

The use of Incense and Light in the Church

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THE INCENSE

What is the use of the incense in the church?

It is a sign for worshipping God and presenting the prayers before Him.

- ❖ The use of the incense is very old and God ordered its use from the Old Testament when He ordered Moses to offer it in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 25:6,37,29)(Leviticus 16:12) and there was an special alter for offering the incense. And from that time on, the use of incense is continuous in the church, in Malachi it is written “ from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, place incense is going to be offered to My name” (Malachi 1:11).
- ❖ In the Gospel of St. Luke we read that the archangel Gabriel appeared to Zachariah when he was offering the incense (Luke 1:9-11).
- ❖ In many parts of the Holy Bible we read about the incense as a symbol of prayer as:
 1. (Psalm 141:2) ”May my prayer be counted as incense before Thee and the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering”
 2. (Revelation5:8) “the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Land, full of incense, which are the prayers of the Saints”
 3. (Revelation 8:3-4) “and another angel came and stood at the alter holding a golden censer, and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the Saints upon the golden alter which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayer of the saints went up before God of the angel ‘s hand

THE LIGHTS

There are many symbols for using the light in the church, it is used in the old testament since God ordered Moses to make the “Lamp stand”

- ❖ In general any light is a representation of God and we say in psalm of Monday “God is light and the angels of light praise Him”.
- ❖ In Isaiah “you will have the Lord for an everlasting light”(Isaiah 60:20)
- ❖ Of course, whenever God is present, there should be light and He said about Himself that “I am the light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- ❖ The light represents also the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ It is a symbol and sign for the heavenly kingdom because it will be totally light as written ”and there shall no longer be any night, and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them, and they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5).

- ❖ Usually the angels are represented by light and candles.
- ❖ The light is a sign of purity and holiness

The Candles

Candles are used as a sort of light in the church and they have many different symbols and they represent many things as we'll see.

1. We put and light the candles **in front of the icons of Saints** in the church, for they are the light of the world as Jesus said in (Matth.5:14).The candle also represents the striving and hardship of the Saints in their life as the candle dissolves step by step enduring the heat to illuminate for the others.

The candles represent the watching up at night waiting for the meeting of the bridegroom and this to follow the footpath of the Saints who were watching up and deserved meeting he bridegroom as illustrated in the example of the 10 virgins (math 25).

2. We light 2 candles **when reading the Gospel** in the church:
 - a. the Word of God is light “Thy Word is a Lamp to my Feet, and a light to my path” (Psalm119:105)
 - b. Jesus sent his Apostles two by two in front of Him to every city that He was intending to go to.
3. We put 2 candle stands on **either sides of the alter** symbolizing the two angles which the women saw in the grave of Jesus, one at the place of the head and the other at the place of the feet.
4. The priest holds 3 candles when praying the prayer of asking and entreating God’s mercy **“Efnoti Nai Nan”**. These three candles represent the Holy Trinity, and they are hold together and united in one hand to illustrate that the Trinity is equal in Divinity and of the same essence.
5. in the Divine Liturgy, the deacons hold candles at the time of the descend of the Holy Spirit for **the Transubstantiation** and the conversion of the bread to he Body of Lord Jesus and the wine (non alcoholic) to His precious Blood. These candles are a symbol for the Holy Spirit.
6. Usually **when the priest moves with the Holy Body or the Precious Blood** a deacon moves before him holding a candle, the deacon and the candle represent the angels surrounding the throne of God in heaven, and the walking of the deacon holding the candle before the Holy Body or the precious Blood represent St. John the Baptist the forerunner who prepared the way before Jesus as written by Malachi the profit “I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me” (Malachi3:1).



“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John9:5)

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.(Matthew 5:16)