

THE PASCHAL CANDLE

Also known as the 'Easter Candle'

Paschal =
Pesach

Who?

The candle represents the **eternal presence of Jesus Christ** and his light overcoming sin. It features in **Catholic churches**.

What?

The name '**Paschal**' comes from the Hebrew word **Pesach** which means Passover.

In the Church, at the Saturday vigil before Easter Sunday, a 'new' fire is lit. The candle is then lit from this sacred fire. There are four key symbols on the paschal candle: the five wounds, the cross, the year and the alpha and omega.

When?

It is lit throughout **Easter time** and then relit for **baptisms** and other special events including feast days in the year.

Where?

The candle has a **prominent place** in the **church** throughout the Easter season so that it is visible to all.

Why?

It is a **special candle** that symbolises the fact that Jesus' resurrection was a **triumph over death**.



The Paschal candle represents Jesus' light overcoming sin and it is decorated with symbols to show this.

The five wounds: The candle has five studs on it to represent the five wounds Jesus received during his crucifixion.

The cross: This is the symbol of Christian faith because it is due to the crucifixion of Christ that the Resurrection was possible.

The year: Each year the candle is marked with that particular year. It reminds people that Jesus is the same for all time and that the salvation earned by Jesus is as real now as it was in the past. The candle will be used by the Church until the following Easter, especially at baptisms.

The 'Alpha' and 'Omega': These are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. They symbolise Christ as the 'first' and the 'last'; the 'beginning' of all things and the 'end' of all things.



The Easter candle has a **prominent place** in the church throughout the whole Easter season. As a reminder of the **triumph of the Resurrection** the Easter candle is lit at every Mass from Easter Sunday through to Pentecost.



"The Light of Christ"

The Easter candle and baptism

Historically, baptisms took place at the Easter Vigil. Many parishes still baptise adults during the Easter Vigil. Baptism is the sacrament of entry into the Church. Water is used during the baptism ceremony to symbolise that sin is washed away by Jesus. The water used to baptise the new Christians during the Easter Vigil is blessed using the Easter candle.

The Easter candle is used in other baptisms throughout the year. To remind the people of the Resurrection, it is lit and placed near to the font. A smaller baptismal candle is lit from its flame and is given to the baptised person or their family to remind them that the 'Light of Christ' has defeated the darkness of sin. The liturgy encourages them to keep the light of faith 'burning brightly'. A further link to Easter is contained in the instructions to priests that, where possible, baptisms should take place on Sundays. This is because Sunday is the weekly reminder of the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Flame



The candle represents the eternal presence of Christ. The lighting of the flame is to help people remember that Jesus is the Light of the World and that before he came, the world was in spiritual darkness.

It begins here!

At the beginning of the Easter Vigil the church is in darkness. Outside the church a fire is lit. The Easter (Paschal) candle is lit from that fire and processed into the church. This symbolises the 'light of Christ' overcoming the 'darkness of sin'. The procession is completed with an ancient hymn, called the **Exultet**, that proclaims Jesus' triumph over sin because his resurrection defeats death. The candle itself has a variety of symbols on it to reinforce belief in this triumph over sin:

"The light of Christ, rising in Glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds."

Knowledge Check

- When is the paschal candle lit?
- Which Hebrew word does *paschal* come from?
- What does the paschal candle represent?
- What are the four key symbols on the paschal candle?
- What do the five studs represent?
- What do the alpha and omega symbols represent?
- Historically, which sacrament took place at the Easter Vigil?
- What is the *Triduum*?

Choose a Task

- Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
- Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
- Create a poster/leaflet

CHALLENGE!

Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

Exam Question

c) Explain why the paschal candle is used in the Easter Vigil and during a Catholic baptism [8]

The Triduum

Each year during Holy Week the events of the last week of Jesus' life feature in a series of liturgies. The most important of them are three from the 'triduum':

- Holy Thursday:** Mass of the Last Supper to remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples
- Good Friday:** a commemoration of the Crucifixion
- Easter Vigil:** in remembrance of the Resurrection

Summary

- The Paschal candle conveys Christian beliefs that the Resurrection brought humankind light and hope. The symbols on it are a reminder of the Crucifixion through which Jesus brought salvation.
- The Paschal candle is used at Easter (the festival that remembers the Crucifixion and Resurrection) and at baptisms as a reminder that 'the light of the world' has defeated death and that salvation from sin is possible.

