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SYMBOLS OF GOD

GOD THE FATHER

TETRAGRAMMATON – the Hebrew letters for God’s sacred name, transliterated in Latin letters as **YHWH**.



EYE OF GOD (Eye of Providence, All-Seeing Eye) — Since Scripture often talks about the eye(s) of God watching over his people (Ezra 5:5 — “But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews...”), a popular symbol of the Father shows an eye surrounded by rays of light or a glory and usually enclosed by a triangle.



HAND OF GOD (*Dextera Domini [Dei]*) — a hand appearing from the sky or a cloud, generally giving a blessing and surrounded by tri-radiant nimbus to show deity. This was one of the only symbols to represent God the Father until about the 12th century. You often see two fingers extended, which symbolize the human and divine nature of his Son, Jesus. The three bent fingers symbolize the Trinity. Psalm 145:16 — “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”



CREATION STAR (STAR OF DAVID) — As a representation of God the Father, this star’s six points reflect six attributes of God: power, wisdom, majesty, love, mercy and justice.



FACE OF GOD/FIGURE OF A MAN — The face of a man in the clouds came to symbolize God the Father, growing in time to be the upper body of a man, and finally the whole figure, usually of an older, white-bearded man.



GOD THE SON

ANCHOR (The Anchor of Hope)— The anchor was one of the most popular early Christian symbols. It reflects Hebrews 6:19: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul...” and was used during time of persecution because of its hidden meaning. The crossbar of the anchor makes a cross. Sometimes there is a dolphin twined around it, which is also an early symbol of Christ.



BRANCH (Righteous Branch) Several Old Testament Prophets referred to the Messiah as the Branch who would come from the house of David (Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13). It pictures the Savior bringing life from something that is dead.



BRONZE SNAKE — The bronze snake of Numbers 21 is connected to Jesus himself when he says to Nicodemus in John 3: Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.



CANDLE/LIGHT — “In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4) Light is a primary symbol for Jesus, the light of the world. In church furnishings it is common to place a candle on each side of the altar or communion table to signify the two natures of Christ.



DOOR— This symbol builds off Jesus’ words in both John 10:9 (“I am the door...”) and Revelation 3:20 (“I stand at the door and knock...”). He is the way to enter heaven and also the invitation extended to all people.



FISH — The fish was another popular early symbol of Jesus and a secret sign of faith for persecuted believers. The Greek word for fish (ichthys) is an acronym for Jesus (I), Christ (ch), God’s(th), Son (u), Savior (s). The fish also connects to the disciples being “fishers of men.”



FOUNTAIN— Zechariah 13:1 speaks of a fountain springing up to cleanse the house of David from sin. Fountain connections can also be made to Jesus, the water of life, as he references himself to the woman at the well and to the crowds in John 7: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

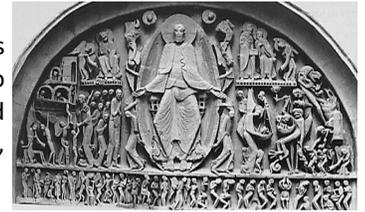


GATE — A symbol of Jesus as the way to heaven (John 10: 7, 9) A symbol of death and departure from this life, connecting to the gates of heaven (or hell) (Psalm 9:13, Matthew 16:18)

GOOD SHEPHERD — One more popular ancient symbol, because of its hidden meaning, the Good Shepherd has also become one of our most beloved contemporary symbols, though its use died out for a time starting in the 8th century. Jesus refers to himself directly as the Good Shepherd in John 10, but this symbolism is revisited throughout Scripture (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34...). The ancient symbol showed a beardless youth bearing a lamb over his shoulder or in his arms. Popular today is a bearded portrait of Christ with a lamb or sometimes holding a shepherd's staff.



JUDGE — In medieval times it was popular to picture Jesus as the Great Judge over the doorways of churches, reminding those who entered the church to show sorrow over their sin. We tend to focus on the merciful attributes of Jesus today, but Jesus as judge is a good End Times image and reminder of the many Scripture references about this role of Jesus (John 5:22, Matthew 19:28, Romans 2:16, 2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 19:22...).



LAMB (Agnus Dei) — From the saving blood of the Passover lamb to the daily sacrifices at the Tabernacle and Temple to John's call, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), no picture in Scripture could be more clear: Jesus is the perfect sacrificial offering, whose blood pays the price for our sin. The Paschal Lamb is shown in many different ways, but most often with a three-rayed divine halo and a cross or banner of victory (or both).



LION — The reference to Jesus as the "Lion of Judah" comes from Revelation 5:5. When the lion represents Jesus, he often wears a crown and carries a scepter or banner of victory or has a divine halo, which distinguishes him from the symbolic lion of St. Mark, which is winged.



MAJESTAS DOMINI (Majestic Lord/Christ in Glory)— A picture of Christ enthroned as ruler of the world, often surrounded by a mandorla (an almond-shaped aureole, which signifies an event that transcends time and space), and often flanked by angels or the symbols of the four evangelists. Christ usually holds the book of life in one hand and makes the sign of blessing with the other.



NATIVITY — A scene picturing the birth of Jesus shows the child in a manger with Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and animals as part of a stable scene.

OX — A rarely used symbol, the ox symbolizes Jesus because both the ox and Jesus were sacrifices for sin.

PELICAN — The symbolism of the mother pelican feeding her little baby pelicans is rooted in an ancient legend which preceded Christianity. The legend was that in time of famine, the mother pelican wounded herself, striking her breast with the beak to feed her young with her blood to prevent starvation. Another version of the legend was that the mother fed her dying young with her blood to revive them from death, but in turn lost her own life. This tradition and others is found in the *Physiologus*, an early Christian work which appeared in the second century in Alexandria, Egypt. Written by an anonymous author, the *Physiologus* recorded legends of animals and gave each an allegorical interpretation.



ROCK — The parable of the house built on the rock, Jesus' encouragement to Peter about building his church on the rock, Paul's reference to the rock from which water flowed in the wilderness, and other references to the Lord as our rock lead us to a natural symbolism of Jesus as the rock upon which we build our faith and receive life.



SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS/MORNING STAR — Jesus is referred to as the "Sun of Righteousness" in Malachi 4:2 and the Morning Star in 2 Peter 1, Revelation 2, and Revelation 22. He is the light that shines in the darkness.



UNICORN — In the ancient book *Physiologus* mentioned earlier, the unicorn is described as hard to capture. Only a virgin could do this. This unicorn myth became as a symbol (incarnation) of Christ, who has been born by the virgin Mary. The connection between Christ and a mythological animal was not acceptable to leaders of the Reformation, but the symbolism was prevalent in art of the Middle Ages.



VINE — In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." The use of the symbol was popular already in the ancient church, showing the relationship of God and his people. Vines are frequently used by artists to fill empty space in art and architecture because of their flowing nature.



**More symbols of Jesus can be found throughout the catalog.*

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

DOVE DESCENDING — One of two popular pictures of the Holy Spirit comes from the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove (Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:22). As a symbol of purity and peace, the dove well represents gifts of the Spirit. A three-rayed halo at the head of the dove indicates its divinity.



TONGUES OF FIRE — Acts 2:3 tells us that on the day of Pentecost the disciples saw “what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them,” as they were filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The tongues are a beautiful visible symbol of the burning energy of the Spirit now descending upon the Church and about to pour itself through every tongue, and over every tribe of men under heaven!



COLUMBINE — Many plants and flowers have been given symbolic meaning according to their attributes. The spurred flowers of a columbine resemble tiny doves and have come to represent the Holy Spirit. The seven petals of the cultivated Columbine also symbolize the seven gifts of the Spirit.



SEVEN-POINTED STAR — The seven-pointed star also represents the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind, however, that it is not clear where the idea of these “sevenfold gifts” came from; it is also more of a symbolic reference than an actual list, the number seven representing God’s interaction with man (3 + 4). Theologians have tried to enumerate seven virtues based on Isaiah 11:2 and Revelation 5:12, and sometimes each point of the star has the first letter of one of the gifts. The seven gifts are also often represented as seven doves circling a cross.



BRANCHED CANDLESTICK/LAMPSTANDS — The seven-branched candlestick described by God to be made for the tabernacle (Exodus 25) has come to represent the Holy Spirit, connecting, again, the seven gifts and the tongues of fire to this Old Testament piece. The lamp was also filled with oil each day, and oil is a type of the Holy Spirit as well (think anointing...). The seven golden lampstands of Revelation 1:12-13 are a similar picture: “I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.”



NINE-POINTED STAR — The nine-pointed star is connected to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Like the seven-pointed star, the points often each contain a letter (those on the right are the Latin abbreviations) representing one of the nine gifts.



THE HOLY TRINITY

TRIANGLE — Though it is impossible to picture something we can’t understand, and equilateral triangle, with three sides making one shape, is the simplest (and probably the oldest) way of representing the complexity of the Trinity. Of course, more things can be added to the shape, as we see in...



CIRCLE AND TRIANGLE — Including a circle with the triangle adds the eternal aspect of the Godhead.



BORROMEAN RINGS — Making a triangle of interconnected circles gives the symbol more complexity. It tries to help us see that each person of the Trinity is distinct but they cannot be separated. In mathematics, the Borromean Rings consist of three topological circles which are linked and form a Brunnian link (i.e., removing any ring results in two unlinked rings). In other words, no two of the three rings are linked with each other as a Hopf link, but nonetheless all three are linked.



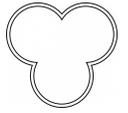
TRIQUETRA (Trinity Knot) — An early Trinitarian design found especially in Great Britain, its three equal arcs represent equality, its continuous line expresses unity and eternity, and the interweaving represents indivisibility. It is suggested that the design is based on the sign of the fish used by early Christians. It is common to see a circle around or among the parts of the triquetra to further emphasize the unity and eternity of the Trinity.



SHAMROCK — Legend has it that St. Patrick used the shamrock to explain the mystery of the Trinity to unbelievers in Ireland. Patrick would hold up a shamrock and challenge his hearers, “Is it one leaf or three?” “It is both one leaf and three,” was their reply. “And so it is with God,” he would conclude.



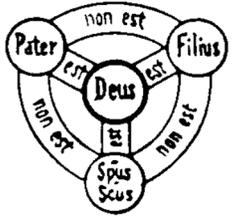
TREFOIL — An architectural design feature in many Gothic churches, the trefoil is the outline of three overlapping circles used to represent the Trinity. It can also be a stylized shamrock. Many variations exist, including a triangle, text... It is a very versatile and popular symbol.



FLEUR-DE-LIS — A stylized lily or iris, this design is used symbolically in several ways. It represents the Trinity because of its three parts making up one shape.



SHIELD OF THE TRINITY — With text that says “is not” (*non est*) between the names of each person of the Trinity and “is” (*est*) between the name of each person and the word “God,” this graphic works to explain the Trinity verbally.



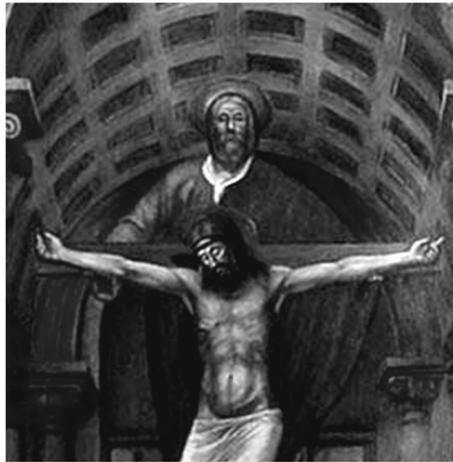
CREATION STAR (Star of David) — We saw this six-pointed star as a symbol of God the Father, but it also works for the whole Trinity, since each person of the Godhead was involved in the work of creation.



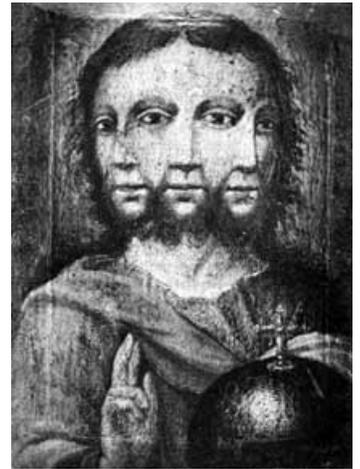
THREE PERSONS — It is common for artists to show the Trinity in a group but as three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is sometimes done with three identical men, sometimes with symbols of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My favorite is the three faces connected to one body, used primarily during the late Renaissance and Baroque periods.



Andrey Rublev, “Holy Trinity” (c. 1415)



Massaccio, “Holy Trinity” (c. 1428)



Artist Unknown

LETTERS, MONOGRAMS, AND PHRASES USED IN LITURGICAL ART AND WORSHIP

HEBREW

TETRAGRAMMATON — Tetragrammaton is a term given to the Hebrew letters for God's sacred name, transliterated in Latin letters as **YHWH**. It first appears in the creation account, Genesis 2:4, and is the most commonly used name for God in the Hebrew Old Testament (appearing over 6,800 times). The name was never spoken aloud, out of reverence for God. יהוה

TRIANGLE WITH YOD — the first Hebrew letter of the Tetragrammaton inside a triangle to represent the Deity... Since YHWH was considered sacred, other abbreviations or symbols, like this one, were good substitutes (This symbol has been incorporated into use by the Freemasons.).



ELOHIM — *El* was a general term for any god in the ancient world. *Elohim*, the plural form, is rightly translated as God (capital G) but really means something more like "God of gods" or "Lord of lords."

ADONAI — The word *Adonai* (translated "Lord") was substituted for YHWH by the Jews. It is also a plural emphatic or majestic form — or a Trinitarian reference. Actually, this word is also a possessive noun, the possessive adding a flavor of "my Lord" to the word. The NIV prints the translated word in all capital letters (LORD).

EL SHADDAI — Although there is some debate, the root word "*shadad*" is thought to be a verb meaning "to overpower" or "to destroy." This Hebrew name for God, then, is well translated as "The Almighty God, which differentiates him from idols." It is first found in Genesis 17:1. Like *Adonai* and *Elohim*, the form is first person plural.

HALLELUJAH/ALLELUIA — From the combined Hebrew words *Hallel* (to praise a group) and *Jah* (a shortened form of Jehovah), it is translated, "Praise (ye) the Lord!" *Alleluia* is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew. What started as an imperative has become itself a word of praise to God.

IMMANUEL — Hebrew for "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14), one of the names of Jesus; the Greek form is spelled with an E (Emmanuel).

AMEN — Hebrew word meaning "true," "certain," or "it is so."

GREEK

ALPHA AND OMEGA — Three times in the book of Revelation, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega..." (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; and 22:13) They are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and, primarily, indicate his eternal nature, "the beginning and the end." Some scholars equate Alpha and Omega with the covenant name of God, "I AM WHO I AM." The letters as a symbol are often shown in an interconnected design.



CHI RO — One of the earliest monograms for "Christ" is formed by superimposing the first two letters chi and rho (XP) of the Greek word "ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ" (Christ). During the time of Iconoclasm, the only permitted representations of Christ were the Chi Ro monogram, the Alpha and Omega, and the cross.



IHS/IHC — Another monogram, sometimes called the Sacred Monogram, this letter grouping has a hazy history. IHS is generally thought to be an abbreviation of the name of Jesus, the first three letters (*iota-eta-sigma*, or IHΣ) . You sometimes see IHC, for the Greek S and C are interchangeable; they make the same sound. The line above the *eta* indicates an abbreviation and also forms a cross symbol. This group of letters is often "wrongly" ascribed a Latin abbreviation: *Jesus Hominum Salvator* (Jesus Savior of Mankind), or is connected to the story of Emperor Constantine's vision with the Latin phrase *In Hoc Signo* (In this sign... —Too long to tell here; you'll have to Google it.)



LATIN

INRI — These four letters are an abbreviation of the Latin inscription Pontius Pilate had placed on Jesus' cross *IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDEAORUM* (Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews). Pilate's message was also written in Greek and Aramaic (John 19:19-20).



