

Worshipping God through the Senses - the value of symbols in Anglicanism

- **Christmas**—The colour used for this season is white and/or gold. There are 12 days of Christmas, and during this season, the Church celebrates the birth/incarnation of Jesus, and the joy that he brings to the entire world.
- **Epiphany**—During this season, we celebrate the commencement of Jesus’ earthly ministry as well as the mission of the church to the world. The colour used during this season is green, however, white may be used on the First day of the Epiphany (the revelation of Jesus to the Magi/Gentiles) and on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, (in which the Baptism of Jesus is celebrated). The Green colour is used as we focus on the life and teachings of Jesus.
- **Lent**— This is the season after Epiphany, and the colour used is a dark purple. During this season, we commemorate the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. This number of days can be noticed if we count all the days from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, and omit the Sundays of each week. It is a penitential season, and all members of church are encouraged to fast, as we reflect on what Jesus went through during this period, and also pray that we too will be strengthened to resist the temptations of life.
- **Palm Sunday**—During the last week of Lent (Holy Week), the linens of the church are changed to red. Palm Sunday commences Holy Week, and on this day two liturgies are celebrated, the first being the Liturgy of the Palms, (in which we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem), and the second being the Liturgy of the Passion, (in which we commemorate the passion and suffering that Jesus went through before being crucified on the cross). It is for this reason that red linens and vestments are used.
- **Maundy Thursday**— On Thursday of Holy Week, the church commemorates the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which is an event that occurred on the night that Jesus was betrayed. At this service the church has the option of using white instead of red linens because of the nature of the celebration/event. At the end of the service, there is the removal of the clergy’s chasuble, the stripping of the altar, and the removal of all other liturgical items from the sanctuary and other parts of the church.
- **Good Friday**—This is a very solemn service, and is also a fast day. The altar is bare, and no other liturgical vestments or linens are present, to remind us that

Christ died on Good Friday. So, on this day, the church celebrates the crucifixion and death of Jesus, in which He gave up His life, in order to save sinful humanity.



- **Holy Saturday**—The colour used at this service is white, as we celebrate the paschal mystery of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Traditionally conducted in the evening when it is dark, the church is in a state of waiting, as we eagerly anticipate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. The blessing and lighting of the Paschal Candle on this day reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world, and Him only should we follow, as the one who will bring us out of darkness into His marvelous light.
- **Easter** — This is the only moveable feast, and is set based on the first paschal full moon for the year. The colour used is white, as we celebrate the triumphal resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is the most significant feast in the church’s calendar for all Christians, as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation of our faith. Also, on that day, (which was the first day of the week), Jesus opened the life gates of heaven, so that we can all inherit eternal life. It is for this reason that we have continue to maintain our worship on Sundays, in which we commemorate this great event. There are fifty days of Easter, and this is in memory of the period on which Jesus was on earth, before He ascended into heaven.
- **Ascension Day**— On this day, the church celebrates the ascension of Jesus into heaven, and it brings to an end the fifty days of Easter. The colour used at this feast is white.
- **Pentecost**—The day of Pentecost is often times referred to as the Birth of the Church, as on this day, the Holy Spirit was outpoured, and gave strength, wisdom and courage to the disciples to address all those who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, which is a Jewish Festival. As a result of their proclamation, over 3000 individuals were converted and believed in Jesus. The colour used for the day of Pentecost and the cloven tongues of fire (which rested on the heads of those in the upper room) is red. As a result, red is used in this diocese for Ordination and Confirmation services.
- **Trinity Sunday**—On this day the Church Celebrates the oneness of God, who manifested God’s self as Father (creator), Son (Redeemer and Saviour), and Holy Spirit (Power of God active in the Church, crea-

tion, and the world). The colour used is white.

