



GRACE
Lutheran

A Catechism in Images

The Symbols and Their Meanings

As compiled by Pr. Christopher Gillespie

The Symbols and Their Meanings

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

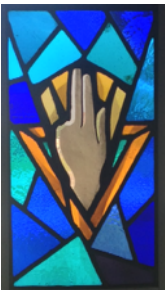
Today, when God's people see an image of a lamb with a victory flag, they understand that this is a symbol of Jesus, who died on the cross to take away the sin of the world. You may already know many of the symbols used to tell the Church's story of salvation because they are found many places in your church, such as on the walls, windows, banners, and altar. No matter which symbol you look at, all are part of the story of your salvation, each symbol pointing you to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

—*Behold the Lamb*, CPH, 2010.

In the Fellowship Hall



IHC is an abbreviation of the name of Jesus from Greek. The cross with IC XC NIKA is a Greek prayer said in the Divine Liturgy, IC=Jesus, XC=Christ, NIKA=Conquerer or Victor.



“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” The most common symbol for God the Father is the *Manus Dei*, the hand of God. The three fingers extended represents the the Holy Trinity. The two closed fingers remind us of the two natures of Christ who is both God and man.

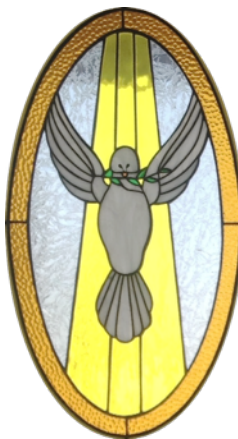


The crown of David is surrounded by palms. The three stars are for the Holy Trinity because Christ is the true king in the lineage of David. He rules His kingdom, the Church, by dying for her and giving her His life.

In the Sanctuary



Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” Satan disguised himself and tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve ate of the fruit and so did Adam. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve brought sin and death to the whole world. (Genesis 3) By Christ’s cross, the fruits of forgiveness of life and salvation are known.



Noah waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. (Genesis 8:10-11) The olive branch symbolizes peace. The flood waters had subsided, God had kept Noah and his family safe, and they would soon leave the ark.



God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. God knew that His children would need visible signs to teach and assure them of His promises and loving presence. The rainbow is a sign of God’s promise to Noah to never again flood the earth. (Genesis 9:11-13) The image of the ark has become a symbol of the church, where God keeps you safe from sin, death, and devil.



And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ... Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. (Exodus 3:2-3) Now that Christ appears, we still enter upon holy ground without the fear of Moses but in the love of Christ, our Redeemer.



The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.” (Exodus 24:12) God’s Law tells us what we are to do and not to do and how to act. No one can keep God’s Law. Thus, God’s people sacrificed day and night until God sent His Son Jesus, to be the perfect and final sacrifice for you.



Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141:2) God’s people also offer sacrifices of praise and thanks to God for his goodness and mercy toward them. Although there are many biblical references to music, one of the most captivating is the story of David, shepherd and King, playing his lyre as he composed the psalms of Christ. Because many of the psalms of David are hymns of praise, the lyre is used as a symbol of praise and worship. (cf. Psalm 150).



"I am the true vine," said Jesus (John 15:1). Jesus nourishes and sustains His people through the means of grace.

In the Bible, a common image for the Christian life is a growing plant: **"I am the vine, you are the branches."** As you therefore have received Christ Jesus as Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him. We stay attached to Jesus through His Word and Sacraments. (John 15:1-8)



And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." This symbol is the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus. The name Jesus means "the Lord saves." (Matthew 1:21).



I am the good shepherd," said Jesus (John 10:11). Jesus cares and provides for us; He laid down His life to save us. The Good Shepherd is one of the most common representations of Jesus. He is the one who leaves the ninety-nine to search out the one lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7, Matthew 18:12-14) and who has compassion on the people who are like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). The crucial relationship between vulnerable sheep and the shepherd becomes an exalted and beloved picture of God's relationship to his people.



For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:19-20) The cross with the serpent reminds us of the lifting up of the pole with the serpent by Moses. When the people looked at the pole that God had provided, they were saved from the deadly snake. God provided Jesus to save us from deadly sin. We look to Jesus for our salvation.



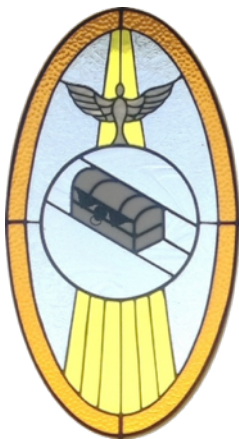
"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:19-20). Like an anchor keeps a ship safely in position, our hope in Christ keeps believers safe and secure. Our hope of salvation is anchored in Christ's death and resurrection on the cross.



