



15. Why Do We Have A Red Light Hanging Above The High Altar?

From very early times, the use of lamps and candles was associated with Christian worship, carrying as it did the idea of holiness and the light of God dispelling darkness. Until the late Middle Ages, candles were not placed on the altar; a hanging light was more usual. The fourth-century Spanish poet Prudentius refers to lamps that 'hang by flexible cords and shine over the ceiling to which they are fixed'.

The lamp hung from the ceiling before the high altar at St Mary's therefore follows an ancient tradition of the Church. It is lit only at the celebration of the Eucharist, in association with the other lights used at the same time. There is no connection with the hanging white light kept burning in the Lady Chapel before the Reserved Sacrament. One may hazard a guess that the lamp over the High Altar is red in honour of St Mary the Virgin, to whom the whole church building is dedicated.