

Concepts Pertaining to Orthodox Worship (2)

3- Why do Orthodox Christians use candles in worship?

Believers light candles during prayer for many reasons:

1- **A candle is a source of light just as God is the ultimate source of light.** In 1 John 1:5, the evangelist says that “...*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*” Since God is intrinsically light, it is unsurprising that light was the first creation as described in Gen 1:3. Even after the fall of man when the darkness of sin reigned over the world, God desired to be “*an everlasting light*” (Isaiah 60:19) to Israel – a prophecy eventually fulfilled by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. St. John begins his Gospel by saying, “*In [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness...[St. John the Baptist] came to bear witness of the Light...that was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world*” (John 1:4-9). Thus, **candles are lit in church in order to remind worshipper that they are in the presence of God, the true Light.**



2- **There is historical precedent for lighting candles in worship.** In the Old Testament, God commanded that a golden lamp stand be continuously lit in the tabernacle before the altar of incense and table of showbread (Ex. 25:37, 27:20). In the New Testament, it is mentioned in the revelations of St. John that there are also seven golden lamp stands in heaven (Rev. 1:20).

3- **The lighting of candles is an apostolic tradition** that was practiced during prayer because Light corresponds to the word of God. The Psalmist David prays saying “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*” Hence, in Acts 20:8, it says that “*There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together*” while the Christians were gathered together. It is also mentioned in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Latin for an ancient document called the “Teaching of the Apostles”) that St. Jerome, a fourth century church father, said that the church lights the candles during the reading of the Gospel to show its joy with the shining Good News to all the world.

4- **The light given off by candles reminds the believers that the church is the spiritual lighthouse to the world.** Just as lighthouses provide navigational assistance and warnings to maritime pilots, the church illuminates the path of righteousness and the consequences of sin.

5- The church lights candles in front of the icons because the saints exemplify the teaching of Jesus Christ – “*You are the light of the world*” (Matt. 5:14). The lives of the saints were consumed in hardship, calamity, and struggle, yet even though their lives were burning, they were a source of spiritual fervency, love, service, and zeal.

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