

Christ Episcopal Church Windows

(Nave and Chancel)

Christ Church, now Christ Episcopal Church, replaced chancel and aisle nave windows in 1962 following an explosion that occurred in the area. The rear aisle nave windows, the Annunciation and the Resurrection, which provided two significant events in the life of Christ, remained in tact. The new windows continued the theme of events in the life of Christ while deriving their style from the Byzantine Romanesque, the earliest Christian art.

Nave windows, which were able to be preserved, reflect the Renaissance period when artists were concerned with realism, originality, perspective, new poses and lighting effects. Models for ideal human beings were classical pagan Greek sculptures or human beings. Composition required judgment and criticism. Subject matter, when Christian had the power or emotion not spirit.

By contrast, the Byzantine style tells the life of Christ without concern for perspective or persuasiveness. Color, fluent lines, intuitive design and filled spaces are important. Figures are monumental with no suggestion of a body beneath the garments. Gestures have no animation. These stylized figures are intended to be universal and symbolic, not portraits of individuals. The power of Byzantine art is spiritual, not emotional.

The chancel windows were designed with the new liturgy in mind, a liturgy which made the altar the center of worship. The Reverend David O. Cowles wrote as follows about these windows:

“Here the basic problem is to have windows which compliment, rather than distract from the altar around which the worship of the church family centers. This consideration dictated a semi-abstract representation of the subject where detail did not cry out for attention. As to the subject matter itself it seemed wise not to use windows whose purpose was teaching--but rather of setting a general atmosphere related to the hopes and visions of the community--related in the minds of the people to the action taking place at the altar. Here the vision of Saint John of Patmos of the

descent of the heavenly Jerusalem with all its colorful imagery seemed highly appropriate.

The use of faceted glass in the chancel, rather than leaded as in the nave, cuts down on the intensity of the light, which would be distraction, while maintaining that purity of color which gives these windows their richness.”

Richard Upjohn designed Christ Episcopal Church in the Gothic Revival style, which draws upon the Gothic style so prevalent during the Middle Ages in Europe. During this same period, Byzantine Art (the style of the 1926 windows) was flourishing in the east with Constantinople as its center.

Benoit Gilsoul, the designer of the 1962 windows, was born in Belgium, graduated from the Belgian Academie des Beaux Arts, worked for many years in Europe before coming to the United States around 1961 to work for the Willett Studios in Philadelphia, the makers of the windows. The church architect, Carl Braun of Greenwich Connecticut, worked closely with the Willett Studios. Comments of Benoit Gilsoul follow:

COMMENTS ON THE WINDOWS AT CHRIST CHURCH

The Descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem

Lancet 4
Lancet 3
Lancet 2
Lancet 1

Altar

Lancet 5
Lancet 6

Crucifixion

Transfiguration

Great Commission

Baptism

Pentecost

Nativity

Ascension

Annunciation

Resurrection

(The above indicates the placement of windows in the church in relation to the altar.)

NOTES PRESENTED BY THE ARTIST

CHANCEL WINDOWS

By an apocalypse is meant a vision professing to reveal the future by means of a symbolism understandable to the faithful, but hidden to others. The symbolism of the Book of Revelation is thought to have been more easily understood by the Christians for whom it was written as they were used to this kind of symbolic writing popular between 175 BC and 100 AD. Its obscurity may have been deliberate for they were then entering into the persecutions, which were to get much worse. Saint John, the author, was exiled to Patmos for his beliefs.

Whether we believe these prophecies have already been fulfilled, are yet to happen in the future, or are only to teach us spiritual truths without reference to anything that will actually take place, the symbolism is some of the most fascinating ever devised. The inspiration for the three lancet chancel windows is drawn from the last two chapters, where the new heaven and earth are so gloriously described by Saint John. The emotional intensity of his ecstatic



experiences coupled with a strange juxtaposition of words and a startling use of idioms and tenses has made the Book of Revelation almost impenetrable to the modern reader. Yet in these lancets is captured the spirit of the New Jerusalem pictured as built of purest gold with the brilliance of glass. At the top of the central lancet, the Cross and the Lamb recall "And I saw