VDMA — represents the Latin phrase *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum (The Word of God Endures Forever)* or *Verbum autem Domini nostri Manet in Aeternum (The Word of Our Lord Endures Forever)*. This is the motto of the Lutheran Reformation, a confident expression of the enduring power and authority of God’s Word. The motto is based on Isaiah 40:6-8 quoted by 1 Peter 1:24-25. It first appeared in the court of Frederick the Wise in 1522. He had it sewn onto the right sleeve of the court’s official clothing, worn by prince and servant alike. It was used by Frederick’s successors as well. It became the official motto of the Smalcaldic League and was used on flags, banners, swords, and uniforms as a symbol of the unity of the Lutheran laity who struggled to defend their beliefs, communities, families and lives against those who were intent on destroying them.



“ECCE AGNUS DEI” — Latin for, “Look, the Lamb of God,” said by John the Baptist as he pointed to Jesus by the Jordan River (John 1:29).



“ECCE HOMO” — Latin for, “Behold the man,” said by Pontius Pilate, hoping to arouse sympathy from the Jewish leaders who wanted Jesus put to death (John 19:5).

PATER NOSTER — Latin words for “Our Father.”

PAX — “Peace”

POST TENEBRAS LUX — “After darkness, light.” This expression was a cry during the Reformation referring to the recovery of the doctrine of justification as well as broader events, like returning worship to the people and making the Bible more available for the average person to read.

SANCTUS — “Holy”

SPIRITUS GLADIUS — “The Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17)

SPIRITUS SANCTUS — “Holy Spirit”

VITA/MORS — “Life”/“Death”



HALOS (NIMBUS)

Halos are rings of light that surround a person in art. They were used in the early Christian church only with the Trinity to symbolize the divine glory that surrounds God. Over time different forms of halos developed, however, and were attached to angels, disciples, saints, confessors, and martyrs. A disk or plate was used until the 15th century when it was reduced to a simple, circular line. Since the 17th century and increasing realism in Christian art, halos have had limited use.

AUEROLE — A halo that surrounds the entire body, an auerole is usually elliptical but can also be almond-shaped and called a **MANDORLA** (*Mandorla* is Italian for the almond nut — See Symbolism of Plants, Flowers, and Fruit). A mandorla usually encloses a sacred event that is beyond the realm of time and space (Transfiguration, Resurrection, Last Day)



TRI-RADIANT/CRUCIFORM — A halo with three radii — or three arms of a cross — coming from the center represents divinity and is only used with a member of the Trinity. The rays are seen in a variety of decorative designs.



TRIANGULAR — A triangular halo represents God the Father.



SQUARE — Square halos are used to indicate that a believer was alive when the image was made.



COLORS

- BLACK** – What we see in the absence of light symbolizes grief, sorrow, sickness, death...
Black is the liturgical color for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
- BLUE** – The color of the sky symbolizes heaven, hope, wisdom, charity, Mary, cherubim...
Blue is becoming more popular as the liturgical color for Advent.
- BROWN** – The color of earth symbolizes rejection of the world... (Think about the color of monks' clothing.)
Brown is a non-liturgical color.
- GOLD** – The color of objects of great worth symbolizes , wealth, kingliness, splendor...
Gold is the optional liturgical color for Christmas, Easter, and Christ the King Sunday (along with white).
- GREEN** – The color of plants and leaves symbolizes growth, life, hope, fidelity, immortality...
Green is the liturgical color for Ordinary times (the Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost).
- GRAY** – The color of ashes symbolizes repentance, humility...
Gray is a non-liturgical color.
- PINK** – A color of roses and other flowers symbolizes joy... (Third Advent candle)
Some churches invest in pink paraments for use only on the Third Sunday of Advent, but it is not specifically appointed.
- RED** – The color of fire and blood symbolizes love, fervor, passion, zeal, youth, blood, martyrdom, the Holy Spirit, the Church...
Red is the liturgical color for Pentecost, Reformation, Mission Festivals, Last Judgment Sunday, Confirmation, Monday through Wednesday of Holy Week, festive occasions such as church dedications and anniversaries, ordinations, installations, and other services celebrating public ministry.
- VIOLET** – The color of the robe Jesus wore when mocked by the soldiers symbolizes penitence, royalty, preparation, mourning, humiliation, the Passion...
Violet is the liturgical color for Advent, Lent, and Maundy Thursday.
- WHITE** – The presence of light also symbolizes purity, innocence, joy, virginity, purification, non-martyred saints...
White is the liturgical color for Christmas, Epiphany, Baptism of Our Lord (It can be used for any baptism service, though the appointed color for the day is fine.), Transfiguration, Easter, Ascension, Trinity, Thanksgiving, Saints Triumphant, Christ the King Sunday, and as an option on Maundy Thursday.
- YELLOW** – Yellow symbolizes cowardice, treachery, jealousy, treason... It can also substitute for gold, and, in that usage symbolizes love, constancy, dignity, and wisdom...
Yellow is a non-liturgical color.

NUMBERS

- 1** the number of unity... ("our God is one," Jesus prayed that believers might be one...)
- 2** the number of difference or division... (tablets of stone, Old and New Testament, dual nature of Christ, light and darkness, male and female)
- 3** the number of God and divine perfection... (Trinity, "Holy, holy, holy," years of Jesus' ministry, days in the tomb)
- 4** the number of God's creative works, mankind and the earth... (four rivers in the Garden of Eden, limbs of the body, corners of the earth, seasons, heavenly creatures, evangelists, horsemen)
- 5** the number of divine grace and sacrifice... (kinds of sacrificial animals, wounds of Jesus)
- 6** the number of creation (God created for six days) and imperfection or evil... (at the 6th hour, six days of labor)
- 7** the number of spiritual perfection... (resting on the seventh day, seven-branched candlestick, words from the cross, seven seals and many others in Revelation, gifts of the Holy Spirit...) and God's interaction with man (3+4)

- 8** the number of new life, salvation, rebirth or regeneration (the day on which Jesus rose from the dead, day of circumcision and naming, number of people saved on the ark) On the eighth day a new series of days begins. Many baptismal fonts are eight-sided.
- 10** the number of ordinal perfection, God’s power and control... (ten commandments, plagues, virgins, northern tribes)
- 12** the number of the governmental perfection and the Church... (twelve tribes, disciples), God’s closeness to mankind (3 x 4)
- 13** the number of betrayal... (thirteen people at the Last Supper)
- 40** the number of testing or trial... (forty days and nights of rain, years in the wilderness, days Jesus fasted, days in Lent)
- 100** the number of completeness or plenty... (10 X 10)
- 666** the number of the Antichrist... (Revelation 13:8)
- 1000** the number of length, infinity, eternity... (a thousand years)

STARS

4 points **THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM/NATAL STAR** — Styled to resemble a cross, this star represents both Jesus’ birth and the purpose for which he was born. It is the star most often shown in connection with the Wise Men’s journey to find Jesus.



5 points like the four-pointed star, this design is also called **THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM, THE STAR OF JACOB**, or the **EPIPHANY STAR** and represents Jesus, his birth and incarnation. It is the star most often used for Christmas decoration. The pentagram has also been used by many pagan religions.



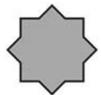
6 points **STAR OF CREATION/STAR OF DAVID** — This star represents the six days of creation or the one who created all things. It can also represent six attributes of God: power, wisdom, majesty, love, mercy and justice. The Star of David has become the symbol of modern day Israel. It is an ancient symbol used by other religions as well.



7 points The seven-pointed star symbolizes the Holy Spirit in connection with the “sevenfold gifts” of the Spirit. The heptagram is also popular as an occult symbol; be cautious with its use.



8 points **STAR OF REDEMPTION** — Eight is traditionally the number of rebirth. It is for this reason that many baptismal fonts have an octagonal base. Jesus was circumcised and given his name when he was eight days old.



9 points The nine-pointed star is used to illustrate the nine attributes listed in Galatians 5 as fruit of the Spirit. The points of the star are often labeled with the initials for each quality — most often with the Latin initials. The nine-pointed star is also a symbol of the Baha’i faith.



12 points **STAR OF THE APOSTLES** — A twelve-pointed star may represent the twelve tribes of Israel or the twelve apostles.



CROSSES:

Because of its gruesome connection to painful and disgraceful execution, the use of the cross as a symbol was not common for the first few centuries of the Christian Church. It was more adopted widely after Constantine's edict allowing for free practice of Christianity in 313 AD. The cross is now the most recognized and beloved symbol of the Christian church, representing God's love in sacrificing his Son for the sins of the world.

It is estimated that over 400 different cross designs have developed. The crosses selected for this section are primarily those most popularly used or those with symbolic meaning attached to them beyond a beautiful, decorative design.

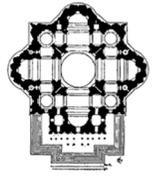
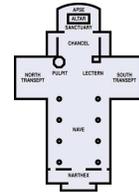
LATIN CROSS – This cross is most likely the cross form upon which Jesus died. The cross, being empty, symbolizes the Resurrection, and the empty Latin Cross is often seen in the hands of Jesus after being raised from the dead.



THE GREEK CROSS – This cross is formed from arms of equal length. On some altars five Greek Crosses are seen. Four small crosses are found on each corner of the altar. A larger Greek Cross is placed in the center, where the sacraments are placed. These five crosses symbolize the five wounds of Jesus.



The cross was a popular design for the floor plans of churches. At first, the Greek Cross and Latin Cross were used indiscriminately by the early churches. As the East and West pulled apart, so did the church design. The western, or Roman Catholic Church, used the Latin Cross as the floor plan, while the Eastern Orthodox used the Greek Cross.



THE ANCHOR CROSS – A cross in the form of an anchor symbolizes hope and stability in Jesus (Hebrews 6:19). Dating back to the 2nd century, it was frequently used in the catacombs to decorate the tombs of the dead. Because it was illegal to practice Christianity in the Roman Empire at that time, symbols used in the catacombs were frequently of common objects (anchor, shepherd, dove, etc.) that could hold double meaning and conceal their Christian meaning from all but the informed few.



THE CROSS ADORNED – ...is simply a cross that is decorated with lilies or floral arrangements, very popular during Easter celebrations.



THE CROSS AIGUISÉE (Pointed Cross or Passion Cross) – A cross with pointed ends, symbolizing the nails that held Jesus to the cross.



THE CROSS ANKH (Crux Ansata) –is a Latin or Tau Cross with a loop extending from the top. It symbolizes life. The symbol is of ancient Egyptian origin but was incorporated by early Christians, especially in northern Africa, because of its resemblance to the cross of Jesus. The Coptic (Egyptian) Christians have used it as a symbol of life after death.



COPTIC CROSS – The cross form used in the Coptic Church has three points on each arm, representing the Trinity. All together, the cross has 12 points, symbolizing the Apostles, whose mission it was to spread the Gospel message throughout the world.



THE CROSS BARBÉE – A Greek style cross with designs like arrows on its tips. The arrows represent barbs found on fish hooks. The cross symbolizes being fishers of men.



THE CROSS BOTONÉE (Cross Bourbonée, Cross Trefflée) – A cross, either Latin or Greek form, with trefoils at the end of each arm. A strikingly beautiful form of the cross, it has been used frequently as decoration in churches.



THE CELTIC CROSS (Cross with Nimbus) – A very ancient form of the cross used by Christians in Great Britain, Ireland and surrounding areas. These crosses are often highly ornate with intricate knot-design carvings. The distinguishing element of the Celtic cross is the circle added to it. The circle represents eternity or a nimbus. At one point during the Protestant movement, the Celtic cross was used as a substitute for the Latin cross to distance Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church.



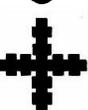
THE CHAIN CROSS – A cross formed from two crossed chains. It symbolizes the power of the cross to free Christians from the chains (bondage) of sin.



THE CROSS COTISED – A cross that has a ribbons or strips added, which symbolize the four gospels. This cross, like many other designs, was used in heraldry.



THE CROSS CRENELLÉE (Embattled Cross) – A cross with indents similar to embattlements found on forts. It symbolizes Christian warfare and the church militant.



THE CROSS CROSSLET (Cross Recrossed) – This cross is formed by putting four Latin Crosses together. It symbolizes taking Christianity to all four corners of the earth.



THE CROSS AND CROWN – A Latin cross with a crown resting on top of it symbolizes the promised crown of life referenced in Revelation 2:10 and James 1:12.



THE CROSS AND CROWN OF THORNS – A Latin cross with a crown of thorns resting upon it symbolizes the suffering of our Lord on the cross. This cross is frequently seen on the altar, pulpit vestments, and banners during Lent and Holy Week celebrations.



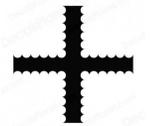
THE CRUCIFIX – A cross with Jesus on it is a crucifix. There are crucifixes of triumph, showing a robed Jesus with arms raised (popular from the 6th to 13th centuries), as well as crucifixes of suffering (increasingly popular from the 13th century on). The figure is often sculpted or carved, though the *croce dipinta* (painted cross) was popular during the late Medieval and early Renaissance period.



THE EASTERN CROSS (Slavic Cross, Russian Cross...) – This cross is the official cross of the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is placed on the top of their spires. It is distinctive for its two horizontal arms and a third, slanting arm. The top arm represents the inscription placed above Jesus' head. The bottom bar is based on Eastern teachings that when Jesus was crucified, His feet were nailed apart, not placed together as the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches teach. As to why the bar is slanted, most agree this is to symbolize the thief on the right going to heaven and the thief on the left condemned to hell. It may also reference the Cross Saltire (St. Andrew's Cross — shaped like an X) because tradition speaks of St. Andrew being the first missionary to take the gospel message to the Russian people.



THE CROSS ENGRAILED – The edges of this cross are pointed, much like thorns. It symbolizes the painful suffering of Jesus on the cross. This cross was another form often used in heraldry.



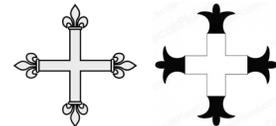
THE CROSS ETOILE – A cross in the shape of a four-pointed star often used during the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany.



THE CROSS FLAMANT – This unique cross has flames coming from its arms, its center, or both. It symbolizes religious zeal.



THE CROSS FLEURETTÉE and THE CROSS FLEUR-DE-LYS – These similar crosses have three flower petals at the end of each arm. They both symbolize the Trinity and are often used as decoration during Trinity season.



THE CROSS OF FOUR PHEONS – A cross made up of four touching dart heads. It is symbolic of the fiery darts thrown at us by our enemies and that we can defeat them with the power of the cross. It was, again, used in heraldry.



THE CROSS OF GLORY (Rayed cross, Easter Cross) – A Latin Cross with twelve or more rays of light behind it symbolizes the Resurrection and is appropriate for the Easter celebration.



THE GRADED CROSS (Stepped Cross) – This cross is composed of a Latin cross set atop three steps, often said to represent the three virtues. The lowest step represents love (or charity); the second step represents hope; the third step is faith. Common as gravestone markers, each step may include an epitaph. The Graded Cross is also popular for table-top or altar crosses, since the steps provide a base for the cross.



THE CROSS GRINGOLÉE – This cross is formed with each arm transforming into abstract serpent's heads, symbolic of sin and salvation.



THE TAU CROSS (Anticipatory Cross, Advent Cross) – *Tau* is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and resembles our letter T. The Tau cross is considered the Old Testament cross, one of the oldest forms. It is thought by some that this was the sign that the Israelites put on their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over them (Exodus 12:22). It is also often pictured as the pole Moses raised up in the wilderness upon which the bronze snake was placed (Numbers 21:5-9). *Tau* is referenced specifically as a sign of salvation in Ezekiel 9:4, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a *tau* [translated "mark" in the NIV] on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it..." Those with the mark were saved; those without (idolaters) were killed. In the context of believers looking forward to the coming of Jesus, the Tau Cross is used during Advent. It is also the symbol of the Franciscan order today.



THE CROSS POTENT (Teutonic Cross) – Comprised of four Tau Crosses, this form was assigned to the knights of the Teutonic (Germanic) Order, founded by Emperor Henry VI as a hospital order in 1191, similar to the Templars and Hospitaliers. In heraldry, this cross is aptly named a Potent Cross (Fr: *potencée*); potent meaning 'strong' and also an old word for



'crutch', 'support' or 'bracket'. It has also come to symbolize the power of Jesus to heal sickness and disease.

