

Windows of Grace

*Do not then believe only what the eyes of your body tell you.
What is not seen is here more truly seen,
for what is seen belongs to time
but what is not seen belongs to eternity.
What is not comprehended
by the eyes but is seen by the mind and the soul
is seen in a truer and deeper sense.*

“On the Mysteries” by St. Ambrose, bishop, circa 387 A.D.

Windows of Grace

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Preface

Since the building of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Omaha, Nebraska, priests and worshipers have recognized the treasure of art found in the stained glass windows throughout the church. These windows are not just decorations nor merely colored glass changing sunlight into dazzling hues as it splashes in the sanctuary. And the windows contain more than just pictures of biblical people. Filled with symbols and designs they add a deeper meaning to what is seen. They are true works of art, instruments of meditation and inspiration which carry the viewer from the current moment back in time to key historical events when God's grace showered upon the Earth – changing it forever.

Each and every window is an integral part of an extraordinary collection – a collection which traces some of God's great acts of mercy in His plan of salvation for humanity: a plan centered on Jesus Christ. This collection of windows – and now this book – can make those events and that grace available to anyone who takes the time to ponder their meaning; that is, to “pray” these works of art. By doing so, anyone can be drawn into the mystery of God's grace at work in the history of salvation.

Holy Cross Parish is truly grateful to those who helped make this book possible.

♦ Fr. Ron Wasikowski for sharing his talents and art background making the windows come alive and reveal the depth of their meaning.

♦ Mr. Tom Kessler for his photography of the windows which provide a stunning view of their true beauty.

♦ Members of the committee at Holy Cross Church who tirelessly shared their talents, time and determination to see this project through to completion despite several obstacles and setbacks.

Fr. Carl Salanitro
Pastor, Holy Cross Church



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Introduction

From time immemorial, people of every culture and country have found great insight to their beliefs through works of art. Long before writing and reading became the norm, religious art informed both believers and non-believers. Whether through cave paintings, frescoes on walls of catacombs, statuary or stained glass windows, religious art is always meant to engage the viewer. As such the artistic merit or value is not the prime issue; religious art is first and foremost a work of faith. The artist tries to express some inner understanding, conviction or insight; some marvel, question or struggle...all with a goal of drawing others into similar reflection, and ultimately deeper belief. The artist invites the viewer to begin where (s)he has ended.

Therefore, religious art grew to serve the largely illiterate public through precise and literal visual images. For example, the Cathedral of Chartres (France) has been called a “Bible in stone” because of the multiple sculptures illustrating events in the Old and New Testaments. The basic vocabulary of visual arts is that of symbolism, just as words are the vocabulary of language and individual notes the basis of music. The technical term for the study and identification of images is iconography, originating from the Greek *eikon*, meaning image.

In addition, there remains within the human spirit a need for beauty! Religious art by nature inspires and uplifts, drawing viewers far beyond the limits that life all too often imposes.

Holy Cross Church of Omaha, Nebraska, is the home for the stained glass windows of this book, which serve as fertile ground for reflection. Each window gives rise to three different but interrelated parts, being interwoven freely:

Scripture texts: these may have prompted a particular stained glass window or may flow from the scene depicted. Read the texts slowly, thoughtfully, allowing the words to speak for themselves; pause whenever so moved, for the words may long to dig deeply within.

Artistic information: Christian art speaks a definite “language” through the use of symbol, color, gesture, placement, etc. These facts may help in understanding the portrayal and open the viewer to further insights.

One reflection upon the event, person or scene is presented. Any number of other meditations may be drawn from each window; here, one is presented only as example.

As spiritual experience with a particular work of art matures, it may become like a quiet, pleasant chapel one can visit at any time!

An Approach

Perhaps the best way to spend time with these windows is through prayer. The windows are complex and will reveal themselves slowly, with insights building one upon another until connections and a cumulative effect start to break through. If at all possible, spend several sessions with the same window before moving on to the next. What follows is one of many formats that may facilitate prayer.

- ◆ Begin by closing your eyes; relax, take some deep cleansing breaths.
- ◆ Repeat these words of Samuel, slowly, softly, several times over: “*Speak, Yahweh, your servant is listening.*” (1 Samuel 3:10)
- ◆ Gaze at the photo of the window for at least 10 minutes, allowing your eyes to roam the piece freely. Focus upon one aspect or another only as your attention seems to be drawn to it purposefully.
- ◆ While gazing, try to remain reverently open to the experience of God. Typically, heartbeat and respiration rates drop as you become more peaceful.
- ◆ Watchful silence is the first key to hearing what God may wish to offer. Details often reveal themselves before meanings coalesce; this is normal. If something puzzles or appears incongruous, be patient for resolution may appear slowly. Write down any insights that may arise.
- ◆ When finished, close with words of gratitude and praise; something so simple as: “*Thanks be to You, O Lord, for You are good; Your love is everlasting!*” (adapted from Daniel 3:89)



David Youngest Son of Jesse



Of all the stained glass windows in Holy Cross Church, only two focus on Old Testament figures, both anticipating the coming of the long-predicted, long-awaited Messiah.

