



Evangelion

Monthly Newsletter of St. Luke Anglican Catholic Church, Augusta, Georgia

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A Fragrant Offering: Why Anglicans Use Incense in Worship

By the Rev. Fr. Daniel S. Trout

For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering. (Malachi 1:11)

Some love it, some hate it, and some might just find its use a smelly excuse to prolong our worship, but incense continues to linger in the liturgy. Incense has enjoyed universal implement in Christian worship since at least the fourth century, and we as Anglicans have continued this tradition. We don't use it as often as Eastern Christians in the Byzantine traditions, but we still repeat its special role at important occasions on the Church Kalendar. But why?

Worship is both spiritual and physical, as we are. Worship might arise from the spirit, but its tangible expression in the liturgy is intended to appeal to the senses. The beauty of sacred surroundings and rich vestments appeal to the sense of sight, while appropriate music gratifies the sense of hearing. So, in the same way, the pleasant odor of incense appeals to the sense of smell. We need to recognize a reciprocity here. The desire to praise and adore God *is* caused by our heart's attention to Him: the Holy Spirit within initiates us. However, these sensory manifestations (light, sound, aroma) inspire us with joy to keep focusing that attention on worship. By analogy, we function in a similar way when we celebrate a loved one's birthday. Think about it.

So, because incense is part of a holistic liturgical ceremony, we should see it as both evidence of our offering to God and the glory of His presence with us. The Jews always used incense in the tabernacle/temple, so we should not be surprised to hear the Bible portray the smoke of the incense as a symbol of prayers rising

to God.

Examples include Psalm 141:2 (which Anglicans still read as an opening "Sentence" at Evening Prayer):

"Let my prayer be set forth in thy sight as the incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."

and Revelation 8:3-4:

"And there was given unto [another angel] much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

Using incense when we worship, then, is actually a powerful reminder of our prayer. In fact, psychologically, the scent of burning incense may have the effect of unconsciously motivating us *to pray*. After all, the sense of smell, being purely chemical, is a powerful vehicle for triggering associations and memories, both individual and collective. So, the scent of incense likely stimulates our nervous system, which might help to get us in the "prayer mood." It's a great example of how closely body and soul are connected to worship God, and how incense helps us associate our worship with where we pray together—in church. We can echo with Psalmist:

"My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God." (Psalm 84:2, BCP)

Ordinarily, where can we look for the use of incense in our Anglican liturgy? At a solemn high mass, look for the burning incense contained in a censer (called the *thurible*) at these prescribed parts of the ceremony: at the introit and the reading of the Holy Gospel, and at the offertory and consecration. Incense is used at these

particular moments to sanctify both the elements of worship (the altar, the Gospel book, the bread and wine) and we the worshipers as fit to make sacrifice to God. Ponder that the next time we worship with incense. Imperfect as we are, our merciful Lord purifies us to make offerings of ourselves and our gifts to adore Him and give thanks!

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Perhaps the incense will truly assist us to grow in that spirit of self-sacrifice, not just at liturgy, but every day and in every way.

As an expression of the Christian “law of liberty”, we should, of course, approach the use of incense reasonably and charitably. Neither the New Testament nor our Anglican formularies absolutely mandate its use, so it is a matter of preference and taste rather than of law, faith, or morals. But if opening our noses to its aroma is emblematic of opening our spirits to a profounder experience of prayer, then perhaps we can welcome it—on occasion—as a worthy liturgical companion.

“Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (I Corinthians 6:20)

Weekday Mass Schedule for August

Thursdays: Holy Eucharist at 11:30AM

Quarterly Sunday Potluck

Our next Sunday Potluck has been scheduled for September 10 after church. Please bring your favorite fall dish or dessert. There will be a church mission/growth presentation by Fr. Trout immediately following.

Behold the Glory of God’s Creation—Safely!

On Monday, August 21, the entire continental USA will be treated with a spectacular event: a total eclipse of the sun. Here is one Bible verse **possibly** referring to a solar eclipse:

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. (Isaiah 13:10)

Here are a few more references: Ezekiel 32:7, Joel 2:10, 2:31, & 3:15, Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24, Revelation 6:12 & 8:12.

The following is reprinted by permission from the NASA website <https://eclipse2017.nasa.gov/>

The **only** safe way to look directly at the uneclipsed or partially eclipsed sun is through special-purpose solar filters, such as “eclipse glasses” or hand-held solar viewers. Homemade filters or ordinary sunglasses, even very dark ones, **are not safe** for looking at the sun; they transmit thousands of times too much sunlight. Refer to the American Astronomical Society (AAS) page:

<https://eclipse.aas.org/resources/solar-filters> for a list of manufacturers and authorized dealers of eclipse glasses and handheld solar viewers verified to be compliant with the ISO 12312-2 international safety standard for such products.

Always inspect your solar filter before use; if scratched or damaged, discard it. Read and follow any instructions printed on or packaged with the filter.

Always supervise children using solar filters.

Stand still and cover your eyes with your eclipse glasses or solar viewer before looking up at the bright sun. After looking at the sun, turn away and remove your filter — do not remove it while looking at the sun.

Do not look at the uneclipsed or partially eclipsed sun through an unfiltered camera, telescope, binoculars, or other optical device.

Similarly, do not look at the sun through a camera, a telescope, binoculars, or any other optical device while using your eclipse glasses or hand-held solar viewer — the concentrated solar rays will damage the filter and enter your eye(s), causing serious injury.

Seek expert advice from an astronomer before using a solar filter with a camera, a telescope, binoculars, or any other optical device. Note that solar filters must be attached to the **front** of any telescope, binoculars, camera lens, or other optics. (*ed. note: Trying to take a picture with a cell phone camera will almost certainly destroy it.*)

If you are within the path of totality, (*ed. note: Augusta is **NOT***) remove your solar filter only when the moon completely covers the sun’s bright face and it suddenly gets quite dark. Experience totality, then, as soon as the bright sun begins to reappear, replace your solar viewer to look at the remaining partial phases.

Outside the path of totality, you **must always** use a safe solar filter to view the sun directly.

If you normally wear eyeglasses, keep them on. Put your eclipse glasses on over them, or hold your handheld viewer in front of them.

Please visit the NASA website for more safety tips and other fun information.