- **Season after Pentecost**—The season after Pentecost is normally referred to as ‘ordinary time’. The colour used by the church is green, and the primary focus is given to the life, works and teachings of Jesus.
- **Feast of Christ the King**—This is the last Sunday of the Church’s Calendar for the Ecclesiastical year, and is a service used to remind us that Jesus is Lord and King of our lives. The colour used in white.

Conclusion

The Church in her wisdom has used various symbols in order to aid our worship of God, as well as to help us unfold the great mysteries of Jesus’ life from His birth in a manger to His ascension into heaven. We should never take this for granted, but should instead seek to immerse ourselves in the life and worship of God in the church, as when we do this, we can have a deeper connection with God, because we understand what we do, and why we do what we do as Anglicans.



Importance of Symbols in Worship

The Anglican Church prides herself in the richness and beauty that a liturgy has to offer through the engagement of our senses as we seek to worship God. The visual appeal associated with the use of candles, incense, the altar, and the different colours used for each season, are just a few symbols which help us to better understand, appreciate and unfold the great mystery surrounding the worship of our God. This is no different from our understanding of sacraments, in which outward and visible signs are used to help us understand and appreciate the inward and spiritual change/transformation that they (the sacraments) should bring about in our daily lives.

A better understanding of the symbols in the Anglican Church, therefore, can help us as aids in our worship of God. They are not “an end” in themselves, but they point us to an even greater reality of God, which not even words, at times, can explain.



Certain Symbols used in Worship


- **The Cross** — A reminder to us of the salvation that has been won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.
- **Stations of the Cross** — A pictorial liturgy designed to assist Christians to commemorate and meditate on fourteen (14) major events that took place on Jesus' last day on earth. It begins With Jesus' condemnation to death and ends with his being laid in a tomb.
- **Incense** — Otherwise known as frankincense, one of the gifts given to Jesus by the three Magi, denotes his priestly role both as the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world as well as the one who hears our prayers and receives our gifts that are being presented to almighty God. The aromatic smoke produced therefore is a symbolic reminder that our prayers are being heard and the offerings/gifts that we present are being received by God. The visual effect of the smoke and the aroma of the incense therefore help us to appreciate God's unending grace and mercy to us, as the one who hears our prayers, and will do what God thinks and sees best for us (Psalm 141:2).
- **Candles** — The light from the candles is a reminder to us that Jesus is the light of the world. In Jesus, therefore, we find our hope, thus giving us the assur-



ance that in the midst of despair Jesus is still in control.

- **Paschal Candle** — Also known as the Easter Candle, this candle is traditionally lit at the Easter Vigil, as affirmation that Jesus, the Light of the World, has conquered death and sin. Traditionally, the candle is also lit for all the Sundays of Easter to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, at funerals to remember that death is not the end, and at baptism to remind us of the call to walk as a Children of the Light.
- **Altar** — The table on which elements of bread and wine are placed, which are consecrated to become, through faith, the body and blood of Christ. In the Jewish tradition, the animal to be sacrificed is placed on it. In the Christian Church however, the Body and Blood of Christ - the one who was sacrificed for all humanity to take away the sins of the world is placed. Also, the elevation of the altar in the sanctuary not only ensures greater visibility during the Eucharistic celebration, but it also has a symbolic meaning of being the high point in the Church's pilgrimage on earth. This is the table that the Body of Christ (the Church) goes to share in the great banquet to be strengthened, sustained and renewed by God.
- **Pulpit** — This is where the Word of God is proclaimed to God's people. It symbolizes Christ's presence in the world among the people, and this is reflected by its position in the church, in which it is either close to or in the midst of the congregants.
- **Lectern** — The Lectern in the Anglican Church often takes the form of an eagle with outstretched wings, on which the Bible/lectionary is placed. The eagle is the symbol of St. John the Evangelist, to whom is credited St. John's Gospel (which begins, "In the beginning was the Word"). The eagle, being the strongest bird, also represents the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the power of the gospels which are to be carried throughout the world by the Church.
- **Tabernacle and Aumbry**—There is a difference between a Tabernacle and an Aumbry. Though both are used for the exclusive reservation of the consecrated elements (the Body and Blood of Christ), the Tabernacle is either placed on an Altar or an adjacent wall to the Altar, while an Aumbry is less obvious, because it is set into the wall. However, both

are able to be locked in order to prevent the consecrated elements from being removed without authorization