This first scene introduces David; artistically, a Hogarth curve (an “S” line of design) draws the viewer through his life and legacy. Beginning at the bottom, follow David:

As a youth, slayer of the giant of a man, Goliath.

“A champion stepped out from the Philistine ranks; his name was Goliath, from Gath; he was six cubits and one span tall. On his head was a bronze helmet and he wore a breastplate of scale-armor; the breastplate weighed five thousand shekels of bronze. He had bronze greaves on his legs...”

(I Samuel 17:4-5)

David “...took his stick in his hand, selected five smooth stones from the river bed, put them in his shepherd’s bag, in his pouch, then, sling in his hand he walked towards the Philistine.” (17:40) “Putting his hand in his bag, he took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead; the stone penetrated his forehead and he fell on his face downwards on the ground...(David) had no sword in his hand. David ran and stood over the Philistine, seized his sword, pulled it from the scabbard, despatched him and cut off his head.” (17:49-51)

The curve of Goliath’s bent knees, torso, crooked right arm with extended sword lead the eye to the foot of:

As king, the lion of Judah. King David stands before the Ark of the Covenant. Two angels guard the Ark, the sacred chest in which Moses placed the



Commandments of Yahweh and remnants of manna. Long before this scene the Ark had become synonymous with the presence of God in the midst of the people.

The king brings the Ark of God “to the city of David. When the bearers of the Ark of Yahweh had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fat sheep. And David danced whirling round before Yahweh with all his might....” (2 Samuel 6:12b-14)

David is often credited with beginning the so-called Golden Age of Israel. Here the sweep of David’s robes, his arched back with both arms upraised draw the viewer higher, to focus on the Ark itself, and another major symbol of Jewish heritage:

As the Star of David, representing the lineage that ultimately leads to “...a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David....” (Luke 1:27)

This star signifies the number seven, i.e. six points plus the center. In the Jewish symbol system, seven has long been considered the number of perfect order, for after creating the world, God rested on the seventh day. It is placed atop the capital of a large column, no doubt in reference to the Temple that David’s son, Solomon would erect.



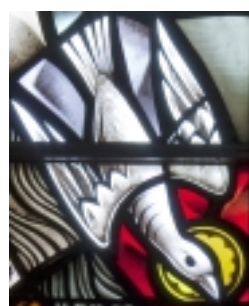
As I pray with this window, I feel a great sense of hope. This scene tells of David’s accomplishments, the highlights of his life. If asked “tell me about David,” most people would answer with one of the stories here presented: David and Goliath, a tale of innocence and valor. Then they may remember David and Bathsheba, relating weakness, failure and sin. Other than Jesus, David is probably the one character in scripture whose life is laid most bare; David’s humanity opens before us with all its strengths and shortcomings. Throughout 1 & 2 Samuel, we read of his call and anointing, being a shepherd, dancing with abandon before the Ark; his plotting to dispose of Uriah, his utter grief at the death of his son (who can forget his gut-wrenching cry: “My son Absalom! My son! My son Absalom. If only I had died instead of you! Oh Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 19:1)), repentance, pursuit by Saul....we know so much, one life played out before us. The point is clear: God is at work in and through it all, which gives me, with my gifts and talents, my failures, sins and flaws, real hope.

*“The wicked man flees when no one is pursuing,
the upright is bold as a lion....”*

*The wicked do not know what justice means,
those who seek Yahweh understand everything.”*
(Proverbs 28:1,5)



The Root of Jesse & Gifts of the Holy Spirit



This is the first time that a dove, the traditional sign of the presence of God's Spirit, is depicted. Here the activity of the Spirit is manifested in three distinct ways:

Speaking through the prophets, represented by Isaiah. At the lower left is a glowing ember held by tongs, recalling the passage: *"Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding in his hand a live coal which it had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. With this it touched my mouth and said: 'Look, this has touched your lips, your guilt has been removed, and your sin forgiven.' I then heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here I am, send me.'"* (Isaiah 6:6-9)

Guiding the History of Salvation. *"After forty years, he deposed him and raised up David to be king, whom he had attested in these words, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will perform my entire will.' To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance ..."* (Acts 13:22-24)



It is the young boy Jesus shown as the final shoot atop this Jesse Tree.

Bestowing the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: “...on him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight (under-

standing), the spirit of counsel and power (fortitude), the spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh;” (Isaiah 11:2) In the Septuagint, godliness (piety) was listed in place of the first mention of the “fear of the Lord,” bringing the total number to seven, which biblically stands for plenitude, fullness, perfection.

In this window Isaiah looks to the “flower” of the Tree of Jesse, i.e. Jesus. In religious art, a halo always indicates the holiness of a person; a cruciform halo such as this, is reserved for the Christ alone, reminding believers that salvation comes precisely through the cross.

Jesse, the progenitor of this family tree (pictured in the lower right) has completed his part in the history of salvation, giving his son, David, to Samuel for anointing. Here he looks tired and spent, but continues to cling to the Tree, continues to hope.