THE JERUSALEM CROSS (Crusader's Cross, Cross Cantonnée) – A Cross Potent surrounded by four Greek crosses was used on the coat of arms of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (A.D. 1099-1203). The four Greek crosses represent the four Gospels taking the place of the Mosaic law symbolized by the Tau crosses. Some scholars equate the five crosses with the five wounds Jesus' received, the large cross representing the spear wound in Jesus' side, while the four small crosses represent the four wounds Jesus received in his hands and feet. Like the Cross Crosslet, this cross can symbolize missionary work where the main cross symbolizes the early church and the four Greek crosses the four corners of the earth.



THE MALTESE CROSS (Regeneration Cross, Eight-Pointed Cross) – ...is the cross symbol associated with the Knights Hospitaller (the Knights of Malta) and by extension with the island of Malta. During the Crusades, the knights protected pilgrims on their journey to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.) The Maltese Cross is made up of four solid spear tips. The eight outer points have been given various meanings over the years, including the eight virtues espoused by the Knights of Malta or the eight Beatitudes. It is also called the Regeneration Cross because the number eight symbolizes regeneration or new birth.



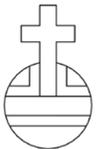
THE CROSS PATTEE – ...literally means "footed cross" and is a stylized Greek Cross form which has arms narrow at the center, and broader at the ends. The form appears very early in medieval art and was loosely associated with the Teutonic and Templar Orders during the time of the Crusades. Taken on a symbol by the Germans in World War I and World War II (the Iron Cross)— and now with biker culture — the Cross Pattee has lost effectiveness as a Christian symbol.



THE CROSS REBATED – ...is a Greek Cross with arms that are bent at right angles. In pre-Christian times it symbolized sun-worship and fire. The design was used in the catacombs by the early Christians, probably with reference to Christ as 'the Sun of Righteousness'. It was thought that the cross symbolized the four cardinal points on a compass. Due to the connection of this symbol to the German Nazi party (Swastika) and the great evils the Nazis committed, this cross should no longer be used in the church.



THE CROSS OF TRIUMPH (Cross of Victory, Cross of Conquest, Cross Triumphant, Cross and Orb, the Mound) – This Latin Cross resting atop a globe symbolizes the triumph of the Gospel message around the world. The globe usually has a band around it with three points, symbolizing the Trinity. The cross of triumph is sometimes seen in the left hand of Jesus when he is portrayed in his kingly office. It can also be seen on church steeples.



THE CROSS AND VICTORY BANNER – A Latin Cross, often thin and narrow, from which a white banner waves. A long, red Latin Cross is seen on the banner. This cross symbolizes Jesus as the Lamb of God. This cross is carried by the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) and also by John the Baptist, who proclaimed the coming of the Lamb of God.



THE CROSS WREATHED – At times the cross is intertwined with greenery and carries various meanings. If the cross is covered in laurel, it symbolizes victory. If the cross is covered in cypress, it symbolizes immortality. If it is covered in oak, it symbolizes strength. If it is covered in bay leaves, it symbolizes death.

THE TETRAMORPH AND THE FOUR EVANGELISTS

The TETRAMORPH (Gk. *tetra* = four *morph* = shapes) is the collective name given to the creatures seen by Ezekiel in his visions or the set of four living creatures described in the Revelation of St. John.

In the first chapter of his prophecy, Ezekiel describes a vision he had of winged creatures with four faces:

*...in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: **Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.*** —Ezekiel 1:5-10



Ezekiel realizes that these creatures are cherubim in chapter 10 of his book:

Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. —Ezekiel 10:14

In writing about his vision in the book of Revelation, St. John describes four individual creatures, corresponding to the faces of the creatures Ezekiel saw:

*Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. **The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.** Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY IS THE Lord GOD ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS, AND IS, AND IS TO COME."* —Revelation 4:6-8



Some time in the early centuries of the church — and certainly by the 8th century — the four creatures of the Tetramorph came to be connected to the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The symbolism of representing the Four Evangelists as the Four Winged Creatures developed over time, so that by the High Middle Ages it was extremely common to find these symbols in the West. It would also be common to see the Evangelists depicted as humans, but flanked by “their creature”.

Far-reaching explanations about how each creature is connected to an evangelist also developed. According to tradition:

MATTHEW is represented as the winged man, because his Gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus; he also focuses on the dual nature of Jesus, both God and man.

MARK is represented as the winged lion, as his Gospel begins with John the Baptist and his “voice crying out in the wilderness,” and the lion is an animal of the Middle East’s wilderness; he also highlights Jesus’ resurrection, a powerful thing.

LUKE is the winged Ox of the Tetramorph, because his Gospel begins in the Temple with Zacharias – the father of John the Baptist; the ox is a sacrificial animal; Luke also has a great deal of detail about the sacrifice of Jesus in his book.

JOHN is represented as an Eagle, because John’s Gospel begins with a soaring overview of the Incarnation: “*In the beginning was the Word...*”; John’s Revelation also takes us up to heaven, as on the wings of an eagle.



Note that the symbols above are enclosed in a quatrefoil design — a four-lobed shape that is another symbol of the four gospels. (See Symbolism of Plants...)

SYMBOLS AND SHIELDS OF THE APOSTLES



PETER — Tradition says that Peter died a martyr in Rome by crucifixion on an inverted cross because he felt unworthy to die on a cross in the same way as his Lord. His shield shows an inverted cross and two keys crossed - the “keys to the Kingdom.” The crossed keys also refer to Peter’s confession and the words of Jesus about the power to “bind” and “loose” on earth and in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-20).



ANDREW— Andrew’s most common symbol is the Cross Saltire, the shape of an X, on which he is believed to have been martyred. On the shield, two fish make the cross Saltire and lie atop fish hook, signifying his early livelihood and his becoming a “fisher of men.”



JAMES — James (also called James the Greater), the son of Zebedee and brother of John, was the first to be martyred. King Herod had him beheaded around A.D. 44. Tradition says that, though he died in Jerusalem, James was buried in Spain. The symbol, then, seen on the shield for James is the scallop shell, often found on the shores of that region. The scallop shell has, in that connection, become a symbol of pilgrimage.



JOHN — John, a fisherman, brother of James the Greater, was known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He was a close companion to Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. Tradition tells us that there were many attempts on John’s life, but none was successful; he was the only apostle to die a natural death. His shield displays a serpent and a sword or cup, recalling failed attempts to poison and kill him.



PHILIP — The cross on Philip’s shield may refer to the power of the cross over idols, or to Philip’s manner of death, traditionally thought to be crucifixion. His is the Budded Cross, the ends of which are in trefoil form symbolizing the Trinity. The loaves of bread signify his presence with Jesus at the feeding of the five thousand.



BARTHOLOMEW — Bartholomew is believed by some to be the same as Nathanael. According to tradition, Bartholomew won King Polymus of Armedia for Christianity, but so angered the king’s brother in doing so that he had him flayed, crucified head down, and then beheaded. His shield displays three flaying knives. The branch of a fig tree also represents Nathanael, for Jesus, when he called him to be a disciple, said that he had seen him sitting under the fig tree.



MATTHEW — Matthew was a tax collector who became a disciple. His shield displays three money bags, a symbol of his job pre-disciple occupation. A money chest and battle axe are other symbols of Matthew, who was believed to have been both crucified and beheaded while doing mission work in Ethiopia.



THOMAS — Tradition is that Thomas was selected to evangelize in India where he preached and was himself martyred by stoning, Thomas built churches by his own hands’ efforts, and often his shield will display a carpenter’s square. This shield for him shows three stones and a leather girdle, the stones symbolizing the manner of his death. The belt signifies the tying up of loose, flowing garments when a man of biblical times prepared for vigorous action.



JAMES THE LESS — Tradition says that James the Less was thrown at age 96, from a pinnacle of a temple in Jerusalem, beaten or clubbed, and then stoned. Near death, he rose to ask forgiveness for his enemies, collapsed, and was ultimately sawn asunder. Sometimes his shield will display a vertical saw, a club or bat, or stones. Here, however, it is shown with a windmill, since he is believed to have been a missionary to the low countries of Europe.



SIMON — Simon, also called Simon the Zealot, was frequently the companion of Jude on missionary journeys. His shield displays a battle-axe, which indicates the manner in which he is thought to have met a martyr’s death - either by beheading or being sawn asunder.



JUDE — Jude, referred to also as Thaddeus and as Judas, son of James, traveled with Simon the Zealot on missionary journeys. The manner of Jude’s death is unknown, but martyrdom is the accepted belief. His shield, suggesting his journeys, bears a sailboat.



MATTHIAS — Matthias, chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26), was one of Jesus’ original disciples, having been with Jesus throughout his ministry. He served as a missionary in Judea. He is thought to have been either stoned or beheaded for preaching the Gospel. His shield bears a battle-axe upon an open Bible.

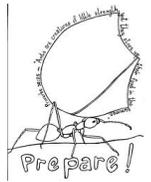


PAUL — Paul is one of the best known of the apostles. Paul’s shield has on it an open Bible, and on top of the Bible, a sword. Sometimes the sword has on it the words “Gladius Spiritus,” or, Sword of the Spirit. “Take the helmet of salvation and the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.” (Ephesians 6:10-18, especially v.17).

THE SYMBOLISM OF ANIMALS

This section could be greatly expanded. Many animals have been given symbolic meaning over the ages. Listings here are limited to animals specifically mentioned in the Bible or with a clear Scriptural connection, though others that are often used or unique are also included.

ANT — The industrious ant is a symbol of hard work and wisdom. Proverbs 6:6 tells us, “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” Because of the cooperation in the ant community, it is also a symbol of the Church.



BEAR — The bear symbolizes evil and cruelty, thoughts taken from the account of the bears that God sends to defend the integrity of Elisha when he is mocked by children and from Daniel’s dream of four beasts (Daniel 7), in which a bear symbolized the cruel kingdom of Persia.

BEE/BEEHIVE — Like the ant, a bee’s tireless activity makes it a symbol of diligence. The beehive is another symbol of the Church working together as a community.



BIRDS — In general, birds represent the soul (This symbolism derives from other cultures; there is no Scriptural reference). Birds around a chalice or grape vine are a symbol of believers receiving the Lord’s Supper. Specific birds carry other symbolic meaning.



BUTTERFLY — The butterfly, changed from a caterpillar after being inside its chrysalis, is a beautiful symbol of the Resurrection. It is a great Easter symbol and is often seen at funerals.

BULL — The bull is associated with strength and fertility. In connection with the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal as well as its worship in other religions, the bull is also a symbol of false gods like Baal.

CAMEL — The camel is a symbol of temperance, because of the long periods it can go without water. John the Baptist’s garment of camel hair also helps us recognize him in Christian artworks.

DEER — The stag or deer is a symbol of piety and devotion and of safety in God's care as we think of Psalm 42:1 — As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God; and Psalm 18:33 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.

DOG — Proverbs 26:11 says, “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly,” which has made the dog a symbol of a sinner returning to his sinful ways. The loyalty of dogs has also made them a symbol of faithfulness and marital fidelity. They are often included in Medieval marriage portraits and at the feet of women’s tombs.

DOLPHIN — Considered a fish and not a mammal in ancient times, the dolphin was frequently used in Early Christian Art as a symbol of Christ—the fish. Dolphins are found wound around the anchor symbol of Christ. The Dolphin was also sometimes connected to the story of Jonah and became a symbol of the resurrection.



DONKEY — While a horse is a symbol of war, the donkey, in contrast, is a symbol of peace, which makes it especially poignant that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, showing that he was the Prince of Peace, not the captain of an army. The donkey is also considered a humble animal, which again coincides nicely with our Savior’s humility.

DOVE — The Holy Spirit’s dove-like form at the Baptism of Jesus has given us a powerful symbol of the Spirit (See: Symbols of God the Holy Spirit). Doves also symbolize purity and innocence, since they were brought as sin offerings (Leviticus 12) and referred to by Jesus when he said to those he sent out in Matthew 10:16 — Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. The dove with an olive branch from the flood account (Genesis 8) has become a symbol of peace, for it brought back a message of God’s renewed peace with mankind. A dove is also one of the birds that often represents the soul of a person and is sometimes shown leaving the mouth of a martyr. Several times in the Old Testament, the mourning sound of doves reflects the grief of God’s captive or repentant people (Isaiah 38:14 and 59:11, Ezekiel 7:16)



DRAGON — The dragon is a symbol of Satan, stemming from imagery in Revelation 12 and 13.

DUCK — While not a Scripture-based symbol, the duck, symbolizing gossip, is sometimes carved into church doors as a reminder.

EAGLE — Because it soars upward, the eagle is a symbol of the Resurrection or Ascension of Christ. Other ideas of renewal come from Isaiah 40:31 (...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.) and Psalm 103:5 (who satisfies your desires



with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's). The eagle is also a symbol of St. John (See: The Tetramorph and the Four Evangelists).

FISH — The Greek word for fish (ichthys) is an acronym for Jesus (I), Christ (ch), God's(th), Son (u), Savior (s) and was used as a secret sign between Christians in times of persecution. The fish also connects to the disciples being "fishers of men," so it carries mission and evangelism imagery.



FLY — Because "Beelzebub" (Hebrew for "Lord of the Flies") was a common name for Satan, flies symbolically represent Satan, sin, and death. They connect in this way to the flies of the ten plagues in Egypt as well. Carriers of disease, they are also a symbol of pestilence.

FOX — Jesus called Herod a fox in Luke 13:32, because of his cunning and trickery. That same connotation also applies to Satan, for whom the fox is a symbol.

FROG — Mainly associated with the plagues of Egypt, the frog has become a symbol of evil, demonic workings, and sin. Because of its croaking, it has also been compared to heretics who proclaim false teaching. In a more positive connection, frogs are symbols of resurrection because they hibernate in the winter and emerge again in the spring.

GOAT/SCAPEGOAT — Positively, the goat is a symbol of Christ's redeeming sacrifice, the scapegoat on whom the sins of the people were laid on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Numbers 29 lists other occasions on which goats were to be sacrificed as sin offerings. Negatively, the goat is a symbol of the wicked and unrepentant sinner, a thought which comes from Jesus' picture of the Last Judgment as the time when he will separate the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers (Matthew 25)



GRASSHOPPER/LOCUST — The grasshopper is a symbol of God's judgment because of its connection to the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 10), the invasion of locusts described in the book of Joel, the army of locusts in Revelation 9 that brought suffering on the unbelievers, and these verses from 2 Chronicles 7 — "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

HEN — The hen is a symbol of Jesus, who said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).



HORSE — Symbolic of strength and military might (Job 39:19-25), the horse is mentioned in Scripture as something in which men place false hope, such as in Psalm 20:7 — "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." (See also Deuteronomy 17:16, Psalm 33:17, Isaiah 31:1, and Isaiah 30:16). They are also a symbol of lust, based on Jeremiah 5:8 — "They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife." The horses with riders in Zechariah and Revelation represent divine instruments of judgment.

LAMB/SHEEP — "Look, the Lamb of God," makes a clear connection between Jesus and the daily lamb sacrifice of the Old Testament (See: Symbols of God the Son); thus a lamb is a picture of Christ or sacrificial atonement. A picture of a lamb surrounded by twelve sheep represents Jesus with his apostles or the church. A lost sheep represents the sinner (Luke 15).



LEOPARD — Daniel 7:6 connects the leopard to evil power. The "Beast of the Earth" in Revelation 13 also resembles a leopard and is sometimes identified as the Antichrist. Early iconographers used the leopard as one of the principal images of Satan, because, according to popular belief, the leopard changes its spots to deceive.

LEVIATHAN — The mysterious leviathan is described in Job 3 and 41, Psalms 74 and 104, and Isaiah 27 as a "monster of the sea," a "coiling serpent." The punishment God plans for this creature in the Isaiah reference connects it to God's destruction of Satan.



LION — The kingly lion represents Jesus, who is pictured as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. The lion is also a symbol of St. Mark (See: The Tetramorph and the Four Evangelists). You can tell the difference: the halo around a Jesus lion will have the three rays signifying divinity, and the lion of St. Mark will not. St. Mark's lion also has wings. The lion also pictures Satan, who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).



MOUSE — There is no scriptural connection here, but the mouse, a dirty and destructive nocturnal animal, is sometimes a symbol of the devil. The famous Merode Altarpiece has a panel of Joseph the carpenter making mousetraps, a symbol of Christ's victory over the Devil.