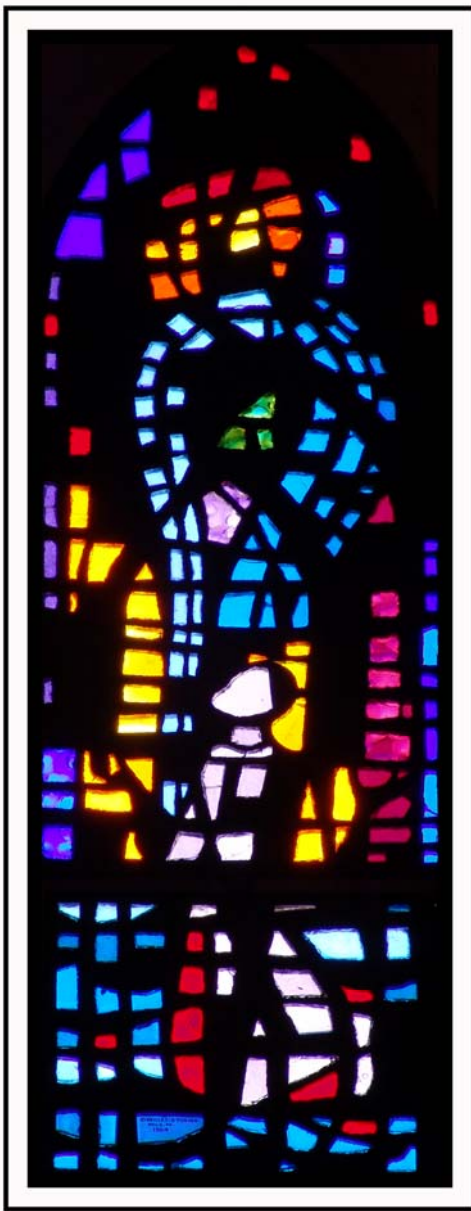
no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb." (Rev. 21:22) At the bottom of the central and right lancets, the darkened sun and moon express the next verse: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb.... its gates shall never be shut by day - and shall be no night there."(Rev. 21:23, 25)

"Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of street of the city; also, on either side of the river the tree with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Rev.22:1-5) The window symbolizes these beautiful words in semiabstract fashion. The River of the Water of Life sparkling like crystal, falling in drops down to a clear blue pool at the bottom is unmistakable, as are the twelve different fruits of the Tree of Life, large jewel shapes) four to a lancet. The leaves of the Tree are apparent in the blue areas of the central lancet.

All the windows in the chancel are executed of brilliantly colored glasses which are chipped and faceted to add a jewel-like quality and are set in a matrix of epoxy resin which holds them in place to form a structural unit of great strength. The thickness of the glass assures the breath taking radiance and complete purity of color, which are the outstanding characteristics of the medium.

SIDE CHANCEL WINDOWS

The six side chancel windows continue the "shower of jewels" in the faceted glass that predominates in the central three lancets.



The first lancets meaning in colors and forms can be read into these semi-abstract panels which express the mystical spirit of this great devotional work. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the waters of life freely."(Rev. 21:6) The beholder will sense the power of the Almighty in the burst of colors in the jewel at the top of the first lancet; while the limpid blue waters of life flow freely down to engulf the human who kneels in prayer.

The second lancet draws its inspiration from "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials which contained the seven last plagues, and talked with me saying "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Rev, 21:9) The angel is apparent in the center wings piercing up toward the orange bowls or vials containing the plagues, as he prepares to make good his words to John below.