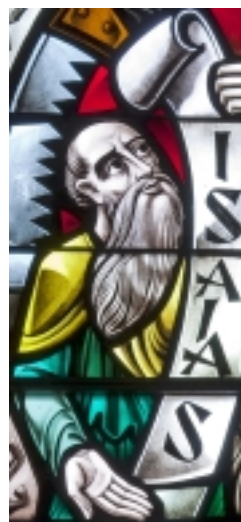
In gazing upon this rich scene, notice there is a typo, a misspelling; look closely to find it....



An “n” is missing from the gift of “understanding.” Has the artist made a mistake? Or might there be purpose to this “error”? When tracking the “Family Tree of Jesus” (Matthew 1:1-17), quite a few

“less-than-exemplary” (to say the least) ancestors of Jesus appear: e.g. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, thus cheating his brother, Esau, of his birthright; David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife, the woman with whom David committed adultery, and who manipulated Uriah’s death; Ahaz copied “the disgusting practices of the nations whom Yahweh had dispossessed for the Israelites.” (2 Kings 16:3); etc.

Could it be that God works with, in spite of, and even through human imperfection to bring about salvation? Is biological heritage even relevant when it comes to the “children of God”?



A final word about Isaiah, who stands with a saw at his back; in religious art, the identity of saints can often be known through items they hold in their hands, are placed at their feet, or may be arranged near or touching the person depicted. If martyred, the instrument of torture and death is the item of choice. Such is the case here as tradition holds that Isaiah was martyred during the reign of King Manasseh, who accused him of treason. The means of death used? Isaiah was sawed in half.

Isaiah was sawed in half.

As I pray with this window, I’m acutely aware of my hesitancy (if not dislike) to being a “good receiver.” Time and again we’re told that God loves a cheerful giver, that it’s better to give than receive...but the truth is really quite different: God has so much to offer, God wants to, is ready to fill me with gifts beyond my wildest dreams, if only I might be humble enough to accept. I need to admit that I don’t deserve such generosity, I can never earn nor merit such treasures; but God gives anyway. All I can do is be thankful. Accept with the deep gratitude and seek to use wisely and well all that God has shared.

*My child, if you take my words to heart,
if you set store by my commandments,
tuning your ear to wisdom, tuning your heart
to understanding
yes, if your plea is for clear perception,
if you cry out for understanding,
if you look for it as though for silver,
search for it as though for buried treasure,
then you will understand what the fear of Yahweh is,
and discover the knowledge of God.
For Yahweh himself is giver of wisdom,
from his mouth issue knowledge and understanding...
He reserves his advice for the honest,
a shield to those whose ways are sound;
he stands guard over the paths of equity,
he keeps watch over the way of those faithful to him.
Then you will understand what uprightness is, equity,
and fair dealing,
the paths that lead to happiness.
(Proverbs 2:1-9)*

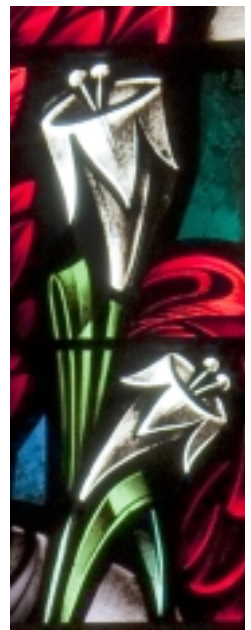
The Annunciation

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.”
(Luke 1:26-27)

If a picture speaks a thousand words, then this scene screams a million. So very many of the symbols associated with Mary have been included:

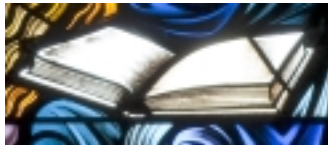
Lilies, the major floral sign of Mary: here they appear in a vase, in the hand of the angel Gabriel, and as fleur de lis at the top of each panel.

The unicorn: Honorius of Autun, a 12th c. theologian, wrote “In order to catch it (a unicorn), a virgin is put in a field; the animal comes to her and is caught because it lies down in her lap.” Thus Mary conceives Jesus, who lay down in the womb of the Virgin.



A fountain: *“Fountain of the garden, well of living water, streams flowing down from Lebanon.”* (Song of Songs 4:15) This fountain is surrounded by a bower of roses, roses without thorns (i.e. sin) for Mary, the Mystical Rose.

A scroll with the words of Gabriel, straddling and uniting this diptych (two-panel) scene.



The book in Mary’s lap, which when open symbolically connotes wisdom being shared.

So much symbolism swirling everywhere raises the question, what’s the focus? Certainly, many of the images point directly at Mary: the horn of the unicorn, the right wing and arm of Gabriel, the encompassing rays of light, the encircling of the scroll. But how does Mary react, being this center of attention? Look at her face and decide where she herself is looking: at the angel Gabriel or the dove, the Spirit of God so very close to her? The question must be answered:

What is more important, the messenger or the message?

