

PASCHAL CANDLE 2026

Once again our Paschal candle has been hand-painted by a parishioner. This year the décor has been made in imitation of a mediæval illuminated manuscript and bordered with gold. Every point of the decoration, including every miniscule detail down to the tiny drops of blood on Christ's side and the petals on the flowers, is painted over with five layers of paint and then finished with three layers of varnish.

The central panel, inspired by an illuminated Book of Hours, shows the risen Christ emerging from the open tomb with two soldiers astonished at what is happening and one of the guards still slumped and unaware. Our Lord's wounds are clearly visible, with blood flowing but no longer causing injury or pain. The red cloak of Christ symbolizes the blood He has shed, whilst the green represents new life. Just as the first Adam committed the original sin in a garden, so now Christ rises from the dead in a garden, putting right what Adam got wrong. In the background, almost too distant to see, is the now empty Cross of Christ and the road to Calvary. Above, is the radiant splendour of the newly risen sun.

The panels above and below the central image are decorated with spring flowers and resurrection imagery. In the top panel we can see a peacock butterfly symbolizing transformation, just as a caterpillar is transformed into a new creature. The bee is mentioned in the Exultet, sung at the Easter Vigil:

*On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,
accept this candle, a solemn offering,
the work of bees and of your servants' hands,
an evening sacrifice of praise,
this gift from your most holy Church.*

Also in the top panel we have a pomegranate, another symbol of the resurrection bursting, as it is, with the many seeds of new life.

In the bottom panel the main image is a peacock, yet another symbol of the resurrection. A male peacock sheds its feathers each year and they grow again in time for the next mating season; once again a symbol of new life. But the symbolism of the peacock is rooted in an even older belief – in fact a pagan idea – that a peacock's flesh never decayed even after it died. This is not true, of course, but it gave rise to the beautiful mediæval association of ideas when Christians adopted the bird as a symbol of the resurrection and of Christ's eternal, glorious new life. It was also believed in mediæval times that peacocks could kill and eat poisonous serpents, ingesting their venom and transforming it into the vibrant colours of the tail feathers. This, in turn, was apposite to the imagery of the resurrected Christ whose victory over death is likened to the medicinal antidote to the poison of sin that entered human nature through the temptation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The scenes on both the upper and the lower panels are set in gardens and remind us of the vibrancy and power of the grace that comes to us through the Sacraments, flowing as such grace does from the pierced side of Our Lord.