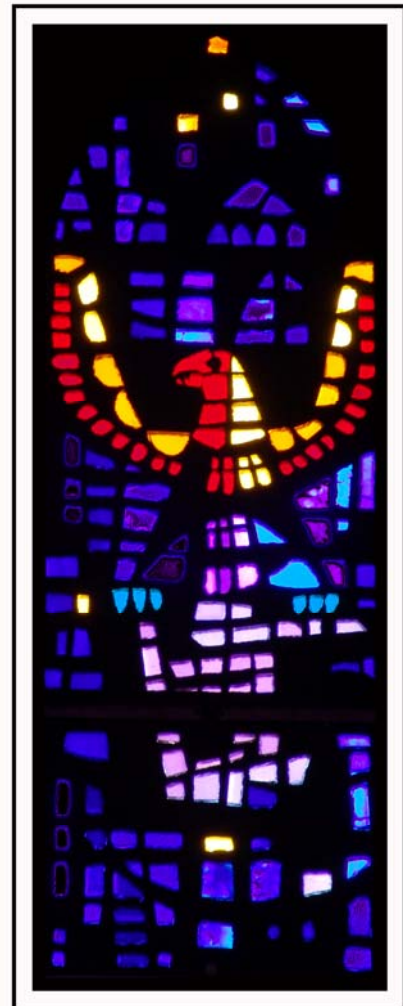


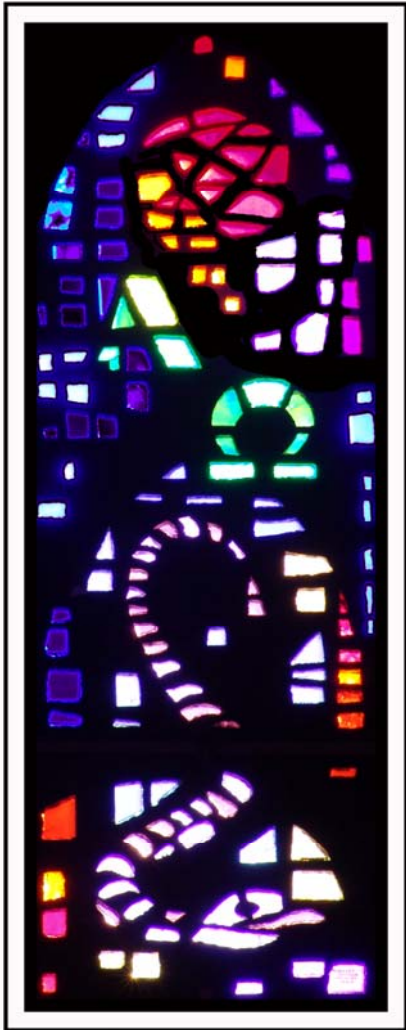


In the third lancet the angel has transported John in spirit to the top of a high mountain, where he beholds in his vision the Holy City of Jerusalem) the bride of the Lamb. "And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2) The light wings of the Holy Spirit are discernable above the peak of the high mountain at the bottom. The Holy City is shown as a precious jewel) clear as crystal", in the center of the lancet, with indications of its gates, walls and foundations sparkling gold under the blue jewel in the heavens.

The fourth lancet expresses the feeling of the verse where "he that set upon the throne said Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write, "for these words are true and faithful."

(Rev, 21:5) John's symbol, the eagle, is there immersed in the colors of God's glory, while the fruits of John's vision, his Gospel and the Book of Revelation, which he wrote after he saw the vision, are symbolized by a scroll.





The fifth lancet "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." (Rev. 22:13) The letters alpha and omega represent those blessed who dwell in the holy city as separated from the damned, symbolized by the serpent of evil.

The last lancet shows "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you....I am the root and the offspring of David and the bright and morning star." (Rev. 22:16) Below the golden jewel is the angel in frosty blues and the six-pointed Star of David,



THE NAVE WINDOWS

The style of the nave aisle windows, while contemporary in feeling⁵ is actually derived from the Byzantine Romanesque style. The Byzantine capital Constantinople was the hub of the cultural world from its foundation as capital around 33AD until its conquest by the Turks in the fifteenth century. This was the first essentially Christian art, dedicated to the service of the Church and to the illustration and expression of that faith...It is an art where a certain degree of abstraction prevailed, and where the rhythmical or spiritual basis of a composition was more important than resemblance to nature. It was nevertheless a figurative art... It was a sophisticated art and a complex art depending for its appeal principally on the attraction of color and intuitive qualities of design." (David Talbot Rice, Art of the Byzantine Era, Frederick A. Praeger, New York). These statements apply very much to the nave aisle windows, in the traditional technique. The colored glass joined by strips of grooved lead. Here are presented episodes in the life of Christ. On the Gospel side are Christ's Baptism, the Transfiguration, and the Crucifixion. On the Epistle Side are the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Great Commission. We begin at the rear, on the Gospel side, with the Nativity.

THE NATIVITY



The Holy Family is visited by the Shepherds and kings. While these events are separated in the biblical narrative the artist is freed from such literalism and can create a composite picture allowing many facets of the event to be present simultaneously.

CHRIST'S BAPTISM



Under the, descending dove of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and John appear standing in the water of the Jordan River. John baptizes Jesus -with water poured from an scallop shell while the voice from heaven proclaims "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The fish swimming at their feet, an early Christian symbol, here represents baptized Christians in the church to come.