What is more momentous, the vessel or that which is poured into it?

It is curious that the key words of Gabriel’s announcement are not quoted in this window:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.”
(Luke 1:35)

Here Mary appears to get it right, as she and the Spirit are wrapped in their own intimate exchange, oblivious to their surroundings; all else is irrelevant to what God is doing. Through it all, imagine Mary quietly mouthing the words:

*Send out your breath and life begins;
you renew the face of the earth.
Glory to Yahweh for ever!
May Yahweh find joy in his creatures....*
(Psalm 104:30-31)

As I pray with this window, how often do I get lost in the swirl of details and activity, losing sight of the essence of my life?! Multi-tasking, two or three jobs, caring for children and/or aging parents...life is demanding, time-consuming...all being good in and of themselves, but am I so busy that I don’t think about, much less draw strength from, the “why” of doing these things, why they matter? Lord, I need You...I need to focus on You, for You are my “why.”



*Avert my eyes from pointless images,
by your words give me life.*
(Psalm 119:37)



St. Joseph

Three sources of information concerning this often-overlooked yet so-important saint are here combined:



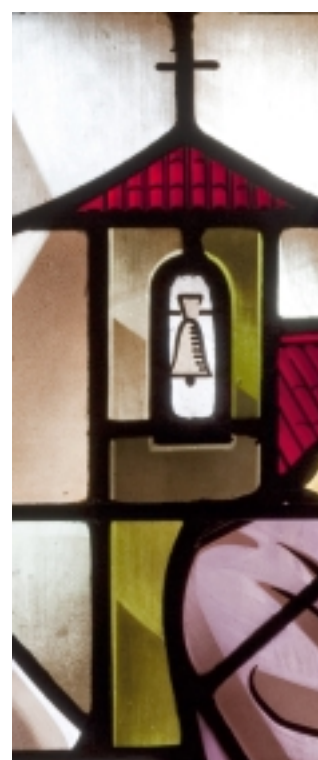
Scripture – “...the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit...’” (Matthew 1:20)

Apocrypha (writings of questionable authenticity) –

Joseph holds a flowering rod (or branch) in his hand, the “miraculous sign” which appeared when

choosing who was to be the husband of Mary, as told in Protevangelium of James.

Papal decree – Pius IX “...assenting to the desires and prayers of the whole Catholic world, has proclaimed (Joseph) patron of the Universal Church. (Roman Martyrology) As a result, Joseph is often pictured with a church building in close proximity.



The pivotal description of this man Joseph is found in Matthew 1:18-19: “...*before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him...*” Recall that according to the law of the Israelites, Joseph had every right to denounce Mary: “...*she must be taken out, and at the door of her father’s house her fellow citizens must stone her to death for having committed an infamy in Israel by bringing disgrace to her father’s family.*” (Deuteronomy 22:21)

Joseph’s integrity, righteousness and compassion move him to action, opening himself to God’s will through his dreams of angels.

Jesus is directly referred to as the “son of Joseph” twice in the gospel of John (1:45 and 6:42) and once in Luke (4:22), but also rather enigmatically in Luke 3:23: “*When he began, Jesus was about thirty years old, being the son, as it was thought, of Joseph....*” Mary however affords him full parental rights when finally locating the boy Jesus “*in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions.*” She says to Jesus, “*My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried **your father** and I have been....*” (Luke 2:46-48)

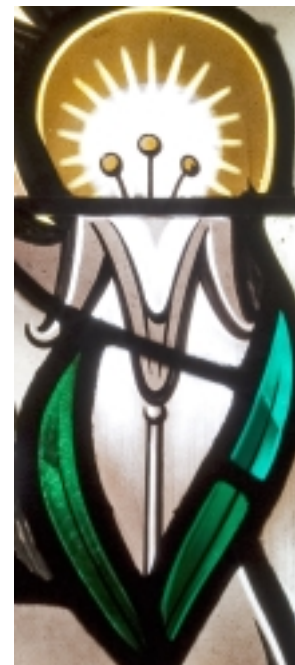
In this depiction, Joseph’s flowering staff is the companion bloom to the stylized lily at the side of the angel, and symbolically the two become one. In spite of his important role in the maturing boy Jesus, Joseph seems always to be “in the background,” whether in crib scene placement, honor afforded to Mary, or presence in the life of Jesus, for the presumption is that he died sometime after the Finding in the Temple, for Joseph appears no more in the gospels.

As I pray with this window, I’m struck by this model of faith and perseverance. When I’m overshadowed or no one seems to be noticing, Joseph inspires me. Apparently he was content with what God had chosen for him, and quietly, with great dedication cooperated as best he could. With little if any recognition, Joseph could easily proclaim with the best, “*We are useless servants: we have done no more than our duty.*” (Luke 17:10) Well done, Joseph! And may I do the right thing just because it’s the right thing to do.

How blessed those whom you choose and invite to dwell in your courts.

You respond to us with the marvels of your saving justice, God our savior.

