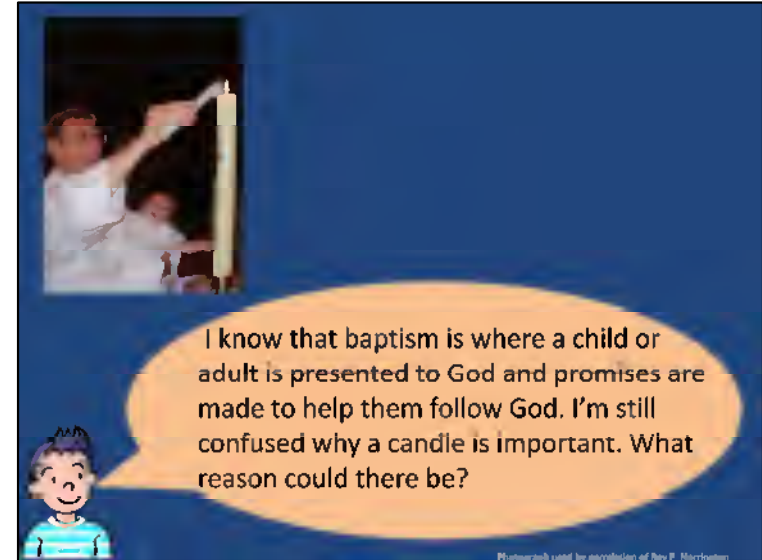


The picture is of a pricket stand in Chelmsford Cathedral. This is a stand for votive candles. The candles are lit to show intentions for prayers said.

Pricket – means a sharp metal spike on which to fix a candle (or a candlestick that has the sharp spikes). These anchor the candle safely so it can be lit.

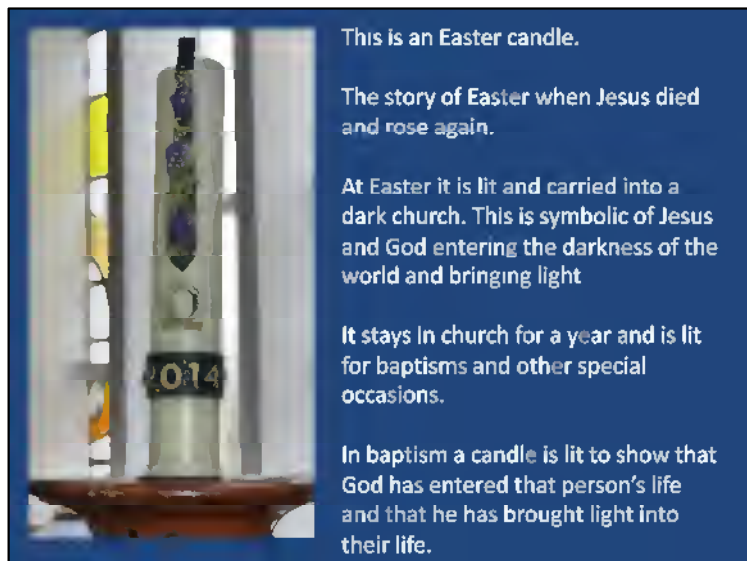
Votive – a candle given in fulfilment of a vow or promise; also means given voluntarily, not obligated.

Baptism: Where a child or adult becomes a member of the church.



Information at: <http://colchesterchristchurch.org.uk/dt/baptism/#>

A candle is symbolic of the baby or adult being brought out of the "darkness" (where there is no God) into the "light of Jesus" where there is God and hope. It is also a share of the light of Easter as the baptismal candle is lit from the Paschal candle (see next slide notes). The above website has a comprehensive explanation of the Baptism service and the background to it.



The Paschal (Easter) candle's flame symbolises the presence of the light of Christ in the middle of his people. PASCH comes from the Hebrew word PSCh meaning Passover.

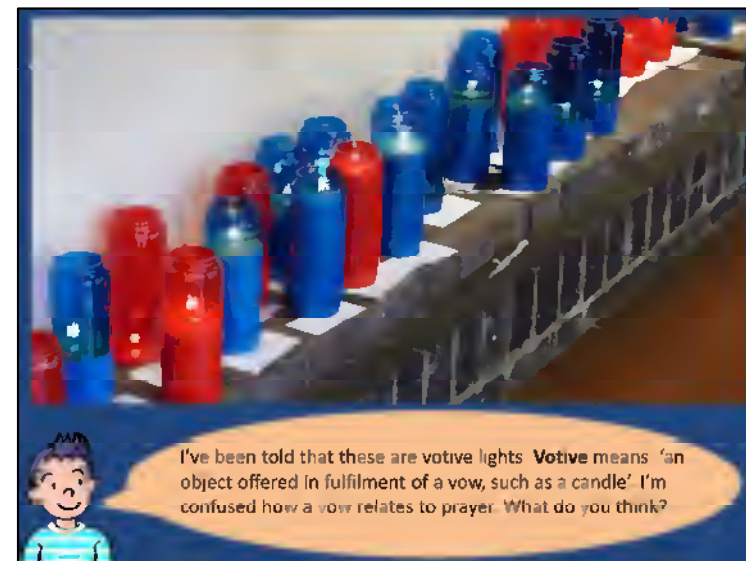
The cross is always the central symbol – in this picture the cross bar has been burned away.

The Greek letters alpha and omega signify that God is the beginning and the end (from the Book of Revelation)

The current year represents God in the present amidst the congregation

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.

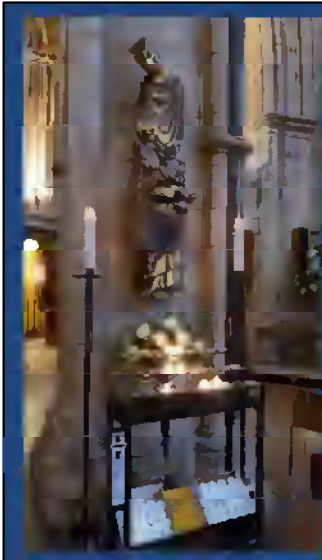
(Ref: Wikipedia).



Votive candles at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk. These are 5 day candles and the pieces of paper have prayer intentions written on them. The colours are not significant.

Votive – a candle given in fulfilment of a vow or promise; also means given voluntarily, not obligated.

Vow – a promise made. Some Christians will light candles as a sign of a promise that they will do something or as part of a promise to pray for someone or something.



Sometimes candles are lit near statues.

Some Christians believe that they can ask the saint represented by the statue to intercede for them.

Intercede means: 'to intervene on behalf of another'.

The candle is a sign that help has been asked of that saint.

Christians do not pray to the statues or saint; they ask them to help God hear their prayers.

It is important to emphasise to the children that the statues are not prayed to but stand as reminders that some Christians believe that you can ask Saints for their intercessions (help) with prayer intentions. This is a statue of Mary with Jesus in Canterbury Cathedral with a pricket stand underneath. The candles symbolise prayers offered to God through the help of Mary or where Mary has been asked for help and to intercede with God on behalf of the person who has lit the candle.

Mary: The mother of Jesus.



This is an opportunity for quiet reflection. Ask the children to think of something which is important to them or give them the opportunity to say a prayer depending on the school context. Ask them to relate their thoughts and feelings to those that Christians may feel/experience when they pray. (AT2)

Acknowledgements:

*Photographs taken, with permission, at

- Chelmsford Cathedral
- The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Norfolk
- Canterbury Cathedral
- Church of the Ascension with All Saints, Chelmsford

*Information from:

- Tufton Tract – Lighting a Candle