



15. Candle light in church

From very early times, the use of lamps and candles was associated with Christian worship, carrying as it did the idea of holiness and the light of God dispelling darkness. Until the late Middle Ages, candles were not placed on the altar; a hanging light was more usual.

At St Mary's at present, we light candles on the altar where the Eucharist is celebrated, as well as those above our High Altar. We used also to have a red lamp hanging above the latter, but this was removed at the time of re-ordering of the East End of the church and the move to celebrate at the Nave Altar.

These lights denote holiness. As candles, their independence of any external power source symbolises the holiness of God – as well as giving an attractive warm light. They are also lit at other service times at whichever altar is used as the focal point.

The light by the altar in the Lady Chapel denotes the presence of the Reserved Sacrament in the adjacent Aumbry (qv), reminding us to approach it with suitable reverence.

The light at the entrance to the Lady Chapel is there for a completely different purpose. It is to enable those leaving written prayers on our prayer board to light a votive candle and leave it on our candle stand if they wish.

The lighting of a candle when leaving a prayer is a physical act symbolising our particular contact at that moment with God, as well as the 'ascending' of the prayer to Heaven like a candle flame. (For more on this, see 'What are votive candles and what are they for?'.)