



## Introduction

The use of candles in worship has a long history. Both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions have always made use of candles in their liturgies, whereas the Protestant Church has tended to rely less on candles as a visual aid in worship, reserving their use for the altar table or for special festivals such as Easter. In recent years candles have become more common, as part of an Advent Crown, as night-lights for prayers or in candle-lit services. However, Christians of all traditions (and many others in our society) increasingly welcome the beauty and stillness that a candle's light can generate. Schools often use the focus of a candle for their time of quiet in an assembly/collective worship.

Always follow your school Health and Safety guidelines when using candles- and never leave a lit candle unattended.

## Preparation

You will need a tall pillar candle on a stand and some matches. Place the candle in the centre of the circle of children. Remind them that matches and candles can be dangerous and that only an adult should light the candle. They must keep well away from the flame. Depending on which of the reflections below you decide to use, you may need other candles to help illustrate what you say (see 2,3,5 and 8 below).

## Development

Any or all of the following Christian reflections could be used alongside the lighting of the candle and as you watch its flame burn. The use of candles as part of a prayerful meditation like this is very powerful, and children (like adults) will respond to the quietening effect that the candle flame brings. Each reflection opens up a whole area of wondering and can be a stimulus for prayer. In the silence that follows each thought give space for the children to pray quietly and/or use the short prayer suggestions below.

1. A candle cannot light itself. It needs to receive light from another.

*Father God, thank you for the light that Jesus brings to us and the light we can pass on to others.*

2. A candle when lit can give away its light without losing the light it has.  
(perhaps you could demonstrate this by lighting a small tea light from the central candle)

*Father God, thank you that you give us so much love that we can give away love to others without losing what we already have*

3. A candle burns as bright when it is new, as when there is only a small amount of the original candle left.



(perhaps you can demonstrate this by lighting another pillar candle that is not as tall because it has already burned lower)

*Father God, thank you that whatever age we are, we can still be used by you to be a light for you to each other*

4. A candle's light is sensitive, reacting to the slightest movement of the air around it.  
(you could demonstrate this by blowing gently - though beware, this will encourage the children to do the same and maybe less gently!)

*Father God, thank you that you pick up every little thought and feeling that we have because you care about us. Help us to be sensitive and kind to others.*

5. A candle's light is the same whatever the size, shape or colour of the candle.  
(introduce some other candles, of different shapes and colours)

*Father God, thank you that we all matter to you and are of equal value to you even though we are each very different. Help us to see the light of your love burning in everyone we meet.*

6. A candle's light is designed to be seen and is best placed high up so that it can give light to all; it is not for hiding away.  
(demonstrate this by carefully lifting up the pillar candle higher)

*Father God, help us not to hide our light away, keeping it to ourselves. You want us to be lights that bring light to as many people as possible*

7. A candle's flame burns upward while it sheds its light outward.

*Father God, help us to put you first every day and in every situation so the light from our flame grows tall, sending out more light to others*

8. Unless the candle's light is passed on, that light dies when the candle itself comes to an end.  
(light some more tea lights from the central candle, maybe one for each child in the circle. Watch how the light grows bigger and bigger, all from the one light)

*Father God, you wanted your light to be passed on to others. You are the light of the world and you call us to be lights to the world*

9. At the heart of the candle's light there is a death happening, as the wick is burnt up and the wax around it melts and evaporates; just as the light of Christ came only from the death of Jesus on the cross.

*Father God, thank you for sending Jesus to die for us on the cross so that we can be forgiven and come to share in your light*



10. When eventually the candle or candles are snuffed out, draw the group's attention to the spreading smoke, which like incense fills the room. This is even more powerful if it is a perfumed candle. It may be helpful to liken this to the invisible presence of Jesus that goes off with us everywhere, even when we cannot see a candle burning to remind us he is there.

*Father God, thank you that even when we cannot see you, you are still with us. May your invisible light shine brightly in and through us wherever we go in the days ahead.*

Suggested Readings:

Jesus said: I am the light of the world. Follow me and you won't be walking in the dark. You will have the light that gives life. John 8:12

Jesus said: You are like light for the whole world. No one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lamp stand, where it can give light to everyone in the house. Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16