(Psalm 65: 4a,5a)



The Visitation of the Shepherds

“In the countryside close by there were shepherds....An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, ‘Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord....the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us’. So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.”

(Luke 2:8-16)

The artist of this window seems to include everything possible about the birth of Jesus, not only from scripture but also from popular tradition:

The “*David’s town called Bethlehem*” in the background, where Joseph and Mary journeyed for the census “*since he was of David’s House and line....*”

(Luke 2:4)



The scroll proclaiming that while there “*her days were accomplished.*” (Luke 2:6)

A manger in which Mary “*laid him...because there was no room for them in the living-space.*” (Luke 2:7)

The dove (Spirit), “*...she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 1:18)

The ox and the donkey, definitely not scriptural but included with every crèche set.

A single shepherd to “*see this event that the Lord has made known to us.*” (Luke 2:15)

In the midst of these diverse bits and pieces of the birth narrative, there is a variety of color: reds, yellows and blue for the people and symbols displayed. The one unifying element in this diptych is the color green, traditionally the color of hope, regeneration and fertility.

Within this green space, the three major characters interplay: the lone shepherd and Christ Child gaze at each other, exchanging gestures, one ready to doff his cap and the other with an extended arm in blessing. They seem to speak volumes silently.



Meanwhile Mary has her head and eyes cast down, deferring to the interaction of the two. Could the artist be subtly including an earlier reflection of Mary:



“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me.” (Luke 1:46-50)

In the midst of so many symbols and such riotous color, she quietly recognizes the “*greatness of the Lord*” and that of “*his servant.*” John the Baptist later echoes this opposition when he declares about the Christ to come: “*He must grow greater, I must grow less.*” (John 3:30)

As I pray with this window, I’m challenged to ask myself: as I age, as I grow deeper in my faith (hopefully), do I honestly see myself “*decreasing,*” letting go of my “*self*” so that Christ might be more fully present and have free reign within me? How big is my ego...and how much, how often must it be fed? Faith, lived rightly, is so countercultural!

*To you I pray, Yahweh.
At daybreak you hear my voice;
at daybreak I lay my case before you,
and fix my eyes on you. (Psalm 5:3)*



The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

“And when the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice ...a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him....he took him (the child) into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

‘Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace, just as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel.’ As the child’s father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Look; he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed – and a sword will pierce your soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.’



There was a prophetess, too, Anna...She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:22-38)

This depiction of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is rather straightforward, a literal interpretation of the text. The color red ties together all the characters and details:

Simeon in his red cloak, holding the Child Jesus and pronouncing his prophecy
Anna, the prophetess surrounded in red
Mary demure in profile, with a halo of crimson
The heart pierced with a sword, blazing red before a field of red, the first of Mary's seven sorrows

Finally, the red flame of the **burning torch**, symbolizing Jesus as "a light of revelation for the Gentiles," (Luke 2:32) boldly emblazoned.



The hierarchy of characters is interesting: Jesus, even at such a young age, is shown giving His blessing while being held by Simeon who has just spoken. Down the steps is Mary, with Joseph partially hidden by the full figure of Mary. And beneath

them is Anna, in three-quarters size compared to the others. The symbolic heart pierced by the sword is so obviously out of proportion that it cannot but draw attention; in addition, the key characters' positions form a semi-circle around it.

And note the facial directions: only Mary and Jesus are interacting, looking squarely at each other, while Simeon, Joseph and Anna appear to be considering their own thoughts: Simeon might be thinking, "yes, Master, you may take me now"; Joseph looks as if to say, "such amazing things being said"; and Anna, "undoubtedly this is the one!"

As I pray with this window, the two doves in the small cage draw my attention. This couple willingly bows to the dictates of the Law, offering grateful sacrifice to God at the birth of their son, or for Joseph, his foster son. Humility is necessary for me to concede to the dictates of others, especially when I don't agree with the law, or feel exempt, or have the attitude: "surely there's a loop hole." I ponder the meaning of the word/concept: assent – to give or express my concurrence, acquiescence, or compliance.

*Keep me far from the way of deceit,
grant me the grace of your Law.
I have chosen the way of constancy,
I have moulded myself to your judgements.
(Psalm 119:29-30)*



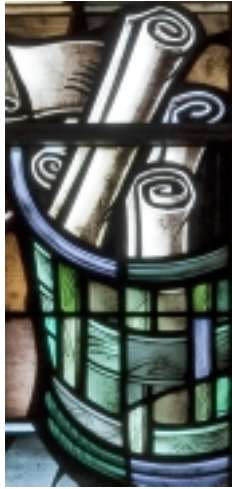
Finding the boy Jesus in the Temple

“When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it....When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. It happened that, three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, ‘My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.’ He replied ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he meant.” (Luke 2:42-50)

Since this is the only story the gospels offer that speaks of the time between the infancy of Jesus and His public ministry, it must be important. And yet, it is sometimes misinterpreted; a careful reading of the text states that the boy Jesus was “listening” and “asking questions,” not teaching the doctors of the law, as is

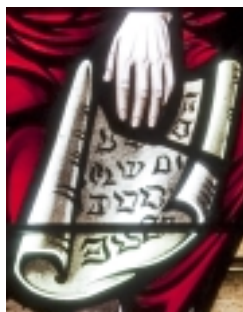


often assumed. Here, the five characters other than Jesus are either looking straight at Him or seemingly lost in their own thoughts, perhaps pondering what has just been exchanged.



