

## A STORY IN SYMBOLS: The Stained Glass Windows of Kingsley UMC

As you enter the sanctuary, facing the altar, our story of the windows begins on your left and moves in a clockwise direction. The story in symbols encompasses Old Testament events, seasons of the Christian year, and our sacraments. The symbols serve to remind us of the devotion and sacrifice of those who have gone before, and they serve as a guide for directing our lives in Christian worship and service. All the windows have a trillium blossom at the top which is a Trinity symbol. The crocuses in each window symbolize the joy of the redeemed. "...like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing..." (Isaiah 35:1-2).

### Window # 1 - Old Testament

The rainbow at the top of the medallion reminds us that God purposefully placed a rainbow in the sky to symbolize his promise to mankind. God told Noah: "I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. . . and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." (Genesis 9:13-16, RSV).

The sacrificial knife symbolizes Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son, Issac, in obedience to God (Genesis 22:1-14). The blue shield symbolizes God's promise to Abraham: "And I will make of you a great nation..." (Genesis 12:2-3).

The two tablets with Roman numerals represent the Ten Commandments and bring to mind the stories of Moses and the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land.

### Window # 2 – Advent / Christmas

Biblical accounts involving angels coming down to earth fill us with a sense of awe and wonder. Imagine how Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds felt when they were visited by angels, as recorded in the gospels in three separate incidents surrounding Jesus' birth (Luke 1:28-38; Matthew 1:20-24; Luke 2:9-14). The angel in this window also reminds us of a future advent: "He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds." (Matthew 12:31).

Other symbols include the manger which denotes the humble birth of Christ and the halo which signifies the divinity of Christ. The shepherd's staff reminds us the shepherds were the first to adore the Christ Child (Luke 2:16) and that Christ was likened unto the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

### Window # 3 - Epiphany

The star cross in this window represents the season of Epiphany, which means manifestation or appearance, usually of a divine being. The guiding light of the star was meant for all the world to see. The wise men followed the star, found the Messiah, and worshiped Him. Although we do not know who these wise men were, their questions reveal they were Gentiles. Therefore, the Epiphany commemorates the coming of the wise men as the first manifestation of the Messiah, who came to both Jew and Gentile.

Evangelism, symbolized by the four rays of the star to denote north, south, east, and west, is logically an aspect of Epiphany. Additionally, the star resembles a cross to remind us Jesus is the focus of the adoration of the world.

#### Window # 4 - Baptism

Until the institution of Christmas in the 4th Century A.D., both Jesus' birth and baptism were celebrated on Epiphany. We now celebrate our Lord's baptism on the first Sunday after Epiphany. One of the earliest symbols of baptism was a scallop shell with drops of water falling from it. Very old paintings show John pouring water on the head of Jesus with this type of shell.

When Jesus had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the bodily shape of a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved son: with Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).

The Chi-Rho, the oldest monogram for this beloved son, is composed of the Chi (X) and Rho (P), the first two letters of the Greek word of Christ. The emphasis placed on names is likewise apparent in our own baptismal covenant. The minister asks the parents, "And what name shall be given this child?"

Finally, the minister says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The Trinity is represented by the three drops of water falling from the scallop shell.

#### Window # 5 – Lent / Holy Week

Lenten season commemorates the forty days that Jesus fasted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-4). For us, Lent is a time of fasting and preparation for the highest season of the Christian year, Easter.

The chalice combined with the cross of agony symbolizes the agony of Christ in Gethsemane. Jesus' cup, or task, was his cross. He prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39).

At the Last Supper, Jesus took a loaf of bread, broke it, and gave the pieces to his disciples saying, "The bread is My body which is broken for you." Then Jesus took a cup filled with wine and passed it around the table saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." (I Cor. 11:24-25; Luke 22:17-20). The command from Jesus applies to all disciples: In remembrance of Me, eat this bread; in remembrance of Me, drink this wine.

#### Window # 6 - Easter

Today the butterfly is probably the most popular symbol for the resurrection of Christ and of the faithful. The three stages that take place in the life of the butterfly become symbols for the believer's journey. The larva suggest the lowly condition of a human being on earth; the seemingly lifeless chrysalis represents the person's dead body in the grave; and the butterfly symbolizes the glorified body destined for eternal life. The Bible says that we shall be completely changed; our perishable, mortal nature will put on an imperishable, immortal nature (I Cor. 15:53).

The lamb reminds us that Christ substituted Himself for the Passover lamb slain to save the people. John said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29). The triumph of resurrection is signified by the lamb carrying a victory banner that bears the cross. Finally, the crown symbolizes Jesus' kingship because He was raised triumphantly King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## Window # 7 – Pentecost / Trinity

In the old covenant period, the Holy Spirit was thought to be limited to kings, prophets and charismatic leaders. However, the prophet Joel foresaw a time when the Spirit's presence and gifts would be universal: "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." (Joel 2:28). Indeed, Peter saw Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2:2-3).

The dove in this window is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. The flames symbolize the gifts of the Spirit and also recall the "seven torches of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God" in John's vision (Rev. 4:5). The triquetra positioned over the dove symbolizes the Trinity.

## Window # 8 - Servanthood

In this window, the open Bible conveys the command to spread the word of God. Remember the second commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:39). We must definitely be concerned about our neighbors' physical and spiritual needs as part of our Christian commitment. From this derives the idea of servanthood which is the focus of our last window.

Jesus taught the disciples about servanthood when He tied a towel around his waist, poured water from a pitcher into a basin, and washed the disciples' feet (John 13:12-16). By performing the humble task of a servant, Jesus, their Master, set the example for all to follow.

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Our windows were dedicated to the Glory of God April 29, 1990.

## INFORMATION SOURCES FOR SYMBOLS AND STORY

Holy Bible - King James Version (Southern Western: 1962)

Holy Bible - RSV (Thomas Nelson & Sons: 1962)

Christian Symbols Handbook by Dean Moe (Augsburg Publishing House: 1985)

Young Readers Book of Christian Symbols by Michael Daves (Abingdon Press: 1961)

Symbols - Signposts of Devotion by Ratha Doyle McGee (The Upper Room: 1962)

Chrismons: Advanced Series by Frances Kipps Spencer (McClain Printing: 1973)