OWL — The nocturnal owl, also listed as an unclean animal in Leviticus 11), represents spiritual darkness.

OX — The ox symbolizes strength and service. As a sacrificial animal, the ox can represent Jesus, the true sacrifice. The ox included in nativity scenes may reference this idea. If the ox has wings, it is the symbol of St. Luke (See: The Tetramorph and the Four Evangelists).

PARTRIDGE — Jeremiah 17:11 says, "Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means." Though the simile is different, the quality of the partridge is the same when, symbolically, it is a picture of Satan, who works to steal souls from God.

PEACOCK — In the early Christian church, the peacock symbolized eternal life. As a Resurrection symbol, the correlation is made between a peacock shedding its old feathers each year and growing a new set. The peacock also symbolizes immortality, for its flesh was thought to be incorruptible. With its brilliant colors and strutting step, it also became a symbol of vanity.



PELICAN — The Christian symbolism of the pelican comes from the legend that a pelican, in times of famine, will pierce its own breast to feed its young with its own blood. Whether this is true or not, it is a perfect symbol of the atonement; Jesus was pierced, spilling his own blood so that we may live. In the hymn "Adoro Te," St. Thomas Aquinas addresses the Savior with, "Pelican of Mercy, cleanse me in Thy Precious Blood." Allusion is even made to this belief in "Hamlet" (act iv): "To his good friend thus wide I'll ope my arms And, like the kind, life-rendering pelican, Repast them with my blood."



PHOENIX — This mythological bird became a symbol of Jesus' Resurrection, for, the story says, the phoenix, when it senses it is near death, makes a nest and lays upon it; when the sticks catch fire by the sun, the phoenix is consumed in the flames but rises again from the ashes to live another life. —It works for Luther Preparatory School.



PIG — Three negative references to pigs in Scripture put them in a bad light (Luke 15 — the Prodigal Sun; Matthew 8 — the demon cast into a herd of swine; Matthew 7:6 — "...do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." Pigs are symbolic of gluttony.

QUAIL — The quail is connected to the manna in the wilderness, and thus to the bread of the Lord's Supper. It appears as a symbol on early Christian sarcophagi.

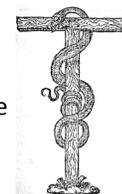
RAM — The ram that God provided for Abraham's sacrifice in place of his son, Isaac (Genesis 22), makes the ram a type of Christ our substitute.



RAVEN — On the positive side, the raven is a symbol of God's providence, for he used ravens to feed Elijah at the brook (1 Kings 17). On the negative side, as a black-winged scavenger, the raven is considered a bird of ill-omen. Here's an interesting one: St. Augustine wrote that every time the raven speaks, it says, "Cras, cras," Latin for "Tomorrow, tomorrow." In this sense the raven symbolizes Satan, who is trying to get every non-believer to put off making a commitment to Jesus until tomorrow.

ROOSTER — The rooster symbolizes denial because of its connection to Peter's denial of Jesus. Because of its early morning crow, the rooster is a symbol of watchfulness and the Reformation (waking us up).

SNAKE/SERPENT — The story of the serpent in Eden gives us the symbolism of the snake as Satan. Sometime a snake is pictured wrapped around the globe, symbolizing the power of sin over the whole world. A dead snake under the cross symbolizes Christ's crushing of Satan's head. The bronze snake is a picture of Jesus; just as the Israelites looked upon the bronze snake on the pole and lived (Numbers 21), so we look to Jesus on the cross for eternal life ("Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up..." John 3:14)

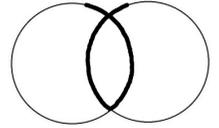


WOLF — Christ's description of false prophets as "wolves in sheep's clothing" has led to the association of the wolf with false teachers. In his discussion of the Good Shepherd in John 10, Jesus also identifies the wolf as the enemy of the flock, which also connects the wolf to Satan, the enemy of the Shepherd's spiritual flock.

THE SYMBOLISM OF PLANTS, FLOWERS, AND FRUIT

These listings, again, limit the focus to plants that are actually mentioned in Scripture or that have a clear Scriptural connection, though others that are often used or unique are also included.

ALMOND — A symbol of divine favor as mentioned in Numbers 17:1-8, where Aaron’s rod blossomed and produced almonds and in the call of Jeremiah (1:11-12). Almonds decorated the seven-branched candlesticks made to light the tabernacle. The almond shape (It. *mandorla*) is also a symbol of glory used to enclose a figure completely and depict an event that is outside the realm of time and space, for it can be made by the intersection of two circles, which represent the coming together of heaven and earth. (It looks like a fish, too.)



APPLE — Though the fruit eaten in the Fall is not specified in Genesis, an apple has become the fruit most often shown in Eve’s hand, possibly because the Latin word for apple, *malum*, is so close to the Latin word for sin, *malus*. In the hands of Jesus (the 2nd Adam), an apple represents redemption after the fall. There are several instances in the Old Testament where the apple is used in a more favorable light. The phrase 'the apple of your eye' comes from Deuteronomy 32:10, Psalm 17:8, Proverbs 7:2, and Zechariah 2:8, implying an object or person who is greatly valued.

BULLRUSH — Because Moses’ basket was found in the bulrushes by Pharaoh’s daughter, and Moses became the deliverer of the Israelites, the bullrush has become a symbol of deliverance and salvation. Because it grows in clusters near water it has come to symbolize the church thriving in the living water of Jesus Christ.

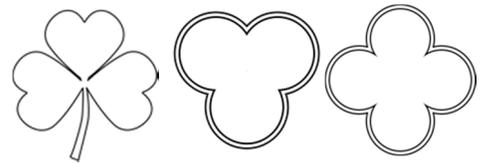
CEDAR — A symbol of steadfastness in faith as well as a symbol of prosperity and long life, the cedar is mentioned often Scripture with admiration, especially in accounts of the building of Solomon’s temple and royal palaces. Psalm 92:12 says, “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon...”



CHESTNUT — A chestnut, undamaged by its thorny shell, has come to represent chastity; a chaste person has resisted the worldly temptations of the flesh, remained untouched by them.

CHRISTMAS ROSE — A hardy, white rose that blooms at Christmastime, this flower is used as a symbol of the Nativity or Messianic prophecy

CLOVER/SHAMROCK — Its three connected leaves represent the Trinity (See Symbols of the Holy Trinity). A four-leaf clover was a symbol of the four Gospels, “The Good News,” though it has degraded to a common symbol of “good luck.” The trefoil and quatrefoil designs used in church architecture are stylized versions of the three- and four-leafed clover.



COLUMBINE — *Colomba* is the Latin word for dove and gave this flower its name. The dove-shaped petals on this flower have made it a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it also has seven petals, which are then connected to the sevenfold gift of the Spirit.

CYPRESS — In ancient times, the cypress was a symbol of immortality, since its top pointed to heaven; it was also the wood from which the ark was made. In later times, however, the cypress turned into a symbol of death, because the cypress, when cut does not grow back from its roots — and it is also often planted in cemeteries. Early Christians used the cypress symbol in their tombs. Cypress wreaths are sometimes used at funerals.



DAISY — The daisy was introduced in the fifteenth century as a symbol of the innocence and humility of Jesus — as opposed to the more exotic lily and iris.

DANDELION — The bitter dandelion is symbolic of the crucifixion.



ELM — A symbol of power and dominance, being rooted in God’s Word

EVERGREEN — A symbol of the eternal God or eternal life. The Advent Wreath and Christmas Tree remind us of the eternal love of God and the eternal life that Jesus came to bring.

FIG — A symbol of sin connected to the fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness; their proximity also leads some scholars to think that a fig may have been the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree in Matthew 21 also lends to its negative symbolism.

FLEUR DE LYS — Not an actual flower, the *fleur de lys* is a stylized iris with three lobes that symbolize the Trinity. It is also a common symbol of the Virgin Mary.



GOURD — A resurrection symbol connected to the story of Jonah and the gourd that grew for his shade.



GRAPES — A symbol of Holy Communion, connected to the fruit of the vine. A cluster of grapes also connects to prosperity, thinking of the large bundle brought back by the spies from the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:23).

HOLLY — The prickly green leaves of the holly are a reminder to early Celtic Christians of the crown of thorns Jesus wore on the day of the Crucifixion. The bright red berries symbolized the blood of Christ spilled for the sins of mankind.



HYSSOP — A reed plant that symbolizes penitence is connected to Psalm 51:7 — “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean ...” Because it quickly regenerates when cut, it also symbolizes baptism.

IRIS — A symbol of purity connected to Mary and also the sword that pierces Mary’s soul (*Iris* means sword.). It is also a symbol of the Trinity because of the three-petal look of the flower.

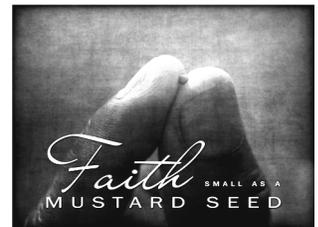


IVY — A symbol of eternal life, because it is an evergreen plant, and of fidelity, because it clings

LAUREL — Crowns of laurel were given to victors in by the Romans, so laurel has become a symbol of victory or triumph. Paul refers to the crown that will not last in 1 Corinthians 9:25, comparing it to the crown of eternal life that will last forever.

LILY — White lilies, like the iris, are symbols of purity, especially connected to the Virgin Mary. They are also an Easter symbol, for the bulb lies dormant in the ground over winter yet appears with new life in the spring. Lilies of other colors have different meanings: red = divine love; yellow/gold = divine light; blue = humility or chastity.

MUSTARD SEED — A symbol of growth, faith, and the Church based on Matthew 13:31-32.



OLIVE — A symbol of peace connected to the olive branch that the dove brought back to the ark; it also symbolizes prosperity (2 Kings 18:32 — “...a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey.”)

PALM — The palm has numerous Old Testament references and was extensively in the temple decoration. A symbol of victory in Roman times, we see that affirmed as the people lay palm branches at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The saints triumphant in John’s vision of heaven also hold palm branches of victory over death: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” Revelation 7:9

POINSETTIA— Now closely connected with Christmas, this large flower has petals in the shape of a star like the one that appeared over Bethlehem. Its red color symbolizes the blood of Jesus.

POMEGRANATE — When cut open to show the seeds inside, the pomegranate is a symbol of the resurrection. It is often held by the Christ Child in images of the Madonna with Child. Its blood red juice symbolizes the blood of the martyrs.



REED — Used to force the crown of thorns onto Jesus’ head and also to lift the sponge to Jesus’ lips on the cross, reed plants are a symbol of the Passion. A reed is also a symbol of John the Baptist in reference to Matthew 11:7, “As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?” John is often pictured with a reed cross in one hand.

ROSE — Another flower symbolizing the Virgin Mary (think *rosary*) if they are white (purity) and also martyrdom if they are red (blood).

SUNFLOWER — As it moves with the sun each day, the sunflower has become a symbol of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus.

THISTLE — Based on the curse in Genesis 3:17-18 (“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you ...”), the thistle represents earthly labor and turmoil.

VINE — “I am the vine; you are the branches,” Jesus says in John 15:5. These words are the basis for the vine as a symbol of Jesus and the relationship we have with God. The vineyard also represents God’s care for his people (Isaiah 5).

WEEDS/COCKLES — ... like thistles, are also another symbol of sin and its curse.

WHEAT — A symbol of the Lord’s Supper connected to the bread. Sheaves of grain also symbolize plenty, thanksgiving, and offerings to God. Shown with weeds (tares), they are a symbol of Christians and non-Christians, based on Jesus’ parable of the weeds and the wheat in Matthew 13.



THE SYMBOLISM OF OBJECTS (and other things thrown in)

ANCHOR — A symbol favored in the early church, the anchor symbolizes hope in Christ (Hebrews 6:19). The anchor's crossbar also allows it to double as a cross.



ARM — A symbol of protection and strength... The first of many Scriptural references: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched **arm** and with mighty acts of judgment. (Exodus 6:6)

ARMOR — Paul's picture in Ephesians 6 ("Put on the armor of God...") makes this a popular symbol of protection against evil.



ARROW — Several Old Testament passages picture arrows as symbols of God's discipline: "I will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them" (Deuteronomy 32:23). "O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me (Psalm 38:1-2 *See also* Psalm 45:5, Ezekiel 5:16). Arrows are also one of many symbols of martyrdom, which include a knife, a sword, an anvil, a saw, a stake, a club...

ASHES — A symbol of humility, penitence, and mourning... Job sat among ashes in his distress and said, "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6)

BANNER — A symbol of victory... When the Israelites defeated the Amalekites, "Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner" (Exodus 17:15) The victorious, resurrected Jesus is often shown carrying a banner with a cross on it, sometimes in his human form, sometimes as the Lamb of God or the Lion of Judah.



BELLS — Used to call believers to worship, bells symbolize that worship. Another general idea is the sounding forth of the Word.

BLOOD — "...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7)... Blood is a symbol of atonement and the forgiveness we have in Jesus. The blood of Christ that we drink in the sacrament strengthens us in faith.

BOOK — A single book represents the Bible, the Holy Word of God. If the book is in the hands of Jesus, it is the Book of Life (Psalm 69:8, Philippians 4:3, and numerous references in Revelation). In the hands of one of the Four Evangelists, it is the gospel that man wrote.



BOW — A symbol of war, strength, and God's justice (Lamentations 3:12 — "He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows.")

BREAD — A symbol of Jesus, who said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and a general symbol of life. When shown with a chalice or grapes, bread represents the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22).



BIT/BRIDLE — A symbol of self-control (Psalm 32:9, James 3:3)

CENSER AND SMOKE — A censer is a container for burnt incense used in worship. As a symbol, it represents the prayers of the faithful which drift upward like incense and present a pleasing aroma to God. Psalm 141:2 — "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.



CHAINS — A symbol of the passion of our Lord, of martyrdom, and the power of Satan. Broken chains symbolize overcoming sin.

CHALICE — "Jesus took the cup..." The chalice cup represents the Lord's Supper. It is also a symbol of suffering.

CITY ON A HILL — A symbol of the church, taken from Jesus' teaching about believers being a city on a hill in Matthew 5

CORNERSTONE — A symbol of Jesus as the head of the church Psalm 118:22 (quoted several times in the New Testament), Isaiah 28:16, Matthew 21:42, Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:6...

CHRISTIAN FLAG — Developed by Charles Overton in 1897, the flag represents the Christian faith, with its red cross symbolizing the blood of Jesus shed, a blue field speaking to the faithfulness of the Savior, and the white background symbolizing purity, peace, and Jesus' sinless life.



CROWN — Symbol of Jesus' office as King (also symbolizes eternal life (James 1:12, Rev. 2:10))



CURTAIN — A symbol of separation... The temple curtain torn in two when Jesus died was a symbol of restoration (Luke 23:44-46)

DICE — A symbol of the Passion, referring to the casting of lots for Jesus' clothing (John 29:23-24)

EARTHEN VESSELS/JARS OF CLAY — A symbol of humility and mortality (Isaiah 64:8, 2 Corinthians 4). They are also metaphors for God’s creatures, designed and made according to his creative plan and purpose (Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, 64:8, Jeremiah 18, Romans 9:21, 2 Timothy 2:20-21).



EGG — The Easter egg was borrowed from pagan springtime festivals, in which the egg signified fertility and new beginnings. For Christians, it also represents new beginnings: the resurrection of Christ and the new life of a Christian (baptisms often occur at Easter).



FIRE — An Old Testament symbol of God’s presence (burning bush, pillar of fire...), and a symbol of the Holy Spirit based on the Pentecost account (Acts 2). Also: inspiration, zeal and passion, sacrifice, and hell

FORTRESS — A metaphor for security and protection (2 Samuel 22:2, Psalm 18:2, 28:8, 31:2...)

GATE — A symbol of Jesus as the way to heaven (John 10: 7, 9) A symbol of death and departure from this life, connecting to the gates of heaven (or hell) (Psalm 9:13, Matthew 16:18)

GLOBE — A globe in the hand of Jesus symbolizes his power and rule over the world. A globe with a cross on top symbolizes the mission of taking the message of Jesus to the whole world (Mark 16:15).