In the Temple, much discussion must have taken place, represented by the basket of scrolls on the floor, one open scroll on a railing, and even one of the teachers with his hand on the dowel of a scroll (could that indicate a Torah?). Note that Jesus is the only one with an open scroll of printed text. In Matthew's gospel shortly after beginning His public ministry, Jesus states:

“Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them.”
(Matthew 5:17)



His later disputes with the Pharisees were often directed to their excessive legalism and the ways they had found to circumvent the true meaning of the Law, implying that human traditions were more important than the divine will itself.

In keeping with their exchange, Jesus seems focused on two of the major symbols of His Jewish faith, the Star of David, which grounds the people in their ancestral heritage, and the Menorah, one of their oldest symbols, used in the Temple to emphasize the mission of the Hebrews, to be a *“light to the nations.”* (Isaiah 42:6). Further bonding this interaction is use of color, a red drape flowing from the symbols exactly matches the tunic of Jesus; nowhere else in this scene does even the hint of the color red appear. The artist seems to be saying that Jesus is firmly rooted in His Judaism.

And so within the context of remaining behind, worrying His father and mother, we find Jesus steeped in the truth of His traditions...but it was not yet His time. The text of Luke continues:

“He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people.”

(Luke 2:51-52)

As I pray with this window, my thoughts turn to Jesus at the age of twelve telling his parents that He must be busy with His Father's affairs; it causes me to marvel at both His insight and acceptance of who He is and what He is called to do. And I ask myself: am I now...have I ever been so focused, so whole-heartedly engrossed in my vocation, the mission and life-style that the Father has given to me (whether marriage, the single or religious life)? And further: what practices help to keep me focused and/or nurture my vocation; conversely, what behaviors distract or lead me away, what starves my vocation? By becoming consciously aware of such aids to my living, as well as such hindrances, I can use the former all the more and seek to let go the latter.

*You created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb;
for so many marvels I thank you:
a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.*
(Psalm 139:13-14)





The Baptism of Jesus

“The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, ‘Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It was of him that I said: Behind me comes one who has passed ahead of me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet my purpose in coming to baptize with water was so that he might be revealed to Israel.’ And John declared, ‘I saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven and rest on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit.” I have seen and I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.’” (John 1:29-34)

Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan may be found in all four gospels, but John’s description (above) is perhaps the richest.

The classic symbols of baptism are all present:

John, the Baptizer, dressed in coarse camel hair, staff in hand with banner flying, pouring water, is not the central figure.

The dove, Spirit of God, appears simple and unassuming in this depiction; no halo, not surrounded by fire, just the quiet presence of God within the event.

Fish: often used to represent Christ Himself. In this context these two emphasize that water is essential to the life of fish, so too is baptism for redemption.

The anchor from the earliest days of Christianity symbolized both the crucifixion as well as the hope of salvation to which it leads.

And, of course, **water**.

In almost all artists’ interpretation of this event, whether in two- or three-dimensional media, Jesus stands full body, straight-forward facing His viewers as He does here. “This is me, this is who I am,” He seems to be saying. Though the voice from heaven speaks *“This is my Son, the Beloved...”* (Matthew 3:17), Jesus proclaims His humanity, too. When John tries to dissuade Him from being baptized, Jesus replies, *“Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that uprightness demands.”* (Matthew 3:14-15)

In this window, it is the water that fascinates! It begins from the shell in John’s hand, increases in volume behind the back of Jesus, swirls around His right side to inundate the lower section of the scene, as if to wash beyond the window itself, flowing out to those who pause to contemplate. Everyone is meant to be cleansed, refreshed, even overwhelmed with the presence of Christ.

Paul surely knew this feeling when he first wrote to the Corinthians (15:44b-49):

“If there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body too. So the first man, Adam, as scripture says, became a living soul; and the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. But first came the natural body, not the spiritual one; that came only afterwards. The first man, being made of earth, is earthly by nature; the second man is from heaven. The earthly man is the pattern for earthly people, the heavenly man for heavenly ones. And as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so we shall bear the likeness of the heavenly one.”

