

## The Easter Candle

If you are visiting the church at Eastertime you will see a special candle called the **Paschal (Easter) candle**. This is kept on the holy altar table.

This candle stands for the risen Christ. It is lit in the darkened church for the Easter liturgy. It is held by the priest.

The people in church also hold candles. The priest invites the people to come and light their candles from the Paschal candle. He says to them, "Come receive light from the light that never dims, and give praise to Christ Who is risen from the dead."

When the liturgy is over, the people carry the lighted Easter candle home.

They make the sign of the cross on the front door of their house with the candle. Then they bless each room of the house with the holy light.

In order to keep the holy light in the house all year long, the Paschal candle is then used to light the small votive light that burns before the family icon.

During the forty days of Easter, Orthodox families light their Easter candles at the supper table as they sing:

*Christ is risen from the dead. By his death he has destroyed death. And to those in the tombs He has given life.*

***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25).***

## The Eternal Light

**The eternal light** is a votive light that either hangs from the ceiling above the tabernacle, or burns before it on the altar table.

It is kept burning always to show that the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is “the light of the world,” is present in the tabernacle.

Because Jesus died at 3 p.m. on Holy Friday, the eternal light is put out every year at that hour.

It is lit again at the midnight Easter service to remind us that “Christ is Risen, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

We who live in darkness have now seen the great light—Jesus—who shines as “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Psalm 119:105).

***Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).***

## The Bread Offering or Prosphora

Every Sunday there are people who bring a loaf of bread to church for the liturgy.

They bring the bread to show that Jesus is the bread of life. The Greek word for the gift of bread is **prosphora**. It means a gift or offering.

We bring bread also because it stands for life. It is the staff of life.

We cannot live without it. Once we eat bread, it becomes part of us—our flesh and bones.

So, when we bring bread to church for the liturgy, we are really giving our life to God. It is the gift of our love.

When the bread is placed on the altar, it becomes God's. God is so pleased with the gift of our life that He changes it through the Holy Spirit.

It becomes His precious Body. He gives it back to us.

And this is how Holy Communion takes place. We give ourselves to God through the bread and He gives Himself to us by changing our gifts of bread and wine into His precious Body and Blood.

We come to the liturgy not just to *receive* Christ, but also to *give* ourselves to Christ.

***Present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship (Rom. 12:1).***

## The Bishop's Throne

The **bishop's throne** is located to the right of the icon screen. It is set apart for the bishop who is the leader of the church. The bishop represents Jesus Christ. For this reason an icon of Christ, the High Priest, is placed on the bishop's throne.

The bishop sits or stands at the throne during church services. He blesses the people. Often he speaks to the people from his throne. When we see the bishop at his throne, we feel that we are in the presence of Jesus.

The bishop holds a pastoral staff. This is like a shepherd's staff. It is a staff that has a loop at one end. The shepherd uses this staff to lead the straying sheep back into the sheepfold.

The bishop holds this staff to show that, like Jesus, he is the good shepherd who cares for the flock and leads them to the safety of the sheepfold which is the church.

When the bishop celebrates the liturgy, he blesses us with two candlesticks. One is a triple-branched candlestick which expresses our belief in the Trinity, that is, in the Father Who loves us, the Son Who saves us, and the Holy Spirit Who lives in us.

The double-branched candlestick expresses our belief that Jesus was both God and man in the same Person.

Holding the triple-branched candlestick in his right hand and the double-branched one in his left hand, the bishop prays God's blessing upon us.

God loves us. He shows us His love for us by blessing us through the bishop, the priest, our parents, and grandparents.

***He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; He gently leads those that have young (Isa. 40:11).***

## Vestments

The priest wears special clothes for the liturgy. These are called **vestments**. They are:

A long linen robe called the *sticharion* or *alb*. This is “the robe of salvation and joy.” It stands for the white robe every Christian receives at baptism.

Over the shoulders the priest wears a long, beautiful double strip of cloth called the *stole* or *epitrachelion*. The stole stands for the grace of God that is poured out upon God’s priests.

Around his waist, the priest wears the *zone* or *belt*. This stands for the strength which God gives His servants. As the priest puts on the *zone* he prays, “Blessed is God Who girds me with strength ...”

Around his wrists the priest wears the cuffs or *epimanikia*. These cover the sleeves of the *alb*. They make it easier for the priest to move his hands during the liturgy. The cuffs stand for the power of God which flows into the priest’s hands to help him serve God.

Lastly the priest puts on the *phelonion* or *chasuble*. This covers the whole body in the back and goes below the waist in the front. As the priest puts on the phelonion he prays that he be covered with all the righteousness of God.

St. John Chrysostom tells us that the vestments are there to hide the person of the priest. When we see the priest at the altar, we are to see Christ through the vestments.

It is really Jesus Who is teaching and blessing us through the priest.

***Your priests, O Lord, shall be clothed with righteousness.***