GOLD (FRANKINCENSE & MYRRH) — Gold symbolizes wealth and royalty. It can symbolize Jesus’ kingly office. Pictured with frankincense and myrrh we think of the gifts of the Wise Men. (Matthew 2)

HAMMER — A symbol of the Passion, used to nail Jesus to the cross

HAND — A symbol of power... ("Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy. — Exodus 15:6) A hand pointed down (usually encircled with a tri-radiant halo) is a symbol of God the Father. The “right hand of God” symbolizes authority and favor (To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" ? — Hebrews 1:13). Folded hands are a symbol of prayer. A hand with a wound symbolizes Jesus’ passion.



HARP/LYRE — A symbol of music, joy, and worship, especially in heaven (Psalm 33:2, 43:4). The harp is also a symbol of David (1 Chronicles 13:8)

HEART — A symbol of love and devotion, Scripture has countless references to the heart as the moral and spiritual center (Genesis 6:5 is the first.).

HONEY — Honey is a symbol of provision, abundance, and blessing (“a land flowing with milk and honey...” Exodus 3:8 is just one of the 19 times that phrase is used in the Old Testament.). The sweetness of honey is compared to the sweetness of God’s Word in Psalm 119:103, Ezekiel 3:3, and Revelation 10:9.

HORN — Another symbol of strength and power... “Horn” specifically refers to Jesus in Luke 1:69 — “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” Jesus is God’s strength, defeating Satan and winning salvation for us. In Daniel 7 horns of strength represent kingdoms. Horns are also receptacles of oil for anointing and, as such, symbolize God’s favor and gifts. Horns are also musical instruments. A horn of plenty symbolizes God’s generous provision.

INSTRUMENTS — A symbol of worship... See specific instruments for more detail

JAR OF OINTMENT/PERFUME — A symbol of the burial of Jesus, referencing Mary’s anointing in Mark 16.

JORDAN RIVER — Crossing the Jordan is a metaphor for going to heaven, for the Israelites crossed the river to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 3). As the site of John the Baptist’s ministry and Jesus’ baptism, the Jordan also has symbolic connections to baptism.

KEYS — A pair of keys symbolizes the keys to the kingdom given by Jesus for forgiving and retaining sins (Matthew 16:19). Because Jesus was specifically talking to Peter in this verse, crossed keys are shown as the symbol of this apostle.



KNIFE — A symbol of sacrifice (in connection with the Sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22) and martyrdom

LADDER — The ladder symbolizes Jesus as the way to heaven, connected to Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28:12 and Jesus’ reference to it in John 1:51. It is also a symbol of Jesus’ Passion, used to get Jesus’ body down from the cross.

LAMP — A symbol of God Word (Psalm 119:105), knowledge, wisdom (Matthew 25 — the Wise and Foolish Virgins), and of Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12 & 9:5)...



LIGHTHOUSE — A more contemporary symbol than most, lighthouses are frequently used in the Christian faith due to the many

references to light in the Bible. The lighthouse is used to reflect God's guidance and words, and it represents God's power to protect and comfort. The beacon symbolizes the light of Christ that Christians use as a guide for life. The light also represents salvation and hope for those who are spiritually lost.

LIGHTNING — A symbol of destruction and God's power and vengeance... "Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked" (Psalm 77:18).



LOAVES AND FISHES — From the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14), five loaves and two fishes represent Jesus' miraculous power and providence.

MANGER — A symbol of the birth of Jesus and the humble life into which he was born... A nimbus at the top of the manger indicates the presence of the divine Christ Child.

MANNA — Jesus equates himself to manna in John 6; he is the "true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." St. Paul, in calling the manna "spiritual food" (1 Corinthians 10:3), alludes to its symbolical significance in connection with the Lord's Supper.

MONEY — A set of coins or one bag of money symbolize betrayal, recalling the thirty pieces of silver Judas received for betraying Jesus. Three bags of money or a chest of money symbolize Matthew the tax collector.

MOON — The early church father Origen (185-254) wrote of the moon as a symbol of the Church, receiving illumination from the Sun (Jesus) and reflecting it to the world.

NAILS — A symbol of the passion; Jesus was nailed to the cross through both hands and feet. Three nails are usually shown in a grouping.



OIL — A symbol of the bestowal of divine blessing, the giving of authority, or consecration through anointing (Exodus 29:7, 2 Kings 9:3, Exodus 40:9). —Remember that "Messiah" means "The Anointed One." Anointing with oil is a symbol of healing in James 5:15.

ORANT — A figure standing with arms raised to heaven is a symbol of prayer. Orant figures were often seen in the catacombs of Early Christian Rome.



PATH — The path is a symbol of life's journey. Scripture gives particular significance to the difference between two paths: the way of the righteous and the way of the unbeliever (Psalm 1, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 119:101, Proverbs 2:9, Job 31:7...)

PEARL — Jesus references the pearl in two places. He warns us not to throw our precious pearls of spiritual wisdom (his Word) before pigs in Matthew 7:6 and equates the value of a pearl to the priceless kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13.

PLOW — A symbol of work... Luke 9:62 — Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

PLUMB LINE — A plumb line represents judgment (Amos 7:7-8). Christ is sometimes portrayed holding a plumb line in his role as the Judge.



POTTER'S WHEEL — A symbol of life being shaped by God based on Jeremiah 18 and Romans 9:21

RAIN — Rain comes either as a blessing (to water the earth and make things grow) or a judgment (the rains of the Flood) See Job 37:13 for a good reference. As a symbol of God's impartiality, Matthew 5:45 tells us that the rain falls equally on the just and the unjust

RAINBOW — Connected to God's promise and the sign he gave after the flood, the rainbow is a symbol of God's continuing love for his creation (Genesis 9:13-15).



ROBE — A symbol of the Passion; a purple robe was put on Jesus as he was mocked for being a king. A white-robed person symbolizes one who has received the robe of righteousness, forgiveness in Jesus (Revelation 7:13-14).

ROCK — A symbol of stability and firmness (Matthew 7:24-27) and of the faith on which the Church stands (Matthew 16:18)

ROPE — A symbol of the passion, for Jesus was bound when he was arrested... A rope in the shape of a J is also used to symbolize Judas, who hanged himself

SACKCLOTH — A symbol of repentance, humility, and mourning. There are numerous Old Testament references to people putting on sackcloth.

SALT — In Old Testament references, salt is referred to as part of the covenant between God and Israel (Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5); its use as a preservative symbolized the lasting nature of the covenant. This preservative aspect was used by Jesus when he said of believers, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:14), speaking of the influence and witness of believers, which help preserve mankind.

SAND — Sand contrasts with rock in Jesus’ parable of the builders. A house built on sand will not last. The innumerable quality of sand is also symbolic of large numbers or infinity (Genesis 22:17, Isaiah 10:22...).

SCALE — A symbol of justice... (Proverbs 16:11, Daniel 5:27, Revelation 6:5) Scales with a cross symbolize Jesus’s death, canceling the debt we owe God for our sin.



SCEPTER — A symbol of royal power, the scepter is found in several Messianic prophecies (Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17...), following through in Hebrews 11:8, which connects prophecy to the Son. King Jesus is often shown holding a scepter in one hand.



SCOURGE — A symbol of the Passion and the wounds inflicted on Jesus before his death

SCROLL — A symbol of God’s Word or authorship, a scroll especially represents the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. It may also represent the book holding the names of the elect (Revelation 5).

SCYTHE/SICKLE — A symbol of death or the end of the world based on the harvest of souls in Jesus’ parable of the weeds and wheat and Revelation 14:14-20.



SEAL — A seal is a sign of legitimacy and authority, something that is secured (Job 14:17). The New Testament often uses “seal” in the context of believers belonging to God (John 6:27, Romans 4:11, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13 & 4:30, Revelation 7:3 & 9:4). God’s mysteries are also sealed (Revelation 5:1-5); those seven seals have come to represent the Last Judgment.

SHADOW — A shadow can represent the fleetingness of life (1 Chronicles 29:15, Job 8:9, 14:2, 17:7, Psalm 102:11...), or a place of shelter and relief (Psalm 17:8, 91:1, Isaiah 32:2, 51:16...). Old Testament ceremonies are called shadows of things to come, fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1).



SHELL — A shell is a symbol of baptism. It is often shown with three drops of water to symbolism baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

SHIP/ARK — As those outside of Noah's Ark were destroyed, the ship became a perfect early symbol of the Church, the place where believers are saved. In that connection, the main part of a church building’s interior, the place where the people worship, is called a "nave," from the Latin "navis" -- ship.



SKELETON — A symbol of death

SKULL — A symbol of the Passion, for Jesus was crucified at Golgotha, “the place of the skull...” A skull is often seen at the base of the cross in paintings, representing Adam, who brought death to all. People holding a skull are symbolic of meditating on mortality. A skull is also a general symbol of death.

SNOW — A symbol of forgiveness and purity (Psalm 51:7, Isaiah 1:18)

SPEAR — A symbol of the Passion, picturing the spear used to pierce Jesus’ side

SPONGE — A symbol of the Passion; wine vinegar was put on a sponge for Jesus to drink when he called out, “I thirst.”

STAFF — A shepherd’s staff is a picture of God’s guidance and protection (Psalm 23) and Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10).



STORM — A storm may represent the power and presence of God. Storms are also symbolic of trouble in life.

WORD — A symbol of power and authority, especially in the hands of an angel (flaming sword in Genesis 3), as well as of war and judgment. The sword as a malicious tongue is referenced in Psalm 57:4 and Proverbs 25:18. It is also a symbol of the Word of God (the sword of the Spirit — Galatians 6).

TABLE — In modern times “the table” serves as the symbolic gathering place for participation in the Lord’s Supper.

TABLETS OF THE LAW— Two stone tablets, usually shown with Roman numerals, represent the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5).



TORCH — A symbol of the Passion, representing the torches carried by the soldiers who took Jesus into custody... A torch can also symbolize the call to witness to the world: "...you are the light of the world...let your light shine before men" (Matthew 5:14-16).



TOWEL — A symbol of the footwashing at the Last Supper (John 13)

TOWER — A symbol of defense and strength in God... Proverbs 18:10 — "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

TREE — Trees usually contrast the ideas of life and death. Consider the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2) or the tree of the cross on which Jesus died to win us eternal life (Galatians 3:13). The symbol of the believer as a tree in Psalm 1 is a beautiful picture of life in Christ.

TRUMPET — A symbol of worship or of the Last Judgment, usually held in the hands of an archangel. At Easter it is also a symbol of the Resurrection; one of the reasons the flowers of Easter are lilies is because of their trumpet shape.



WATER — Essential to life, water has always been an important symbol. Jesus is the "living water" (John 4:10-11). Water is the earthly element used in baptism to wash away sin.

WATER JARS — A symbol of miracles, reminding us of Jesus' first miracle, changing water into wine (John 2:1-12). Several water jars are usually shown in a group.



WELL — A symbol of spiritual renewal from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). It also represents the Gospel from which we draw water (Jesus) for salvation. See also Isaiah 12:3.

WHEEL — An early Christian symbol, the letters that make up the Greek word for fish (IXOYE) were combined to make a wheel... another reference to Christ that could be used without drawing undue attention to the outlawed faith.



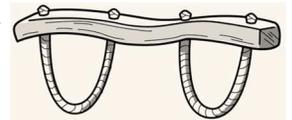
WINEPRESS — A symbol of God's wrath and judgment (Isaiah 63:3, Revelation 14:19-20 & 19:15)

WREATH — A symbol of eternity. The Advent wreath pictures eternal life in Christ, its four candles showing the growing light of the coming Savior.



YEAST — Mentioned 22 times in Scripture, yeast is almost always a picture of sin or evil. Bread without yeast, eaten during the Passover, was a great symbol of Jesus (the Bread of Life) who lived a sinless life.

YOKE — All people are under the yoke of sin, oppression, guilt, failures, anxieties, or worries (Lamentations 1:14). Jesus has set us free from the yoke, we just need to cast our heavy burden on him (1 Peter 5:7), and he will give the rest for our souls (Matthew 11:29).



A Few Christian Symbolism Resources:

Books:

Murray, Peter and Linda. Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art. *Awesome resource...not just for symbolism, but for any topic related to Christian Art*

Gray, Doug. Christian Symbolology. *Much of this book is on www.christiansymbols.net.*

Fergusson, George. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. —*Very comprehensive. It seems like a lot of the websites I found on Christian symbols are “quoting” from this book.*

Baldock, John. The Elements of Christian Symbolism.

Steffler, Alva William. Symbols of the Christian Faith.

Stoner, Marcia. Symbols of Faith: Teaching Images of the Christian Faith. *This book includes symbol patterns and activities for teaching symbolism. The cover says that it is “for intergenerational use,” so don’t think that it’s just fun stuff for kids.*

Taylor, Richard. How to Read a Church: A Guide to Symbols and Images in Churches and Cathedrals. *In addition to information on symbols, this book has summaries of Bible events and people that one might encounter when looking at art in churches.*

VanderMeer, Harriet. Rings, Kings, and Butterflies: Lessons on Christian Symbols for Children. —*Comes with a CD with of images you can use for your publications*

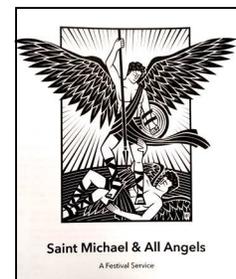
Whitemore, Carroll E. Symbols of the Church. *A thin but full book... It’s a quick reference.*

Dover Publications has a book called Christian Symbols that includes a CD with 456 royalty-free pieces of clip art.

Internet:

www.paramentics.com

WELS member Ian Welch is a graphic artist with a site full of art for your worship folders for each Sunday of the church year along with information and art on symbols.



ww.welsstainedglass.org *View symbols from the stained glass windows of WELS churches... Photographed and posted by Pastor Robert Koester*

www.christiansymbols.net

See Christian Symbolology by Doug Gray above... It’s the same thing.

www.planetgast.net/symbols/

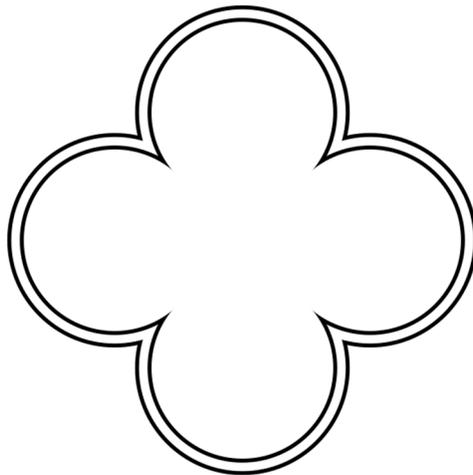
A fairly comprehensive listing of symbols with information, pictures (not great but usable) and available patterns for free by email or for purchase on CD

www.google.com

Type in key words, and you’ll find resources and images that you can copy and paste into documents for educational purposes.

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Symbol of the Week



For a little more than two years, a “Symbol of the Week” paragraph was included in the weekly bulletin at St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin, as a way to educate the congregation about the symbolism of the church.

The following pages show you what was published from the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost in 2011 through the Fourth Sunday of End Time in 2013.

An attempt was made to connect a symbol to the lessons, theme of the Sunday, or the season of the church year. Once in a while the selections are calendar or congregation specific and may not be useful in your setting, but you are free to steal the idea and the blurbs that work for your congregation.

Not every Sunday had a symbol; sometimes there just wasn’t enough space in the bulletin.

Series A



Tenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week: *To help us learn or review lessons about Christian symbolism, we offer this new bulletin section.* Many of our Christian symbols come from Jesus' teaching and parables—like the parables of the treasure, the net, or the pearl. The pearl "of great value," which in Jesus' parable symbolizes the kingdom of God, has also come to represent anything that is rare and of great value in our spiritual lives, including the Word of God and even Jesus himself. Enjoy the pearls that come to you today from the Word of God.



Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week: The Hand of God *To help us learn or review lessons about Christian symbolism, we offer this new bulletin section.* The hand of God (*Manus Dei*) is used as a symbol of God the Father. It was virtually the only symbol for God used during the first eight centuries of the church. The hand symbolizes God's act of creating and also his provision for all of creation, and comes from the many references to the "hand of God" in the Bible. Think of it in the context of today's *Forward, Lord* thanksgiving worship and consider Psalm 145:16—"You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing." The *Manus Dei* is often shown, as pictured at the left, surrounded by a three-rayed nimbus (the halo circle), which is a symbol of divinity.



Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week: Jesus pulling Peter from the sea is before us every week as we worship and just above the pastor as he preaches the sermon. Consider this painting as you hear today's gospel lesson. May it always remind us to receive the Word of God with trusting hearts, calm the storms of doubt in our lives, and strengthen us in our faith.



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week: Beehive—Considering all the bees that seem to come out and bother us at this time of year (especially at Family Fest), it may not be wise to mention this, but the beehive is a Christian symbol for the family of believers. The Church, like a hive, is a community working together for the benefit of all.



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Rocks: The firmness and stability of a rock makes it one of Scripture's most powerful and often used symbolic images. "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer..." (Ps. 18:2) "He alone is my rock and my salvation..." (Ps. 67:2) "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (from Jesus' parable in Matthew 7) —Just a few examples in addition to those heard in our lessons today.



Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Keys: In last week's gospel we heard Jesus say to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Similar words are found in today's gospel. Crossed keys, therefore, have come to be used as a symbol for the apostle Peter or for what we call the Ministry of the Keys—the authority our Lord gave to his church to forgive the sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent.



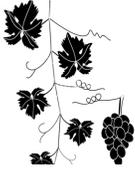
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Cross and Crown: This combination of symbols represents the reward of the faithful who have carried their cross: life after death to those who believe in the crucified Savior. "***Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.***" —*Revelation 2:10*



Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Clay, Potter, and Jars: The Biblical symbol of "the potter and the clay" gives us a beautiful and awe-inspiring picture of the sovereignty of God over both men and history, and shows us vividly his constant, loving, artist's hand in all our affairs. In addition to today's focus on God, the potter who shapes us, think also about how God used clay jars and light as a weapon for Gideon's army and about Paul's reference to Christians as "jars of clay" that hold a great treasure.



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Vineyard: In the Old Testament, a vine or vineyard symbol represents the nation of Israel (Psalm 80, Isaiah 5). Jesus brings the symbol into the New Testament as the vineyard continues to symbolize God’s people, his Church, which he planted and cares for.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost:

First Sunday of End Time — Reformation :



Symbol of the Week—Luther’s Seal: This emblem, designed for Martin Luther, has also become associated with Lutheranism and the Reformation. Here’s what Luther said about the seal in a letter to designer Lazarus Spengler dated July 8, 1530:

“The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. "For one who believes from the heart will be justified" ([Romans 10:10](#)) ...Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace ...The rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels (cf. [Matthew 28:3](#); [John 20:12](#)). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal. This is my *compendium theologiae* [summary of theology].



Second Sunday of End Time — Last Judgment:

Symbol of the Week—Sheep and Goats: Jesus’ Judgment Day picture of separating believers from unbelievers “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” has carried over into our symbolic references. Scripture regularly pictures Christians as sheep, docile but needing a leader (—think of Psalm 23 or John 10). The wild, impetuous, and curious nature of goats makes this animal an appropriate representative for unbelievers, those who are “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).



Third Sunday of End Time — Saints Triumphant:

Symbol of the Week—Oil Lamp: With so many references to God being "light" in Scripture, representations of light such as candles, flames and lamps have become common symbols of Christianity. Psalm 119:105 says God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. 2 Samuel 22 says the Lord is a lamp, turning darkness into light. There are different ideas about what Jesus had in mind for the virgins’ lamps and the oil in today’s Gospel parable. Do they represent faith? The Holy Spirit? All the ideas apply when we consider Jesus’ main point: don’t let the supply of God’s presence in your life run out. We must always be ready for the Bridegroom’s arrival.



Fourth Sunday of End Time — Christ the King:

Symbol of the Week—*Maiestas Domini* (“The Majesty of the Lord”) is a Christian image that was popular already from early Christian times, but especially during the Middle Ages. It shows Christ the King seated on his throne enclosed by a *mandorla*, an almond shaped frame which indicates that he transcends time and space. His feet rest on a circle representing the world, for, as we hear in today’s Epistle lesson, God has “put everything under his feet.” This symbol became the standard for art above the entry of Romanesque and Gothic churches.

Series B

First Sunday of Advent:

Blue Paraments: Today we begin a new church year, and the colors of the chancel cloths have changed for the season. Liturgical colors not only help differentiate one season from another, but the colors have symbolic meaning as well. Blue is the color of the sky and hope. It is the color of the Advent season as we wait in hope for our coming Lord Jesus and look to the sky for his coming again in glory.

Second Sunday of Advent:

Advent Wreath: Many Christian churches and homes make use of a wreath with candles during the season of Advent. Since a circle has no beginning or end, the circle shape of the wreath reminds us that our coming Lord Jesus is also from eternity. The evergreen branches of the wreath, as their name implies are “ever green”—always alive, just as Christ, who died, is alive, never to die again.

Third Sunday of Advent:

Pink Candle: Advent is a time for preparation and repentance, but it is also a season of hope and rejoicing in our coming Savior. The church calendar calls this Sunday *Gaudete*, Latin for “Rejoice!” That is why the candle for this week is different from the others—pink in color to symbolize the rejoicing in the midst of this time of repentance.

Fourth Sunday of Advent:



The Nativity of our Lord: Christmas Day

Symbol of the Week—*IHS*: The IHS monogram is an abbreviation or shortening of Jesus' name in Greek to the first three letters. ΙΗΣΟΥΣ is shortened to ΙΗΣ (iota-theta-sigma), and transliterated into Latin or English characters as IHS or IHC. The letters are often inscribed inside of a blazing sun, and this is a great symbol to use on Christmas Day, for so many Christmas texts refer to Jesus's birth as the dawning of salvation. The “Sun of Righteousness” (Verse of the Day and Closing Hymn), the “glory of the One and Only” (Gospel lesson), or “the Sun of grace is shining” (Hymn of the Day) are just a few examples that we see in today's service.

First Sunday after Christmas:

Symbol of the Week—*White Paraments*: The paraments on the altar, pulpit, and lectern are white during the season of Christmas and the first part of Epiphany. White has many symbolic associations, but during this season it reminds us especially of the “light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of [God's] people Israel”, the Savior who has come into the world. White is also a color that reflects the joy of the season.

First Sunday after the Epiphany:

Second Sunday after the Epiphany:

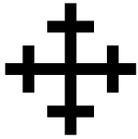


Third Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*The Christian Fish*: The Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ, is also an acronym for Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ (“Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”). Seeing this connection, early Christians adopted the symbol of a fish to identify themselves without exposing themselves to persecution. When you encountered someone new, you would draw an arch in the ground with your staff. If the other person drew a reverse arch over yours it would form the fish symbol. Both people would then know that they could safely talk about being a Christian. The symbol is still used today to identify Christians, and the idea of “fishers of men” from today's Gospel is another good fish connection to the identity of Christians.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany:

The Green Paraments: The Sundays after Epiphany (as well as the Sundays after Pentecost) fall outside the festival times of Christmas and Easter, but during these times we still grow in our lives of faith as we worship and study God's Word. On these Sundays, then, the liturgical color is green, which is symbolic of life and growing—the basic color of nature. Green cloths (paraments) are placed on the altar, pulpit, and lectern, and the pastors wear green stoles.



Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*Cross Crosslet*: Four Latin crosses joined at their bases represent Christianity spreading in all directions. This special cross symbol is especially appropriate when a missionary theme is expressed. Think about it this week as you prepare for Friendship Sunday.



Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*Cross and Heart*: God is love! What better way to illustrate this important aspect of the Christian faith than with the classic symbol of love — the heart. As you celebrate Valentine’s Day this week, remember the greatest love shown to you in Christ!

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany:

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany — Transfiguration:

Symbol of the Week—*White*: The white paraments make a return for just one Sunday prior to Lent. The colors of Transfiguration Sunday remind us of Jesus’ shining glory and the comment in Mark’s gospel that Jesus’ clothes appeared “dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”

First Sunday of Lent:

Symbol of the Week—*Ashes*: Why is the first day of Lent called Ash Wednesday? The tradition of placing ashes on the forehead to begin this penitential season echoes symbolism from ancient times, when dusting oneself with ashes was a way of showing sorrow over sin. Many references are found in Scripture. The prophet Daniel, for example, recounted pleading to God this way: “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:3). Have mercy on us, Lord!

Second Sunday of Lent:

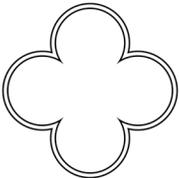
Symbol of the Week—*Purple*: The paraments are purple during the season of Lent, a somber tone symbolizing repentance. Purple has also been connected with royal dignity since ancient times and its use during Lent reminds us that our suffering Savior, draped in a purple robe and mocked by soldiers as “King of the Jews,” really is the King of all.

Third Sunday of Lent:



Symbol of the Week—*Shamrock*: St. Patrick’s Day shamrock decorations can remind you of more than what has become a very worldly holiday. According to tradition, St. Patrick, a missionary to Ireland, used the three-leafed shamrock to teach the truth of the Trinity: three leaves on one clover stem are symbolic of the three persons in one God. This symbol, in its architectural form, called a trefoil and seen at the left, is found in a few places in our sanctuary (*The four-leafed clover is much more prominent, though. Look forward to an explanation of that symbol next week.*).

Fourth Sunday of Lent:



Symbol of the Week—*Four-Leaf Clover/Quatrefoil*: The four-leaf clover is now considered a good luck charm, but the symbolism actually began with a good Christian gospel message. The four leaves of the clover were connected to the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and represented the “good news” (not good luck) about which they wrote. The four-leaf clover in its quatrefoil (architectural) version pictured on the left or as four-petal flower is one of the most commonly used symbols in our church building. When you see this symbol in our windows, doors, lights... praise God for the “good news” Gospel message that is proclaimed in this place.

Fifth Sunday of Lent:

Our Parament Cross: Please take note this week of the cross on our Lenten paraments, which looks like four nails coming together. This cross variation is just one of an estimated 400 forms of the cross that have been designed over the centuries to remind us of our Savior’s passion.

Sixth Sunday of Lent:

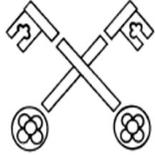
Symbol of the Week—*Palms*: The palms that were scattered in Jesus’ path on Palm Sunday were not just convenient, they were symbolic. The palm branch was a symbol of triumph and victory in ancient times. The Romans rewarded champions of the games and celebrated military successes with palm branches. What a great way to proclaim our Savior’s victory over Satan!



The Resurrection of Our Lord — Easter Day:

Symbol of the Week—Banner: Just as conquering armies carried banners to signify a great military conquest, the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus, bearing a banner with a cross, as seen on our white paraments, is an Easter symbol of the joyful victory over sin, death, and Satan won by our Lord.

Second Sunday of Easter:



Symbol of the Week—Keys: When Jesus appeared to his disciples on Easter evening, he told them, “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” This authority conveyed by Christ to his church is represented visually by a set of keys, tying in with Jesus’ earlier charge in Matthew 16: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” You remember from catechism class that we call this work “The Ministry of the Keys”.



Third Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Easter Lily: Many ideas have developed about how white lilies became connected to Easter, though none of these thoughts are mentioned in Scripture. Here are a few: First, the white color, symbolic of hope and purity, references the eternal life won for us in Christ. Also, the trumpet bell shape of the blooms reminds us of trumpet calls on Easter morning, announcing the triumph of Jesus. Finally, this flower is associated with the resurrection because, although its bulb is buried in the ground, from this apparent death, new life springs forth.



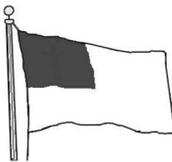
Fourth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Good Shepherd: The image of the Good Shepherd is the most common symbolic representation of Christ found in Early Christian art. It was used in the Catacombs of Rome, before Christian imagery could be explicitly displayed and could be used without fear of persecution because the form of a young man carrying a lamb round his neck was a familiar image for the ancient Greek and Roman culture. Initially it was probably not understood as a direct portrait of Jesus, but as a symbol like others used in Early Christian art. However, by about the 5th century the figure more often took on the conventional depiction of Christ, as it had developed by this time.



Fifth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Vine: The symbolic relationship in today’s Gospel lesson is clear: Jesus is the vine, we are the branches; we must stay connected to him to live and bear fruit. Because of the fluidity of vines, this symbol has often been used in a decorative way in art and architecture, filling awkward spaces that are hard to fill with other symbols. Don’t discount the importance of the symbol, however; just because it looks like simple decoration, doesn’t imply that the meaning is any less.



Sixth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week— The Christian Flag: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch,” so our first lesson tells us (*Acts 11:26*). One symbol of the unity of all Christians is the Christian flag, which is displayed in the front of our church sanctuary and in many other Christian churches since it was developed in 1907. The flag’s most conspicuous feature is the red cross, a symbol of Jesus’ suffering and death for our salvation. The blue field is symbolic of faithfulness. The large white field is connected to purity and forgiveness.

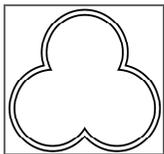
Seventh Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week— 40: Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after he rose from the dead. As you read in Scripture, you notice that the number forty comes up regularly, and it is often connected to a time of preparation (waiting, trial, or testing). Before Jesus ascended, he used those forty days as a special time of preparation for his disciples. Think also of the flood rains that came on the earth for forty days and forty nights, the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, or Jesus’ forty days of temptation by the devil



The Coming of the Holy Spirit — The Day of Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week— Tongues of Fire: Consider the significance of those tongues of fire that came to rest on the disciples that first Pentecost day: Fire warms; fire lights; fire burns; fire refines. Tongues proclaim; tongues praise... This is what the disciples were called to do: light the way, warm hearts, proclaim Jesus... The Holy Spirit employed great symbolism that day!



The First Sunday after Pentecost — Holy Trinity:

Symbol of the Week— Trefoil: How do you symbolize something that we can't even understand—like the Triune God? Many symbols try to capture the idea of Three in One, like a trefoil, the architectural term and form of a three leaf clover. The three lobes of the symbol represent the three persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, they are all one connected piece. Look for examples in church as you worship today.

The Second Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— Jars of Clay: Paul uses a beautiful metaphor in today's second lesson. He refers to himself—and all who spread God's Word—as jars of clay full of treasure. We are fragile, cracked, not worth much...but the message we have to proclaim is worth everything. When you hear the Word of God, don't consider the vessel bringing the message to you, but look instead to God and his greatness, "surpassing power."

The Third Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— Sin and Temptation: The temptation and fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, and the consequences that we read in today's first lesson, are often symbolized as a trunk of a tree with some sort of fruit on it and a snake coiled around it—although Scripture doesn't actually place the serpent in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The sinful nature of humankind as a result of Adam's fall can also be represented as a snake coiled around the entire world.

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— Mustard Seed: Jesus again gives us a direct symbolic reference in today's Gospel lesson. "...the kingdom of God is like...the mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground..." Remember also Jesus' words: "...if you have faith as small as a **mustard seed**, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move." The mustard seed has become a popular Christian symbol. If you do a Google search you will come up with Mustard Seed Project, Mission, Ministries, Homes, Bookshop, a Mustard Seed restaurant... Charms, key rings, and cross necklaces with mustard seeds embedded in them are also popular ways to reference the parable's thoughts of faith and God's kingdom.

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— Ship: A ship is a symbol of the Church. Jesus is the captain. Ships will frequently get caught in storms. The church, in a parallel respect, gets caught in heretical storms or storms of persecution. But just as God protected his faithful in the ark and Jesus protected his faithful in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, so too will the faithful be protected from these storms. Note also that the ship's mast forms a cross. Some ship images have the Chi Rho on the sail or as part of the mast.

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— The Eagle Lectern: Although it may look like a patriotic symbol, the eagle lectern at the front of our sanctuary is not an American Eagle. It is a symbol of the Apostle John, assigned because his gospel soars high, not only with accounts of Jesus life but also many of his specific teachings. How appropriate for St. John's Lutheran to have this symbol before us as the Word of God is read each week. (The statue of St. John above the altar also includes an eagle.)