As I pray with this window, I recall some background history to this one in particular. A memo issued by Harold Rambusch (Rambusch Decorating Co. of New York) stated that the “pastor (Msgr. E. J. Appelbaum) is unhappy with the Baptistry window...It is the general design he considers faulty....” It seems an earlier sketch had plain, clear glass surrounding a much smaller central picture, while this final, selected design has the water seeking to inundate the viewer. This memo was dated January 11, 1955, more than nine years prior to the document Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Pre-Vatican II baptismal theology stressed ministerial priesthood, viewing only the ordained as alter Christus, “another Christ,” that Jesus as Head of his Church acts through them in their ministering of sacraments. With the Council (1962-1965), this was balanced with the complementary understanding of the Church first and foremost in terms of the baptized as the People of God. The Council drew attention to the priesthood of the Faithful whereby each of the baptized can be understood as “another Christ.” As members of His Body, they act in His name to bring the Gospel and His love to the world. Was there a prophet in our midst, a pastor who saw the reality of something forgotten? God so often uses instruments not anticipated....

*As a deer yearns for running streams,
so I yearn for you, my God.
Deep is calling to deep by the roar of your cataracts;
all your waves and breakers, have rolled over me.*
(Psalm 42:1,7)



The Temptation of Jesus

“Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, ‘If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf’. But Jesus replied, ‘Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone’.

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, ‘I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me and it shall all be yours.’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Scriptures says: You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone must you serve’.

Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the Temple. ‘If you are Son of God,’ he said to him, ‘throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He has given his angels in order about you to guard you, and again: They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone’. But Jesus answered him, ‘Scripture says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test’.

Having exhausted every way of putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment.” (Luke 4:1-13)

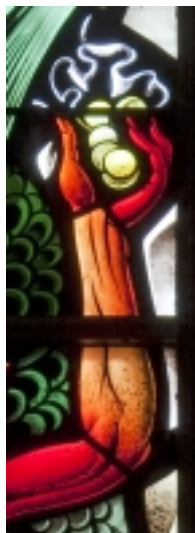
Satan (the Hebrew term literally means “Adversary”) has been portrayed variously throughout the scriptures:

As a serpent (Genesis 3:1-15), engaging the woman to reconsider what God has asked of her

In Job (1:6+), “...*the Sons of God came to attend on Yahweh, and among them came Satan,*” i.e. one of God’s council members with the assigned task of testing

Revelation (12:9) states “*The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan...*” i.e. the antithesis of God and all things righteous

Here, the depiction of Satan is pure medieval imagining: a red semi-human torso, with long, tapered fingers, goat-like ears and horns, bat-like wings, and in his left hand (traditionally, the left side of the body is considered “unclean,” from which comes the Latin “sinistra,” with the English “sinister” entering the language) a bag of money. Not only is money proclaimed as the root of all evil, but in Christianity it is also one of the instruments of Jesus’ Passion, since Judas betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver. In this window, such a small item becomes both a temptation and an omen of things to come.



Conversely, Jesus’ entire body is shown as being fully human, one of us. The color of His garment consists of various shades of blue; blue is the traditional color used to represent heaven, divinity, with dark blue typically reserved for Christ alone. The mountain ledges upon which Jesus stands are of vivid green, the color which symbolizes the joining of heaven and earth. Combining these details there is Jesus, fully human yet fully divine, the union of everything earthly and all that is heavenly.

If as the poets say “the eyes are the windows of the soul,” the gaze of both Jesus and Satan are quite revealing. Jesus looks straight at His tempter, confronting this adversary directly. There’s no sign of hesitation or reticence, His focus is riveting. On the other hand, Satan looks downward, as if fearing the glance of his opponent, as if unable to cope with such intensity. In fact his eyes are almost closed, hidden by his eyelids.



Some details to note: the eight crowns represent “*the kingdoms of all the world*” dismissed by Jesus, four grounded on earth and four indicating the heavens. The number eight itself symbolizes regeneration, because in drawing the shape of an eight, the pen never leaves paper but can remain eternally in motion. By extension, the kingdoms of the world will continue to come and go, while Jesus lives in the world but not of the world. The pale angel behind Jesus is one of many who stand ready to “*guard you...and carry you*” if He should need; obviously, this angel remains in the background.

As I pray with this window, I have the sincere desire that whenever I am being tempted, I can move to the position of this angel. I mean, when temptation comes my way, I can choose from a variety of responses: ignore it, hoping it goes away; embrace it, letting it carry me off; resist it as best I can, knowing ultimately I will fail; or I can proclaim: “I am helpless! Left alone I will give in! Lord, may I stand behind You, to watch You confront this evil?” It’s an attitude that embraces the doxology we add after each praying of the “Our Father” at Mass: “For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours, now and forever.” I admit: “if I hope to enter the heavenly Kingdom, it will happen only because of Your power, Lord; therefore the glory belongs solely to You. You conquer all, so handle this for me.” This response places me in the position of the angel, in awe of what Jesus accomplishes when I stand aside.

*You are a refuge for me,
you guard me in trouble,
with songs of deliverance you surround me.
(Psalm 32:7)*



The Wedding Feast at Cana

“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ Jesus said, ‘Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.’ His mother said to the servant, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water,’ and they filled them to the brim.”

(John 2:1-7)

Reading this window as it is, no one yet realizes the outcome of the story, for this scene depicts the moments surrounding the miraculous change of water into wine. The key characters are all present:

Mary, holding an empty pitcher, looking to her Son.