When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the apostles could preach salvation in Jesus Christ in many different languages. (Acts 2:1-4)



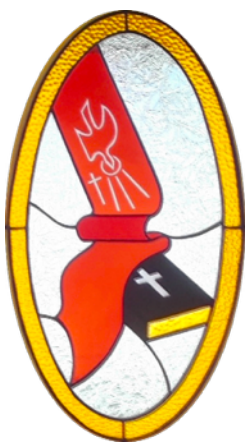
The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2-3) The seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit were fulfilled in Christ Jesus and given to the Apostles on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit gives us His gifts through the means of grace—God’s Word and the Sacraments.



The Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Jesus at His Baptism. All four gospels record the appearance of the Dove after Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:31-34). That picture has captured the attention of Christians and has been used by the church to represent the coming of God's Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. The Spirit reveals Christ, who is the Father's priceless treasure, our “one thing needful” The Spirit of Christ gives us the gift of Christ.



“Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). *Spiritus Gladius* means "spirit sword" in Latin. The Bible is the Word of God. The written account of the words and deeds of Jesus become the means by which God continues to speak to us. God's word is living and active in his people as they are moved by faith. (2 Tim. 3:16, John 17:17, John 10:35 and Ps. 119:105)



These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. Through God's Word the Holy Spirit works faith, and through faith eternal life (John 20:31).

On the day of Confirmation the congregation should pray for the catechumens that they may grow in grace, be steadfast in the profession of their faith, become fruitful in every good work, and in the end receive the crown of life in Christ Jesus. (Rev. 2:10 and Rev. 3:11)



But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit. (SC, Baptism) Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit gives us God's gifts of faith, forgiveness, and salvation. The Shell has become a symbol of baptism. Three drops of water remind us of the triune God in whose name we are baptized. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Holy Baptism is our birth as God's children and the beginning of the life of pilgrimage where we daily are born again in the Spirit. The three rings intertwined are used to symbolize the Trinity who are active in Holy Baptism.



As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” Our Lord's gift of the keys of the kingdom, the power of the Church to forgive and retain sins (John 20: 21-23; Matthew 16:18-19). This is the proclamation of the Word of God in Law and Gospel, the law convicting us of sin and the Gospel giving us Christ for our forgiveness.



For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you ... For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Through these commonly harvested elements of the earth, bread and wine are made. In the Lord's Supper participants receive Christ's very body and blood together with bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).



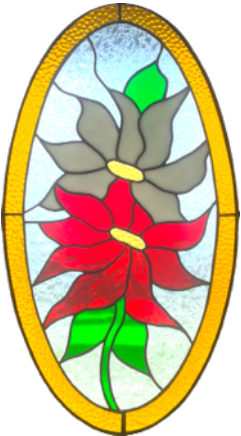
Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. God invites believers in Jesus Christ to pray and promises to hear and answer us (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Prayer is praise, thanksgiving, requests to God. trusting in God's grace, mercy, and loving kindness in Jesus Christ. The Book of Psalms is a collection of man's loving praise to our Lord and Savior. Martin Luther remarks: "As a shoe maker makes a shoe, and a tailor makes a coat, so ought a Christian to pray" (Matthew 6:9, Ephesians 6:18, and Deuteronomy 4:7)



The life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) As the Advent season progresses, the light increases until at last Christmas with its news of great joy arrives. The lighting of a candle for each week of Advent unfolds the time of preparation and the impending arrival of the birth of Jesus. The gradual spreading of light is a powerful reminder of one of the great themes of the gospel of John; the light of Jesus which overcomes the world of darkness.



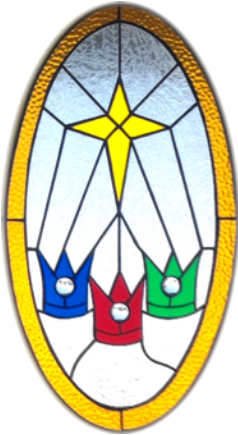
And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7) The most common Christmas symbol is the manger. Just as there was no room for the infant and family in the Inn, so the world rejected Him at the cross. Just as Christ was wrapped and laid in the manger, so Christ was wrapped and buried in the tomb. The baby Jesus shines from Bethlehem as the light of the World, the best gift unwrapped ever known.



Based upon a Mexican Christian legend, the Poinsettia flower is a joyful symbol of the birth of Christ and the annual celebration of Christmas.



When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:1-12). Epiphany is a season that stresses evangelism, symbolized by four rays for North, South, East and West. The star forms a cross, reminding us that Jesus is the focus of the adoration of the world.