THE TRANSFIGURATION



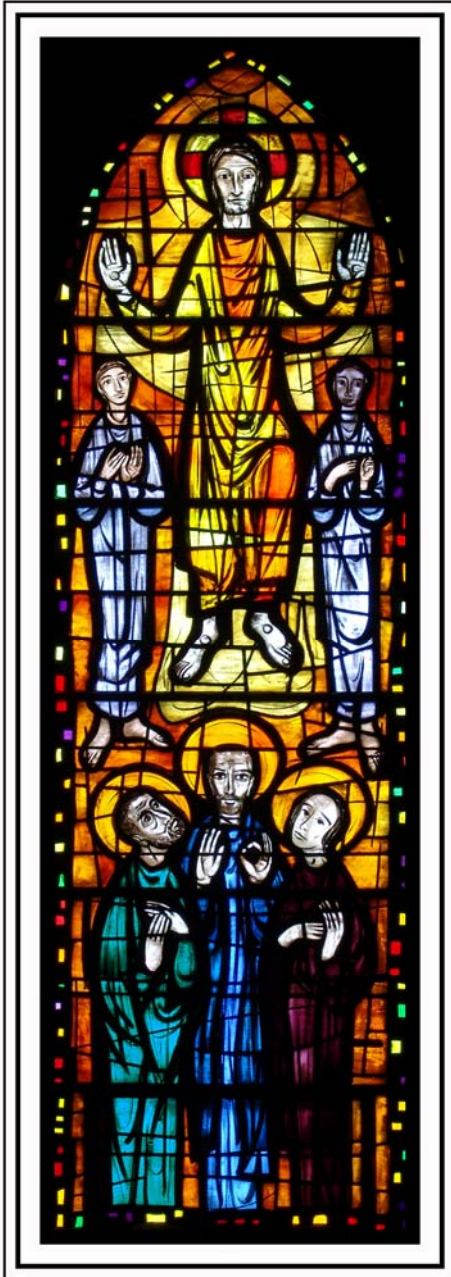
Christ arrayed in glistening white is flanked by Moses and Elijah. Moses holds the tablets of the law and Elijah his symbol, a raven. Below, Peter, James and John kneel in amazement.

THE CRUCIFIXION



The crucified Christ, vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the worlds hangs between his mother, Mary, and the beloved disciple, John, to whom he commended her saying, "Behold thy Mother!"

THE ASCENSION

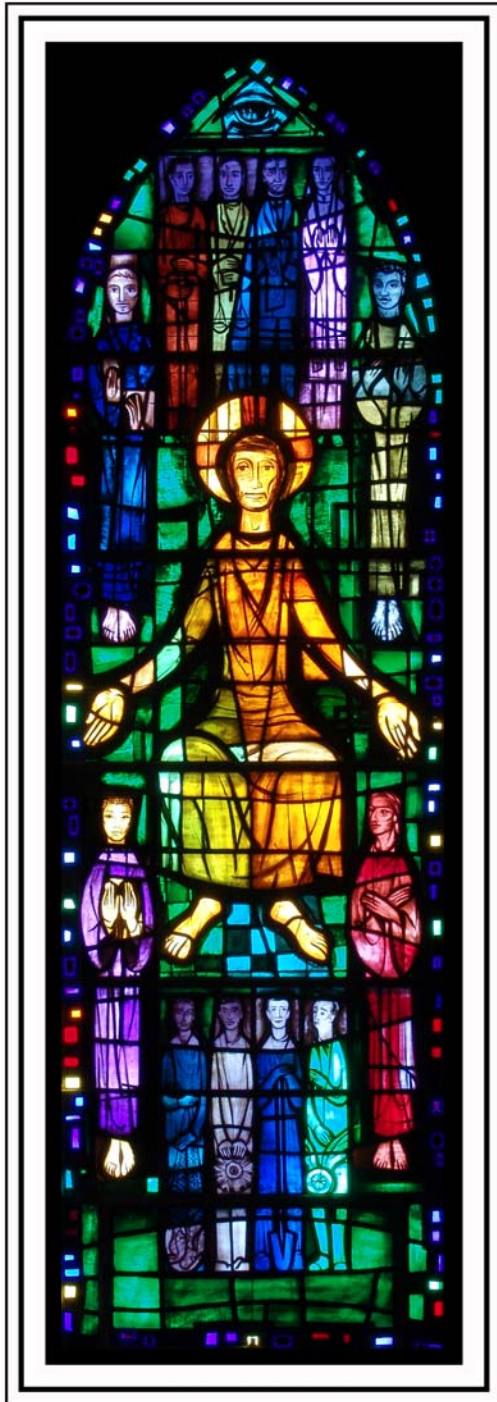


Christ, after promising to send the Holy Ghost to, guard and guide his infant Church, was taken up into heaven. Two men in white apparel, asked, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Below are Peter, James, and John, three of the company who were to carry on His work.

PENTECOST



As he promised, Christ sent the Holy Spirit, shown here as the dove descending toward the faithful gathered in the upper room on the feast of Pentecost, Eleven disciples are shown.



THE GREAT COMMISSION

Before his Ascension, Christ met with his Disciples to give them a message "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) In this window (instead of the eleven disciples) Christ is surrounded by men all eras and all walks of life, for this command is given to all Christians throughout past ages, in the present, and for the ongoing Church.

These two windows predate the Willet Stained Glass Windows that were installed in the late 1960s.



ANNUNCIATION

RESURRECTION

