

THE ALTAR...

By definition the altar is the focal point of the worship space. The altar is an elevated structure which can be ornate or simple, made of stone or wood on which the Lord's Supper is prepared and distributed. It is not considered a piece of liturgical furniture as are the pulpit or lectern and may be free standing or fixed on the east wall of the Chancel.

The altar symbolizes the presence of God and functions as both sacrificial where God gives his people the gifts of Christ's sacrifice and sacramental where his people offer prayers, praise and thanksgiving.

Since the beginning of the fall into sin, people have sacrificed animals and first fruits to the glory of God. Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord however the word altar is not used in Gen 4:3-4.

The first mention in the Bible of the word altar is when Noah disembarked from the ark in Gen 8:20.

Until God gave His Law to Moses, men made altars wherever they were, out of materials that were at their disposal. An altar was built to commemorate an encounter with God which had a profound impact on someone. Some examples would be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Gideon.

After God's appearance to Moses on Mt Sinai, in the Tabernacle and afterwards in the Temple only two altars are mentioned: the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Altar of Incense.

God Himself often commanded that an altar be built when He had delivered someone in a miraculous way. This altar would be a memorial for generations to come to remember the mighty works of the Lord.

The word altar is rarely used in the New Testament and if used is reference to the Old Testament Law and Temple worship. The books of Hebrews and Revelation speak of an altar, but that altar is in Heaven, not on earth. The word altar is mentioned in the King James version 378 times within 321 verses of the Old Testament and 22 times in the New Testament.

We don't see the New Testament altar on earth because Jesus' death destroyed both the Temple with its altar and the Law of Moses which demanded sacrifices on the Altar. New Testament thinking is that we offer our bodies as living sacrifice for this is our spiritual worship as stated by Paul in Romans 12:1.

New Testament Christians today can access the invisible altar at any time and in any place where we can spiritually give our wills and choose His way as ours. Altars are used for prayers and Holy Communion.

Members of the Altar Guild should always remember that the altar is a monument of God's presence and that reverence and honor toward the altar are reverence and honor to God Himself.