This represents Epiphany, Christ the King. The Epiphany season begins with the Epiphany of Our Lord (January 6). It continues until Ash Wednesday. The manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God is the primary theme in this season. The accounts of the star that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem and the miracle at Cana in Galilee by which Jesus first manifested his power are traditional Epiphany readings.



After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10). Palm Sunday begins the royal entrance into Jerusalem for Holy Week. Palm branches remind us of the final victory that is ours in Jesus.



So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands." For us and for our salvation, our Savior suffered under Pontius Pilate (Matthew 27:29; John 19:1-3).

"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Jesus was nailed to the cross to suffer and die for our sins (John 20:25).



And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. (Matthew 28:2-4) The messengers of the Lord terrify those who remain in darkness and death. But the message Christ's ministers bring of the resurrection of Jesus is a comfort to those who believe by the Spirit.



But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said." (Matthew 28:5-6) ALLELUIA, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed, ALLELUIA! Just as we will one day lay in the grave, we, like Jesus, will not see destruction but the resurrection. The tomb is a place for the blessed dead to rest in Jesus until the last day.



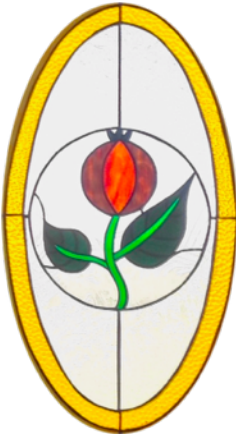
Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Luke 12:27)

The Lily is a symbol of Easter. The springing forth of such lovely beauty from a seemingly dead mass (the bulb) and the purity of its color testify to our death and resurrection in Christ Jesus through Holy Baptism. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness that covers all our sin.



Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. (1 Corinthians 15:51) The caterpillar must first be wrapped in a tomblike chrysalis and die before it emerges as a beautiful and changed creature. So, Jesus died on the cross, was wrapped in cloths, laid in a tomb. Three days Jesus was raised from the dead.

"Therefore; if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17)



And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. (Exodus 28:32-34) The bursting pomegranate is another symbol used of Jesus bursting forth from the tomb on Easter morn. The many seeds inside this fruit that burst out when it is ripe are all believers in Christ who will one day burst from their tombs.

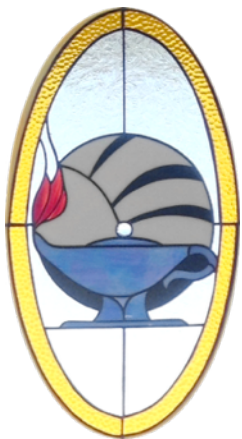


Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Jesus kept the Law in our place and without sin. The pastor who is called to deliver Jesus wears the priestly garment of Jesus. (Hebrews 4:15)



Just as God saved Noah and his family in the ark, God saves His people through the faith He imparts through the means of the Spirit, His gifts to the Church. As Noah was saved through water, so we are saved in the water of Holy Baptism (cf. 1 Peter 3:18-21).

Like a fisherman who gathers fish in a net and then sorts them, at the end of time the angels will separate believers from unbelievers (Matthew 13:47-49). The net represents the Church and the kingdom of heaven.



Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; And do not let me be ashamed of my hope. Hold me up, and I shall be safe, And I shall observe Your statutes continually. (Psalm 119:116-117). God directs and enlightens God's people through the lamp of His Word.



Just as Christ Jesus fed the 4,000 and 5,000 in the desolate place, so He feeds us with daily bread for our bodies. Even more so, He is the bread come down from heaven, essential for the soul. Then Jesus said to them, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ... As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."** (John 6:53-58)



For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Cor 15:52)
Trumpets are used to announce the second coming of the Lord. The Lord himself will descent from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of the trumpet of God. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)



“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. God's plan is for husbands and wives to love each other and to live for Him in marriage, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for the Church to make it holy (Ephesians 5:25-31).



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, remind us of Jesus' words, "I am the Alpha and Omega, . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (John 1 and Rev. 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13)



Luther's personal seal speaks what he believed about his salvation. He called it the "summary of my [theology], belief in God." Luther said that the cross is meant to remind us that "it is faith in the Crucified that saves us . . . This feast should be set in the midst of a white rose, to show that such faith yields joy, peace, and comfort." The rose is set on a blue field representing the beginning of heavenly joy and new life received in faith. These are surrounded by a golden ring reminds us that this heavenly, joyous life last forever without end.



Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together. (Isaiah 48:13) Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (Psalm 102:25) The Lord God who made the heavens and earth still cares for creation for the sake of faith in Christ Jesus.



Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25) The Holy Spirit dwells within the Church to guide, protect, and comfort Christ's bride.