

## THE CHRIST WINDOW

The Chancel Window of the First Presbyterian Church of Joliet, Illinois

The windows of the sanctuary are planned to depict the mighty acts of God revealed in the Bible. The key to these acts which unveil the nature of God is to be found in Jesus Christ. That is why the central or chancel window is the Christ Window. This mightiest act of God is depicted in four scenes which occupy the four lancet windows. Each is an important event in the life of Jesus Christ which has been commemorated in the Church year. The face and figure of Jesus are never depicted since as the Incarnate Babe, the Crucified, Risen and Ascended Christ he confronts each of us in his own way. In this sense he belongs to no race or nation or period in history. Yet, in another sense these events did happen in history. Therefore, underneath are the reactions of individuals to these events as these reactions are recorded in Scripture.

At the top of the lancet depicting Jesus' birth is the symbol IHS. These letters are from the Greek word for Jesus and remind us of the words spoken to Joseph, "...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Beneath it we see the manger representing the humility of our Lord and behind it Mary and Joseph signifying the humanity of Jesus. The Angel in the background reminds us of his unique nature as the Son of God. Below are the shepherds in the fields hearing the news. They see a six-pointed Star of David symbolic of the fact that David's successor, the Messiah, had come. The poorly dressed shepherds include a boy, a man and an old man indicate that Jesus comes to the humble of every age. The next group underneath shows three wisemen, one of whom is an African, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Our Lord also comes to the wise and mighty of every race and nation. The star they follow is a five-pointed Epiphany Star.

The second lancet showing the Crucifixion has the symbol INRI at the top. These are the first letters of the Latin words which were inscribed over the Cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". Underneath are three crosses on a green hill. The sky is dark and broken by lighting. The crosses of the thieves remind us that Christ died for the sins of all men. They also indicate two responses which man can make to God's gift of forgiveness. One thief railed at Jesus while the other asked that he be remembered. Just below, Simon of Cyrene, a black man, carries the Cross. Around him are figures representing the forces that put our Lord to death. Greed is seen as the man clutches the money bag. The sneering woman indicates hate, the child throwing the stone is symbolic of ignorance. The priest, aloof and unmoved, depicts pride. The bottom scene shows the centurion kneeling at the foot of the Cross, laying down his sword as he exclaims, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54) This symbolizes the power of love to triumph over the power of might.

The Greek letters, Chi Rho, are at the top of the third lancet, which deals with the Resurrection. They are the first letters in the Greek word for Christ. Because God raised him from the dead Jesus is proved to be the Christ, the Messiah and Deliverer. Beneath is a rock-hewn tomb in a garden with the large stone rolled away. Above is the bright sky of Easter dawn. There are no human figures in this scene since every man, through faith, can meet the Risen Christ. Below we see the joy of the women as they hear the angel say, "He is not here; for he is risen, as he said." (Matthew 28:6) The women hold unused spices in their hands indicating that their defeat has been overcome by his victory. Beneath we see the disciples fishing from a boat. The net which they draw in overflows with fish. It symbolized the return

of the disciples to their daily work which is then transformed by the power of a Risen Christ. It is also a reminder that to experience a Risen Christ is to become a fisher of men.

At the far right the lancet has on top the Greek letters, Alpha and Omega. The reference is to passages in Revelation. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and indicate that through his Ascension, Christ is Lord of all life from the beginning to the end. The cloud beneath stands for his being taken into heaven. The disciples stand on the mountain, looking up. This reminds us of the message of the angels, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? The Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) Below we see the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as seen through the eyes of Jesus. The city gate is open. Palm branches are waved as children, youth and adults sing, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19:38) The Kingdom of God has come since Christ has come. The time for response is now. At the bottom we see the New Testament Church celebrating the Lord's Supper. The scene is from Revelation (4:1-11) and shows the elders seated behind the table as they eat bread together. We recall the Words of Institution, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1Cor. 11:26) It is a foretaste of the final coming of Christ. We wait for the Last Judgement.

