

I'd like to share a few things about the Altar in a Byzantine church, since many may not be familiar with its setup. It is much more complex than a simple table but, as you have come to expect from the East, richly symbolic as well. There are variations in usages, but



there are a number of standard elements. The picture here is of the Altar in our monastery church, so I'll work with that.

First of all, to be technically correct, in the Byzantine tradition, what is called the "Altar" is what would be called the "Sanctuary" in the West, and what is called the Altar in the West is called the Holy Table in our tradition. That does do a bit of violence to the plain meaning of the term "Altar" in English, which denotes a thing and not a place or area. So for the sake of convenience I will use "Altar" and "Holy Table" interchangeably to mean that upon which the Holy Sacrifice is offered.

The Holy Table itself is traditionally cubic in structure, modeled on the heavenly Jerusalem: "its length and breadth and height are equal" (Rev. 21:16). In some churches (especially larger ones) this may be rather impractical, but for our little church a 3 x 3 x 3 foot Altar is just right. Also from the Book of Revelation comes the seven-branched candelabrum, reminiscent of the seven golden lampstands in the midst of which the Son of Man appeared (Rev. 1:12-13). Before that, God had commanded that in the original Tent of Meeting there should be a golden lampstand. "And you shall make seven lamps for it..." (Exodus 25:37).