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— The Lion of St. Mark: Last week we talked about the Eagle of St. John, seen in our lectern. How are the other gospel writers symbolized? In this church year's cycle of lessons we are reading mainly from the book of St. Mark. His symbol is a winged lion, because his gospel begins with "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," suggestive of a lion's roar. It also represents the majesty and power of the Savior expressed in Mark's narrative. It's hard to see in the statue of Mark above the altar (top left), but Mark is cradling a lion in his arms.

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost :



Symbol of the Week— The Man of St. Matthew: When portrayed as one of the four evangelists, Matthew is symbolized as a winged man—again, as was noted last week, one of the four faces in Ezekiel's vision and one of the four living creatures in John's Revelation. A connection between Matthew's gospel and the man is made because the opening of his Gospel contains the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew also focuses more on Jesus' humanity than he did on His divinity. The top left figure above the altar represents Matthew; he cradles a cherub in his arms—a winged man.



The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *Loaves and Fish*: The five loaves of bread and two fish from Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of the 5000 have come to be used as a symbolic connection to miracles in general or to God’s provision. They remind us that God provides all that we need for body and life. You might think about including an image like the one on the left in your kitchen.

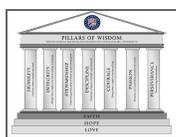


The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *Bread of Life*: In today’s Gospel lesson we hear Jesus say, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). Therefore, bread makes an excellent symbol of life. He makes a connection to God’s giving of manna in the wilderness to preserve the lives of the Israelites. Think about how Jesus continued the bread connection at the Last Supper: “This is my body, broken for you...”(Luke 22:19) That innocent broken body is what gives us life.

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *40*: The number 40 in Scripture is nearly always connected with a time of trial or testing. Consider the 40 days and nights that it rained on the earth at Noah’s time ...the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness ...Jesus 40 days of fasting in the wilderness at the time of his temptation ...and the 40 days and nights of travel that Elijah undertakes in today’s Old Testament lesson. There are at least a half dozen more examples.



The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *Seven Pillars*: Today’s lesson from Proverbs pictures Wisdom, who has built a house and “hewn out its seven pillars.” We have no explanation for what those seven pillars represent, but people have assigned seven Scriptural qualities upon which a wise Christian builds his life, an example of which you see pictured on the left. The pillars may also represent the completeness (that’s what the number 7 represents) of wisdom—a perfect guide for life. —Or how about a connection between the seven pillars and the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, the giver of heavenly wisdom, that are mentioned in Isaiah.



The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *The Raven*: Ravens have several symbolic connections to Scripture, but this one caught my attention as a tie-in to today’s sermon theme and also to our September/October *Forward, Lord* focus on “commitment.”

“According to the writings of St. Augustine, every time the raven speaks it says ‘*cras, cras*’ meaning, in Latin, ‘Tomorrow, tomorrow.’ In this sense, says Augustine, the raven symbolizes Satan, who is trying to get every non-believer to put off making a commitment to Jesus until tomorrow.” Don’t listen to “the raven.” Let’s not wait to make a commitment to follow and serve our Savior.

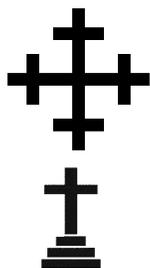
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week— *“A Clean Heart”*: David uses this phrase in the psalm of repentance that we sing today. Solomon also wrote, “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’”? We can’t literally scrub our valves and ventricles, but symbolically, it’s a good reminder about the evil that comes from within us. We must ask God to clean our hearts daily.



The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*Pretzel*: The pretzel is not only a symbol of our Gemuetlichkeit Days, it has a spiritual attachment as well. According to tradition, pretzels were first made by a young Italian monk to remind his brothers that Lent was a time of prayer. He shaped a special Lenten bread in the form of arms crossed over the heart, mimicking the then popular prayer position. Another tale is that the young monk gave these *bracellae* (“little arms”) prayer breads to children as a reward when they could recite their prayers. *Bracellae* became *bretzel* in German, and mutated to our word pretzel. We don’t know if these stories have any basis in fact, but seeing the Gemuetlichkeit pretzel is a good reminder to us to cross our arms in prayer for our city.



The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*Which cross are you taking up?* There are many different styles of cross symbols, each with a different focus or point of origin. On which cross will you focus at this point in your life? You could take up this mission-focused cross crosslet (*top*), which has four Latin crosses that represent the spread of Christianity in the four directions of the compass. Maybe you’ll focus on the Graded Cross (*bottom*). Its three steps stand for faith, hope, and love—great concepts on which to center your days. Think about taking up one of these crosses—maybe in a decorative way in your home—as a symbolic reminder of spiritual things.

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*Little Child*: Look at how Jesus uses symbolism in today’s Gospel Lesson. We hear that he “took a little child and had him stand among them.” Jesus is using that boy as a symbol of “the very last,” someone who is powerless and has no authority. Yet serving a child, meeting the needs of a lowly child is a great thing. Let us learn the lesson from Jesus’ symbolism and be willing to serve.



The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*Celtic Cross and the Millstone*: Although there are a variety of thoughts about the origin and meaning of the circle in a Celtic Cross symbol, one account says that the earliest known form of this symbol consisted of a wooden cross and a millstone. All was held together by metal pins. The millstone has several meanings for us: Its presence with the cross is a warning, found in today’s Gospel lesson: “...if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” (Mark 9:42) One must not impede or misdirect those who believe in Christ—especially children—by providing a motivation to sin. The millstone also grinds grain into flour which is made into bread, reminding us of the Bread of Life or the Lord’s Supper.



The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*The Christian Marriage Symbol* pictures two rings that intersect over a cross or the monogram of the cross (seen left). The rings, which have no beginning or end, symbolize God’s unending love, which stands as the model of love for the husband and the wife who have both pledged their commitment to each other.

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*Camel*: Camels, growing to more than seven feet tall and weighing more than 1500 pounds, were the largest animals commonly seen in ancient Israel and have become a symbol of large creatures. In today’s gospel lessons, Jesus tells his disciples, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." He also called the scribes and Pharisees "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" (Mt 23:24). Augustine told his readers not to worry that the Godhead had been in any way cramped or restricted by the smallness of the body of the Christ Child since God was able to give tiny ants and bees abilities superior to those of large camels.



The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost :

Symbol of the Week—*The Right Hand*: In many cultures, the right is regarded as the better side. In Scripture it is the side of strength, security, and salvation (See Job 40:14, Psalm 16:8, 98:1...) The seat on the right hand of God or an important person is regarded as a place of honor, and the right hand is used for blessing, as reflected in much Christian art.

The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost :

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost :



First Sunday of End Time — Reformation:

Symbol of the Week—*The Reformation Cross: V.D.M.A.* represents the Latin phrase *Verbum autem Domini nostri Manet in Aeternum* (But the Word of Our Lord Endures Forever). This is the motto of the Lutheran Reformation, a confident expression of the enduring power and authority of God’s Word. The motto is based on Isaiah 40:6-8 quoted by 1 Peter 1:24-25. It first appeared in the court of Frederick the Wise in 1522. He had it sewn onto the right sleeve of the court’s official clothing, worn by prince and servant alike. It was used by Frederick’s successors as well. It became the official motto of the Smalcaldic League and was used on flags, banners, swords, and uniforms as a symbol of the unity of the Lutheran laity who struggled to defend their beliefs, communities, families and lives against those who were intent on destroying them.



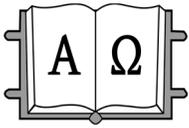
Second Sunday of End Time — Last Judgment:

Symbol of the Week—*Trumpet*: In Bible times trumpets were used for praise, as we use them today, but they also signaled announcements, provided warnings, or declared a battle cry. Jesus makes the first connection between trumpets and Judgment Day in Matthew 24: “They will see the Son of Man coming... And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds...” Paul uses the same picture in his first letters to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, and trumpets appear throughout the Revelation of St. John. In art, the trumpet of judgment is usually held in the hands of an angel.



Third Sunday of End Time — Saints Triumphant:

Symbol of the Week—*Palm Branches*: The palm branch was a symbol of victory during Roman times. Think of Jesus’ victorious entry into Jerusalem and the palm branches placed in his path. In today’s opening verses and in the art on the first page of the worship folder you find palm branches in the hands of believers standing before the throne of God. The symbolism represents those who have died in the faith; Christ has given them the victory and the victorious reward of heaven! On this Saints Triumphant Sunday, there are nineteen palm branches in front of church—a reminder of the nineteen faithful whose names are being read today, who were added to the list of Saints Triumphant in the last year.



Fourth Sunday of End Time — Christ the King:

Symbol of the Week—Alpha and Omega: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” Jesus’ words in today’s reading from Revelation tell us a great deal about our King, and the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega, picture these thoughts well. That’s probably why you see them used so often in Christian art. Just take a look around our worship space, and you’ll find several examples: altar, pulpit, ceiling...

Series C



First Sunday of Advent:

Symbol of the Week—The Righteous Branch and Jesse Tree: Today’s lesson from Jeremiah 33 has just one mention of the Righteous Branch (the Messiah) promised to come from the family tree of King David. The symbol of the Branch comes up again in Jeremiah, several times in Isaiah, and in other Old Testament passages. The reference found in Isaiah 11, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit,” has developed into an Advent tradition called a “Jesse Tree”, which is kind of like an Advent calendar on which symbols of the story of salvation are hung during the days of Advent. It is too involved to tell everything here, but you can find out more at www.jesse-trees.com, and I’ll put a book on the narthex table.



Second Sunday of Advent:

Symbol of the Week—Symbols of John the Baptist: St. John the Baptist, whose ministry we celebrate today, is frequently shown in Christian art and is easily identified because of the many symbols connected to his person and message. You will usually see a pointed index finger [he pointed to Jesus...] which is often pointed at a lamb [“Look, the Lamb of God...”], a shell or bowl [for baptism], a grasshopper [because they were part of his wilderness diet], a camel’s hair garment [his clothing of choice], and a reed cross in his hand [because Jesus asked the crowds, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”].



Third Sunday of Advent:

Symbol of the Week—Pink Candle: This is a repeat from last year, but it’s good to remember that while Advent is a time for preparation and repentance, it is also a season of hope and rejoicing in our coming Savior. The church calendar calls the Third Sunday of Advent *Gaudete*, Latin for “Rejoice!” That is why the candle for this week is different from the others—pink in color to symbolize rejoicing in the midst of this time of repentance.



Fourth Sunday of Advent:

Symbol of the Week—Symbols of the Virgin Mary: Mary is easy to recognize in Christian art, for she nearly always wears a red tunic (a symbol of life’s blood) with a blue cloak over it (the color of the sky and, therefore, a symbol of truth and clarity and heaven), and she has a veil covering her head.

Mary is often represented by a white lily, a symbol of purity and virginity. You will see a lily included in many pictures of the Annunciation.

The symbol of the Mary rose developed in the Middle Ages as well. “Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming...” the Catholic rosary (for prayers to Mary), and the name Rosemary all stem from this symbolic attribution.

First Sunday after Christmas

Symbol of the Week—White Paraments: The paraments on the altar, pulpit, and lectern are white during the season of Christmas and the first part of Epiphany. White has many symbolic associations, but during this season it reminds us especially of the “light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of [God’s] people Israel”, the Savior who has come into the world. White is also a color that reflects the joy of the season.



The Epiphany of Our Lord:

Symbol of the Week—Epiphany Star: Although there are other star symbols with different numbers of points, the five-pointed star shape has come to represent the star followed by the magi to the King of the Jews. It is sometimes also called the “Star of Jacob,” which is a reference to the Messianic prophecy from Numbers 24:17—“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel...”



First Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—The Descending Dove: Today’s gospel lesson shows us the connection between the Holy Spirit and the form of a dove. This symbol is prevalent in our sanctuary. Just look above the altar, above the chancel area, and above the organ... It was used almost exclusively as the symbol for the Holy Spirit during the first eleven centuries. The dove should always be white in color and should always have a three-rayed halo to show it is representing a part of the Trinity.



Second Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*Precious Feet*: While not a specifically Christian Symbol, the “Precious Feet” lapel pin shown at the left is the exact size and shape of an unborn baby’s feet at 10 weeks after conception and has been the International Pro-Life symbol for 25 years.



Third Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*Scroll*: In Christian art, the symbol of a scroll often represents the Word of God. A scroll or manuscript in the hands of a person suggests the person was an author. Usually, scrolls are found in the hands of the Old Testament authors, while a book (codex) is placed in the hands of a New Testament author. A scroll in the hand of Jesus also represents the book of life in which the names of the saints are written (Revelation 5).



Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany:

Symbol of the Week—*Hand of Blessing*: Have you ever wondered why the pastor holds his right hand the way he does when bestowing God’s blessing upon us? The three extended fingers represent the blessing of the Triune God. The two closed fingers remind us of the twofold nature of Jesus: fully divine and fully human. You will also see many examples of Christian artwork with Jesus’ hand raised in blessing in the same way.



Last Sunday after the Epiphany — Transfiguration:

Symbol of the Week—*Jeweled Cross*: A symbolic representation of Jesus in Transfiguration glory is the jeweled cross. The jewels allow for a representation of the shining glory of Christ, while the cross reminds us about what Jesus and the prophets spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration. The jeweled cross in the apse mosaic of the 6th Century church of Sant’ Apollinare, Ravenna, Italy (shown above), is probably the best known example of the use of this symbol.

First Sunday in Lent:



NOT a Symbol of the Week—*Satan*: To many people Satan is just a symbol. They say that he is a product of the imagination of superstitious people or a representation of the idea evil around us but not real. Others trivialize his threat by making him a silly cartoon character (Yeah, like the one at the left.). Yet, as we see in today’s Gospel lesson, the Bible says that Satan is not a symbol; he is a reality. He is powerful and cunning; he “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Take him seriously—but also know that our Lord delivers us from his power.



Second Sunday in Lent:

Symbol of the Week—*Hen and Chicks*: In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus again gives us a beautiful symbol of his love and protection, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...” (Luke 13:34). The image at the left is a mosaic representation of Jesus’ picture found in a chapel near Jerusalem just below a window with a view of the city.



Third Sunday in Lent:

Symbol of the Week—*The Burning Bush* from today’s first lesson has taken on several symbolic meanings. It is a symbol of God’s glory and presence and his revelation to us (“I AM WHO I AM.”). It is also a symbol of the Lord’s call to those for whom he has a spiritual mission, as he had for Moses. Finally, it is a comforting picture of his merciful love for sinners: God is a mighty fire, but he does not consume those who turn to him for deliverance..

Fourth Sunday in Lent:

Symbol of the Week—*The Fattened Calf*: The fattened calf is a metaphor or symbol of festive celebration and rejoicing for someone’s long-awaited return and comes from today’s gospel parable of the Prodigal Son. In Bible times, people would often keep one piece of livestock that was fed a special diet to fatten it up and make it more flavorful. Slaughtering this animal was done on rare and special occasions. Thus when the prodigal son returns, the father “kills the fattened calf” to show that the celebration is out of the ordinary.



Fifth Sunday in Lent:

Symbol of the Week—*Vineyard*: A vineyard represents God’s people, often being cared for by him. The Old Testament frequently refers to Israel as being a vine or a vineyard that God planted. In Psalm 80 the Psalmist says to God, “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.” Isaiah says, “. . . my beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill . . . He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes” (5:1-2).





Sixth Sunday in Lent:

Symbol of the Week—"Hosanna": As we walk through a *Garden of "Hosanna!"* this Palm Sunday, it is good for us to review what this word means. The Hebrew word *hoshana* was a plea ("please save" or "save now"), as used in Psalm 118:25 — "O Lord, save us." The people of Palm Sunday shouted a Greek version of the word to praise Jesus, recognizing him to be the Messiah; he is the one who comes to save. We continue to use "Hosanna" in our worship in praise of the Lord's saving work.



