



## 12. Why Do We All Turn Eastwards To Recite The Creeds?

From a very early date, Christian symbolism has associated the East, the compass-point from which the sun rises, with life, hope, and rebirth, and the west, where the sun sets, with darkness, evil, and death. From the second century, a candidate for baptism (who would be adult) would face westwards to 'renounce the Devil and all his works' and then to turn eastwards to affirm belief in Christ. It was also customary to face eastwards when praying. In the Western church, in the Middle Ages, it was usual for the whole congregation to face the East for the Glorias.

Such 'superstitious customs' were denounced by many Protestant Reformers, but Archbishop Laud in the reign of Charles I insisted that Anglicans should face eastwards at every recitation of the Creed and this has continued ever since.

Because the custom was to face eastwards to pray, the priest when celebrating the Eucharist also faced the liturgical East, where the altar was. This, of course, meant that he was celebrating with his back to the congregation. At the Reformation, the Altar became the 'Lord's Table', and was moved from the Chancel to the middle of the church, with the congregation gathered around it. A rubric in the Prayer Book directed that, at the celebration, the priest should stand on the North side of the table.

Archbishop Laud, determined to move the Church of England away from extreme Protestantism, directed that the Table be moved back to the East end of the church and railed off. However, the rubric requiring the priest to stand to the north of the table continued - illogically - in force, and great controversy was caused in the nineteenth century when more Catholic-minded clergy again began adopting the eastward-facing position at the Eucharist.

The controversy was only resolved - ironically - through the influence of the Liturgical Movement, which originated in the Roman Catholic Church. The Altar was really Christ's Table, about which his people gather to celebrate the Eucharist, the argument ran. The priest presides, and should therefore stand behind the table, facing westwards, towards the congregation. This is, of course, what we do at St Mary's.