- **Baptismal font**— The Baptismal Font is placed close to an entrance, especially at the west door, (or at a central point from which it may be seen from any entrance), so that the moment we step into the church, upon seeing it, we are reminded that we are children of God and heirs of the eternal kingdom by virtue of our baptism.
- **Holy Trinity** — The word trinity is not found in the Bible, but it is a word which was used in the Early Church to explain how the three persons of the Godhead are ONE. The word Trinity comprises of two words: tri (which means three) and unity (which means coming to together). The symbol of the Holy Trinity is 3 circles overlapping each other, in which each circle represents the three different manifestations of God and the central point at which they meet reminds us that God is ONE. In essence, therefore, God as Trinity is a vivid reminder to us of the different ways in which God manifests/makes God's self known to us in three different persons and roles: God the Father (as creator, guide and the one who spoke through the prophets); God the Son (as teacher, Saviour and redeemer of the world), and God the Holy Spirit (as God active in the church and the world through us). 
- **Fish** — The picture of the fish, which is seen today on the back of many cars is actually a symbol which was used by the Early Church to secretly indicate the places that the Christian community gathered for worship during times of persecution by the Roman Empire. The Greek spelling of fish is *ΙΧΘΥΕ* (pronounced: ICHTHUS), and it is an abbreviation, which when translated means: I = Jesus, X (CH) = Christ, Θ (TH) = God's, Y(U) = Son, E(S) = Savior. 
- **Chirho**— Often times seen on the vestments of priests or linens used in the church, the Chi-rho is a symbol containing the first two Greek letters for Christ. They are X (CH) and P (rho). (pronounced Chi-rho), and is written by superimposing the P over the X. It was a symbol used by Constantine in a war, in which he got a vision one night stating, “In this sign you will conquer.” As a result, he placed this symbol on the shields of all his soldiers, and made the commitment to God that if he won the war, he would

give his life to Christ, and change the major religion of the day to Christianity. When he won the war this he did, and to this very day the chi-rho symbol is still used by the Church. 

- **Vestments**— This is worn by the ministers of the church to symbolize their role, the office they hold and the function they are called by God to play. The white alb worn by the clergy, symbolizes the righteousness and purity of Christ. When worn, it is a reminder to us all that Jesus covers us with His righteousness, thus further reminding us that it is Christ who is acting as the celebrant through the minister. The stole which is worn around the neck of the bishop or priest, or across the chest of the deacon, symbolizes his/her authority and the functions/roles that he/she has been ordained to carry out. The Chausable which is worn over the alb highlights the season or event that the church is celebrating. 
- **Holy Water** — Water which has been blessed by the priest or bishop to consecrate objects and set them apart for the honour and glory of God. It may also be used to bless people and even the body of our loved ones. Traditionally, salt is normally added the water when it is being blessed. 
- **The Church Building**—For the most part, many of our churches are designed in the Shape of a cross, and this is oftentimes noticeable in the shape of the isles in the church. Others may be so designed, such that the altar is easily seen, be it that it is at the centre of the church or at the Eastern end. Also, the Church building is a symbol of Christ's presence in the community. It reminds the people that even amidst our struggles, Christ is here with us as, and so we need not worry as God will make a way.

Seasons of the Church and Colours used

The Calendar for the Ecclesiastical/Church's Year begins four weeks before Christmas, in the season called Advent.

- **Advent**—The colour used is royal or bright/deep purple, thus depicting the royalty or kingship of Jesus. During this season, we celebrate both the second coming of Jesus and the anticipation of God becoming flesh.