The Resurrection of Our Lord — Easter Day:

Symbol of the Week—Our Stained Glass Window Garden: Hey, look... We're in a garden! Flowers and decorative plants fill our windows. We've talked about the four-lobed flower petals before; they represent the good news of the four gospels. How appropriate, though, that we have this symbolic garden surrounding us in worship all the time! When we consider the garden connections that we've heard throughout Holy Week and recognize how God's plan of salvation ties in to gardens... Well, we should rejoice to be in a garden all the time. **Happy Easter Garden!**

Second Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Empty Cross: Are you surprised not to see Jesus on the cross behind the altar? It's unusual for a Lutheran church to have a *crucifix* with a *corpus* (the body of Jesus), although several churches in our area do. Lutherans traditionally display an empty cross, focusing more on the risen Lord than on the suffering Savior. For the Easter season, then, we will follow that empty cross tradition by "removing" the body of Jesus from our symbol (although our Jesus sculpture doesn't really detach from the cross; what's up there now is an empty replica).

Third Sunday of Easter:



Symbol of the Week—The Net: The catch of fish in today's gospel lesson reminds us of all the symbolic connections between fishing and work in God's kingdom. A symbolic use of the fishing net comes in one of Jesus' parables. He says: "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous..." (*Matthew 13:47-50*)



Fourth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Shepherd's Staff: Psalm 23:4—"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." In a sense, the shepherd's staff, more than any other item of his personal equipment, identifies the shepherd as a shepherd. No one in any other profession carries a shepherd's staff. It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep — and only sheep. It will not do for cattle, horses, or swine. It is designed, shaped, and adapted especially for the needs of sheep. And it is used only for their benefit. Consequently, a shepherd's staff is a symbol of the concern and the compassion of the shepherd for his sheep. And the word that best sums that up is comfort. We can take comfort in the fact that our Savior leads and guides us with the shepherd staff of his Word.



Fifth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Shaking the Dust: Today we consider a symbolic action, shaking the dust off one's feet. In Biblical times, when leaving Gentile cities, pious Jews often shook the dust from their feet to show their separation from Gentile practices. When Jesus called his twelve disciples and sent them out, he told them, in a reversal, to perform the same act against non-believing Jews (*Matthew 10:14*). If the disciples shook the dust of a Jewish town from their feet, it would show their separation from Jews who rejected their Messiah. The opportunity to learn of Christ might not present itself again. The only recorded instance of this symbolic practice in Scripture is found in today's first lesson, when Paul and Barnabas were expelled from Antioch.

Sixth Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—The People of God are represented in two ways in today's Revelation reading. The Holy City of Jerusalem, though it sometimes symbolizes heaven itself, also stands for the Church. In John's vision, the believers in heaven are radiant as jewels, reflecting the glory of God.

The repetition of the number twelve in these verses also shows that God's people are represented here, for the number twelve in Scripture is symbolic of the people of God: twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples... If you think about it, twelve is a multiplying of the number of God (3) with the number of his creation (4)... That combination is what builds the Church of God.



Seventh Sunday of Easter:

Symbol of the Week—Alpha and Omega: In today's Revelation lesson, Jesus tells us that he is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." These words assure us that Jesus, as he promised before his Ascension, will always be with us—even to the end of the age. This promise is important for us, quite obviously, for the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet) appear more than once in our sanctuary. See how many of these symbols you can find as you worship today.



The Coming of the Holy Spirit — The Day of Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Pentecost and Confirmation Symbolism: If you would do an internet search for both “Pentecost Symbols” and “Confirmation Symbols,” you’d find many images that are very similar—the Holy Spirit dove and tongues of fire. How fitting, then, that Confirmation and Pentecost are celebrated on the same day this year. Both events focus on the gifts of the Holy Spirit coming to the hearts of believers.



First Sunday after Pentecost — Holy Trinity:

Symbol of the Week—Triune God: It is impossible to represent clearly the mystery of the Trinity, but artists try to develop symbols that help us understand. One of my favorite is seen at the left and was used regularly during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It depicts our Triune God as a person with three faces, sharing certain features, others distinctly separate—not clear where one begins and the other ends. This, of course, is not a perfect symbol, but it is kind of fun to look at and thought-provoking.

Second Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Green Paraments: The springtime color of green is a symbol of growth, life, hope, and immortality. It is the color for our worship paraments during the non-festival half of the church year—the Sundays after Trinity Sunday until Reformation—during which time we focus on the teachings of Jesus and our growth in faith. We can make a good connection to our mission theme today also: nurturing the faith of our members through the Word and Sacrament is one of our goals as a congregation; we all want to continue to be green and growing in faith.



Third Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Mission Graphic: What does the picture at the top of the next page say to you? Many ideas are presented, but I want to especially emphasize the thought that there are many pieces to our mission puzzle and many hands are needed to put all the pieces together. What’s your role? Please give serious thought in this “Mission Month” to the purpose God has for you.



Fourth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Mission Cross: This heraldic cross is made from four Latin Crosses arranged at right-angles to each other, with their tops pointing north, south, east and west. Usually called the **Cross Crosslet**, it is a symbol for the spreading of the Gospel to the four corners of the earth, which gives an alternative name, **Mission Cross**.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost:



Symbol of the Week—WELS Logo: The WELS cross was updated a few years ago to better symbolize our mission to proclaim the gospel. Red bands of color, the color of the Holy Spirit, now emanate from the cross symbolizing the good news spreading from the cross throughout the world. The phrase “Christ’s Love, Our Calling” was also added. It is not merely a short-term theme, but a new way of describing ourselves, especially to those unfamiliar with the terminology in our official title. When the world understands that as a church body our mission is to

proclaim Christ’s saving love, it will make the connection that every individual WELS member shares that same mission.



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Gentle Whisper: With all the thunder you’ve heard this week, you might think that the power of God is loud and sleep-disturbing. But today’s Bible Study shows us that God’s power is better pictured as a gentle whisper. This symbol of the still, small voice is a beautiful representation of mission work and the spread of the gospel. Yes, Jesus can be made known through loud proclamations, but it is good, too, that through gentle whispers among family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers that the Holy Spirit works faith.



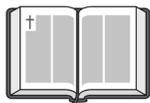
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—In God We Trust: These symbolic words are on most pieces of United States currency. May they also be in the hearts of all those who use that currency! Lord, help us to place all of our trust in you!



Eighth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—Dragon: The dragon is a symbol for Satan, sin, and pestilence, which comes from a series of verses in the book of Revelation. This week in the Czech Republic, we used the symbol of the dragon as we taught about taking up “The Armor of God” to fight the continual attacks of Satan. We screen-printed t-shirts with the children using a design of a knight in armor slaying a dragon underfoot to help them remember all the pieces of armor that God gives us: the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Righteousness, the Shield of Faith, and Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit.



Ninth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—*Open Bible*: The symbol of the open Bible represents the Word of God. When we see it — as in our stained glass window in front of church — it may remind us not only to open our Bibles and read what God has to say to us, but also to open our ears and listen closely as well.



Tenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—*Folded Hands*: From where does the common practice of praying with hands folded come? Nobody knows for sure. Historians say that the Jews used this posture before the time of Jesus, although they more often prayed with hands raised. Some have suggested that folded hands are a symbol of obedience, submission, or humility—a good practice when approaching the Lord of all.



Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week—*“Eat, Drink and Be Merry”*: Most of the world doesn’t know that this popular saying comes from Scripture (several places, in fact), and it’s not all positive. While in Ecclesiastes 8 Solomon uses the phrase in thanks to God for the simple pleasures of life, in today’s gospel lesson it comes with a warning. In addition, both Isaiah (ch. 22) and Paul (who quotes Isaiah in 1 Cor. 15) show the arrogance of those who use these words without considering what God has said or what Christ has done. Take note of how people use this saying: Right attitude or not?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — *Pictures of Preparedness*: Look at all the symbolic language Jesus uses in this week’s gospel lesson as he talks about being ready for life eternal in heaven: *providing purses that will not wear out, storing up treasures in heaven, being dressed and ready for service, keeping your lamps burning, watching for the coming thief...* Every day you hear about people who are not prepared for life-changing events. Be sure that you are ready and pray for those who are not.



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

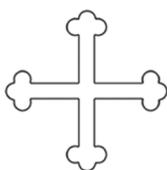
Symbol of the Week — *Fire*: Elemental symbols, such as water and fire were widely used by the early Church. Fire, especially in the form of a candle flame, represents both the Holy Spirit and light. Think about the *tongues of fire* that symbolized the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and about Jesus’ description of his followers as *the light of the world*. Scripture also shows fire as a symbol of God’s presence, like on Mt. Sinai and in the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the wilderness. We also hear that *God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12), and see the fire mentioned in today’s lessons is a refining fire, one that burns away corruption.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — *The Door*: The door is a symbol for Christ taken from the gospels. In today’s lesson from Luke, Jesus refers to himself as the narrow door; it is only through him that we can enter heaven. In John’s gospel we hear him say, “I am the door; whoever enters through me will be saved” (John 10:9 King James Version). It may also be used to symbolize the invitation to prayer and personal relationship that Christ extends to all people, as he did in Matthew 7: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

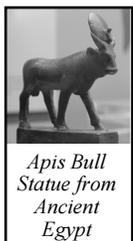
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — *Angels*: Would you recognize an angel if you were entertaining one? You probably would, if that angel really looked the way they are most often portrayed in art. Symbolically God’s messenger angels are always shown beardless, sexless, with wings, and barefooted. They are often seen carrying a palm branch, scroll or book, a sword, or musical instruments. But what do they really look like? The Bible doesn’t give us a very good description. Most often they look like a man—kind of hard to pick out. We’ll be happy to see them and find out on Judgment Day. In the meantime, remember that you could be entertaining one at any time.



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — *Carry Your Cross*: What type of cross will you carry? There are many varieties. The main reason for the large number of variations was the use of the cross in heraldry. Heraldry was the art of creating and displaying coats of arms during the Middle Ages. Crosses of unique design on a coat of arms would help distinguish your family. The Cross Bottonnee, shown at the left, is one example. Either Latin or Greek in form, with trefoils at the end of each arm, this is a strikingly beautiful form of the cross. It is also used frequently as decoration in churches—like the gold cross above our altar.



Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — Golden Calf: Why did the Israelites have Aaron make a golden calf instead of a golden fish or lion? They probably got the idea in Egypt. Apis, the Egyptian bull god, was the most important of the Egyptian sacred animals. The Egyptian temple in Memphis housed an actual bull to represent Apis. The bull was used as an oracle. His movements were interpreted as prophecies. His breath was believed to cure disease, and his presence blessed those around with virility. He was given a window in the temple through which he could be seen, and on certain holidays was led through the streets of the city, bedecked with jewelry and flowers. The golden calf symbol reminds us of all hearts that turn from God to worthless idols.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost:



Symbol of the Week — Scales: The symbolic scales of justice were not developed by courts and the government. Scales have long represented honesty and justice in God's eyes. Looking at today's Old Testament lesson, Amos mentions "cheating with dishonest scales." Such dishonesty and injustice in business dealing is condemned often in Scripture. Look at Leviticus 19:36—"Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin." Proverbs says: "The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him." One other symbolic use of scales shows them with a cross symbolize Jesus' death canceling the debt we owed God because of our sins.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — Lazarus: Is the lesson of the Rich Man and Lazarus, today's Gospel lesson, a parable or an account of actual events? We don't know for sure. If it is a parable, it is the only Biblical parable to mention a person by name. Lazarus, then, becomes symbolic of all believers, representing all who have nothing to bring to God on their dying day except for the faith he has given them. He is in contrast with the Rich Man, who had every luxury in life, but nothing in death.



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — Seven: When Jesus uses seven times as a reference number in today's gospel, he seems to be making a symbolic point, for seven is the number of spiritual perfection or completeness in Scripture. He is saying something like, "Forgive your brother perfectly or completely."

Notice how the number 7 is found in other Scripture in a "complete" way. There are: 7 days in a week; 7 of each clean animal on the ark; 7 years of drought and famine (cows coming from the Nile and heads of grain...); 7 designated feasts; 7 braids on Samson's head; 7 words from the cross; 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit; 7 seals revealed in Revelation (along with 7 trumpets, 7 promises to 7 churches...)

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost:

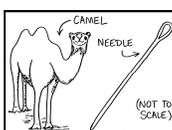
Symbol of the Week — Leprosy: Biblical leprosy is a broader term than the disease that we know today. The Hebrew *tsara'ath* included a variety of ailments. In Leviticus it referred primarily to uncleanness or imperfections according to biblical standards. A person with any scaly skin blemish was *tsara'ath*. The symbolism extended to rot or blemish on leather, the walls of a house, and woven cloth. Other Old Testament references to leprosy are associated with punishment or the consequences of sin.

Although we can't know all the reasons that God allows disease into our lives, biblical leprosy is a powerful symbol reminding us of sin's spread and its horrible consequences. Like leprosy, sin starts out small but can then spread, leading to other sins and causing great damage to our relationship with God and others.



Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — Wrestling in Prayer: Jacob's act of wrestling with God was no symbolic match or dream; it actually happened. The fact that Jacob walked with a limp for the rest of his life after God put his hip out of socket shows this. However, the idea of wrestling with God has become symbolic for what we do in our lives of prayer. Scoffers say that prayer does no good, because God will do what he wants anyway, but God has been known to conform his will to our requests, and he loves that we are willing to struggle with him over what is best for us. Take up the challenge!



Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost:

Symbol of the Week — Camel through the Eye of a Needle: The camel vs. needle symbol that Jesus uses in today's gospel lesson is a great metaphor for an impossibly difficult happening, but, of course, there are people who try to make the saying more literal or reasonable. Here are a few interesting (but baseless) attempts:

— The "eye of the needle" has been claimed to be a gate in Jerusalem, which opened after the main gate was closed at night. A camel could only pass through this smaller gate if it was stooped and had its baggage removed. However, there is no evidence for the existence of such a gate.

— Variations on this story include that of ancient inns having small entrances to thwart thieves, or a story of an old mountain pass known as the "eye of the needle", so narrow that merchants would have to dismount from their camels and were thus more vulnerable to robbers. There is no historical evidence for any of these, either.

— Cyril of Alexandria claimed that *kamêlos* (camel) was a misprint of *kamilos*, meaning "rope" or "cable." However evidence for such a Greek term is weak, and there is little or no manuscript support.



First Sunday of End Time — Reformation:

Symbol of the Week—Luther's Seal: This emblem, designed for Martin Luther, has also become associated with Lutheranism and the Reformation. Here's what Luther said about the seal in a letter to designer Lazarus Spengler dated July 8, 1530: "The first should be a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. 'For one who believes from the heart will be justified' (*Rom. 10:10*) ...Such a heart should stand in the middle of a white rose, to show that faith gives joy, comfort, and peace ...The rose should be white and not red, for white is the color of the spirits and the angels (cf. *Matt. 28:3; John 20:12*). Such a rose should stand in a sky-blue field, symbolizing that such joy in spirit and faith is a beginning of the heavenly future joy, which begins already, but is grasped in hope, not yet revealed. And around this field is a golden ring, symbolizing that such blessedness in Heaven lasts forever and has no end. Such blessedness is exquisite, beyond all joy and goods, just as gold is the most valuable, most precious and best metal. This is my *compendium theologiae* [summary of theology]."



Second Sunday of End Time — Last Judgment:

Symbol of the Week— "in blazing fire": Though not as common as pictures of Jesus coming again on glorious clouds, artists do regularly show Jesus "revealed from heaven in blazing fire" as Paul describes the Last Day in today's Second Lesson. (See the pictures below in color on our website.)



Third Sunday of End Time — Saints Triumphant:

Symbol of the Week— "Wolf and Lamb": Isaiah twice uses images of a wolf and lamb together (Isaiah 11 and 65), to symbolize the peace that Christ brings, the peace that will be ours in the Heavenly Jerusalem. The wolf and lamb dwell together; they feed together. "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain." The Messiah brings peace to formerly hostile enemies. Be cautious, though, as some people misrepresent these words of Isaiah. Millennialists take them literally, saying that Isaiah is prophesying a time of peace on earth before the end comes. Their Paradise on Earth is not consistent with what the Bible teaches as a whole.



Fourth Sunday of End Time — Christ the King:

Symbol of the Week—A Righteous Branch: In Old Testament times, a branch was symbolic of kings descended from royal ancestors. It was not uncommon for the prophets to depict the Messiah as a new shoot or branch growing from David's stock. In today's first lesson, Jeremiah announces that one day in the future the Lord will raise up for David a "righteous Branch," who will reign as the rightful heir to the throne (23:5). Isaiah proclaims that "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit" (11:1).