

# ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS › MOUNT DINHAM

## THE USE OF VESTMENTS & LITURGICAL COLOURS

### INTRODUCTION

The vestments worn by the clergy when celebrating Mass are derived from the clothing worn by Romans in early Christian times (the toga was by that time formal dress). They therefore connect today's worshippers directly and visibly with the earliest Christians.

The purpose of vestments is not to glorify the clergy as individuals but to draw attention to what they are doing, whether offering prayer, proclaiming the Gospel or re-enacting the Lord's Supper.



Image: The Revd. Canon John Thurmer celebrating Mass at Easter

The '*foundation garment*' of all sets of vestments is the **alb** (from Latin albus, meaning white). It derives ultimately from the under-tunic of Roman times. As the alb is put on, the priest or deacon prays to be made pure. It is fastened with a girdle round the waist and is topped off with a neckcloth called an **amice**.

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The priest wears a **stole** around the neck. This is a long strip of coloured material which indicates the priestly calling. The stole is also worn at other times, such as weddings (white) or confessions (purple). As it is put on, the priest kisses the stole and prays to enter into the joy of the Lord, despite any personal unworthiness. The deacon wears the stole over the left shoulder.

On the left wrist is the **maniple**, originally a towel like the ones carried by French waiters. It has come to be a symbol of the '*sheaf of tears*' which we must endure before entering into joy.

On top the priest wears a **chasuble**, a garment which looks like a South American poncho but was in fact the outdoor coat of Romans in the first centuries AD. As the priest puts it over his head he recalls that he should take up the yoke of Jesus. In Roman times slaves carried buckets and other loads suspended from a yoke placed over their shoulders..

Jesus said: '*My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*'



There is also a cope – a vestment shaped like a colourful cloak – worn for procession or services other than the Mass: for instance, weddings, baptisms and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.



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## HIGH MASS VESTMENTS

The set of vestments shown here, (from our annual exhibition for the Heritage Open Days), as a group of three, is what is required for a High Mass. Three separate clergy do the work of the sub-deacon (reading the piece of Scripture from the Epistles, assisting the deacon), the deacon (reading the Gospel, preparing the Table) and the priest (offering the Mass).

The deacon and sub-deacon wear respectively a **dalmatic** and a **tunicle**, garments which also come from the earliest Christians of Roman times. For High Mass, the vestments worn are gold.



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## LITURGICAL COLOURS

The colour of the vestments used, like so much else in the worship at St Michael's, follows a regular pattern. These colours also mark the passing seasons of the Church's year.

### WHITE

'The Best': Easter and the Sundays after Easter; Christmas and the days after it up to Epiphany; Festivals of the Blessed Virgin Mary (often blue and white).

### RED

Whitsun (to suggest the fire of the Holy Spirit) and festivals of martyrs (to suggest blood).

### PURPLE

Times of repentance, fasting and preparation: Lent (the six weeks of preparation before Easter) and Advent (the month of preparation before Christmas).

### ROSE

Fourth Sunday in Lent (Laetare or Mothering Sunday) and Third Sunday in Advent: these are the 'half-time breaks' in periods of fasting and preparation.

### BLACK

Requiems; All Souls' Day

### GREEN

'Ordinary Time': the rest of the year.