

Liturgy We Live *by Dr. Gil Haas*

Orientation is important for religious practices - for example, Jews pray towards Jerusalem while Moslems face Mecca. Christian “orientation” refers to the construction of a church so that its longer axis runs east and west. The front of fourth Century basilicas faced east, and their altars were at their west end. In this plan, the celebrant at Eucharist faced east when he stood behind the altar. The high altar of Byzantine churches, on the other hand, were built so that the congregation faced east, and this practice was followed in England. Christians view the rising sun from the east as a reference to Christ’s triumphant rising on Easter Sunday while the west, where the sun sets into darkness, has been interpreted as the realm of Satan. In earlier times candidates for baptism faced west to renounce the devil and east to recite the creed. Even though St. Paul’s altar is, by the compass, to the north, liturgically it is to the “East.” This orientation is liturgically significant since each Sunday becomes a celebration of Christ’s rising with the rising sun. This sense of orientation is also why we face “East” when we recite the Gloria and the Creeds.

If you have a liturgical question or an inquiry about anything that transpires during or around our worship service, please forward the question you would like researched to: gghaas@aol.com, or drop the question in the offering basin. Please note whether we can credit you as the source of the question.