Above the four lancet windows are eight smaller windows called "kites". At the top of each kite there is a different cross representing Christ. Midway down is a symbol which stands for one of the claims made by Christ and recorded in the Gospel of John. These find their support in the lancet windows underneath. At the bottom of the first, third, fifth and seventh kites there are different symbols for the Trinity to remind us that through Christ we come to see God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The symbols at the bottom of the second, fourth, sixth and eighth kites represent Christ and relate to the lancet windows underneath.

The first kite window is the claim of Christ, "...before Abraham was I am." (John 8:58) The eternal nature of Christ is represented by the circle which is interwoven with two other circles representing God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity Cross at the top also symbolizes the eternal nature of the Son through his relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. At the bottom is an equilateral triangle representing the Trinity.

The second kite has a large loaf of bread for Christ's claim, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven..." (John 6:50) At the top is the Tau or Advent Cross. According to tradition the blood on the Israelites' door-posts to save the first born formed this type of cross and this is said to be the cross upon which Moses lifted up the brazen serpent. (Numbers 21:8-9, John 3:14) The lily of the valley, the Messianic symbol, is at the bottom. (Song of Solomon 2:1-2)

Next is the claim, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11) This is symbolized by the shepherd's staff. The pointed cross or Cross of Suffering indicates the pain of our Lord's death. The Triquetra consists of three equal arcs representing the Trinity. Half the length of each pair of arcs forms the bladder of a fish. The Greek word for fish is formed by taking the first letters of each of the words in Greek which stand for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior".

"I am the door; if any one enter by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find

pasture," (John 10:9) is the claim depicted by the door in the fourth kite. The Greek Cross with four arms of equal length stands for the height, depth, width breadth of God's love revealed to us in the Crucifixion. The kneeling lamb at the bottom signifies the suffering servant (Isaiah 53:7) who becomes the sacrifice.

The seven-branched candlestick in the fifth kite symbolizes Jesus' claim, "I am the light of the world..." (John 8:12) It also refers to his perfect life as God and man. The Easter or Latin Cross with representation of the rays of the sun is a sign of triumph and victory. Below the Fleur-de-lis signifies the Trinity and comes from the lily which is a sign of the Resurrection.

In the sixth kite we see Christ's claim, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die," (John 11:25, 26) is depicted by the Lamb of God carrying a resurrection banner. At the top the Cross and Crown indicate that by his Resurrection, Christ became victor over sin and death. At the bottom the butterfly is a symbol of the resurrection and eternal life.

"I am the way and the truth and the life..." (John 14:6) is Christ's claim depicted in the seventh kite by a fish in which in acrostic form are the Greek letters IXOYC. The early Christians were first called "Followers of the Way" and used this symbol as a secret sign. The first letters in the Greek word for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior spell fish in Greek. The anchor in the Anchor Cross at the top represents hope and signifies that our hope is through faith in Christ depicted by the Cross. The trefoil beneath symbolizes the Trinity.

The last kite shows Christ's claim, "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5) The vine represents Christ and the branches remind us that unless we abide in him we become dead branches which the Father, the Vinedresser takes away. The Jerusalem Cross indicates that we bear fruit as branches of the vine as we preach Christ crucified to the four corners of the world as in Jesus' words, "...you shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The trumpet at the bottom is a symbol of Judgement Day.

It will be seen that this window symbolizes the fact that Christ links the Old and New Testament. The Tau Cross and Messianic symbols above the Incarnation lancet depict Christ as the fulfillment of the Covenant hopes and promises. The Jerusalem Cross and symbols of the Last Judgement point to man's response to God in Christ through the Church.

The church is not a building but people. These people are different from others in that they are disciples of Christ. To be a disciple is to be a learner. So the Church comes out of the world to this sanctuary in obedience to Christ's command, "Learn of me..." This window seeks to teach us of Christ by highlighting that which we hear in the reading and the preaching of God's Word and see in the administration of the sacraments. It is fitting that this is a memorial window. We are reminded that it is through the lives of others that we have received this Gospel. As there is no beauty to the window except as the sunlight comes through the glass so there is no beauty in our lives unless the light of Christ shines through us. No particular piece of glass has any meaning in itself, but when they are worked together according to the design of the artist they tell a great story. So our lives by themselves are meaningless until through the Church they are linked with others to tell the story of God's great love in Jesus Christ.