Jesus, not returning her look has a facial expression as if to say “it is not yet my time.”



The servant filling the fifth of the stone jars; four already brimming, two to go.



The groom embracing his new wife with his right arm, extends his cup, awaiting wine.

The horrified **wine steward**, knowing the wine has run out, has

the look of "what am I to do now? It's all gone!"

This is a moment of transition, the first of Jesus' "signs" is in fact happening. In John's gospel "signs" certainly encourage belief, but more importantly they reveal Christ for who/what He really is, they show His true character. Consider the significance of this scene: the guests had gathered, completed their ritual washings, and only then, after fulfilling all requirements, entered worthily to partake of the feast. The empty jars would stand as silent reminders that no one could join the joy of a wedding celebration without purification.

Jesus is about to reveal that He is the true bridegroom, willing and wanting to initiate the relationship which surpasses ritual washings, the genuine marriage between God and all humanity. Water symbolizes promise, no longer needed, while wine signifies fulfillment. The word of Jesus effects a change, for with the presence of Jesus the heavenly feast has begun. After all, in a companion text to this wedding feast at Cana, we hear this discussion:

"They then said to him, 'John's disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees too, but yours go on eating and drinking'. Jesus replied, 'Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then, in those days, they will fast.'"
(Luke 5:33-35)

The bridegroom is with us; the true Bridegroom is here. Let the feasting begin!

But there's one character in this scene not yet identified: who is the pale, shadowy figure behind the couple? For a possible answer and a rich reflection, turn to the parable of the ten bridesmaids. Recall that all ten took their lamps to meet the bridegroom, but as he was long in arriving, they began to sleep. Upon awaking, their lamps were going out; five had brought extra oil while five were unprepared. While they were gone seeking a merchant to sell them oil, the bridegroom arrived and moved on to the feast. The story concludes with: *"Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. 'Lord, Lord,' they said 'open the door for us.' But he replied, 'In truth I tell you, I do not know you'. So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.'"* (Matthew 25:11-13)



As the true Bridegroom provides an abundance of wine for His guests, who might be the ones locked out, crying "Lord, Lord," but to no avail?!

As I pray with this window, I notice that the contents of the four already-filled jars is red in color, which means wine. No one (except Jesus) seems to realize this fact; each face still reflects concern: there's Mary ("I told Him, now what?"), the servant filling the jars ("why am I doing this?"), the wine steward ("how could this happen?"), and even the groom ("will I ever be served?"). And I must admit: isn't that the way the Lord typically acts! I go about my daily routines and schedule, clueless as to His presence and workings until it becomes so very obvious. Do I live with confidence that in the midst of everything, Jesus is present, calmly working things out though I remain unaware. Am I poised, ready, alert to notice? Later, do I make time to reflect, seeking to recognize how the Lord actively revealed Himself to me, to praise and thank Him?

*Great are the deeds of Yahweh,
to be pondered by all who delight in them.
Full of splendor and majesty his work,
his saving justice stand firm for ever.*
(Psalm 111:2-3)



The Transfiguration of Jesus



Context is not only helpful but vital to appreciate this scene. For quite some time Jesus had been preaching in Judea and Galilee, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In all three of the synoptic gospels, shortly before the transfiguration Peter professes that Jesus is the Messiah, followed by Jesus stating clearly that He will suffer, die and rise. This all happens in the midst of those who have waited centuries for the Messiah to come, yet most did not accept Him as such. Is He discouraged, frustrated, anxious; does fear or pain fill His being? To contemplate these questions Jesus does what He so often did: pray!

"...he took with him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. And it happened that, as he was praying, the aspect of his

face was changed and his clothing became sparkling white. And suddenly there were two men talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they woke up and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. He did not know what he was saying. As he was saying this, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.'" (Luke 9:28-35)

The glory of the Lord shines within the context of prayer! Focus on Jesus and recognize that the signs of glory are all present:

Jesus' face is turned straight to the viewer, for He has nothing to hide.

His garments are dazzlingly white.

His body is encompassed by a mandorla, an almond-shaped, elongated halo that surrounds Him; its color is red, most often associated with passion and blood. The only other place a mandorla is seen in these Holy Cross windows is embracing the "true cross" in the St. Helena scene.

Yellow rays extend to Him from above, indicating the words flow from the Father: "This is my beloved Son; hear ye Him."

Moses is surrounded by blue and Elijah is dressed in blue, the color which symbolizes heaven and truth.

Note that the artist separates the apostles from the transfigured three by a blue background space composed of triangular shapes, a subtle reference to the "tents" (the term many translations use instead of "shelters") Peter wished to erect.

Certainly, the glory of the Lord shines within the context of prayer! Peter himself recalls this event in one of his letters:

"When we told you about the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not slavishly repeating cleverly invented myths; no, we had seen his majesty with our own eyes. He was honoured and glorified by God the Father, when a voice came to him from the transcendent Glory, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour.' We ourselves heard this voice from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain."
(2 Peter 1:16-18)

As I pray with this window, I am reminded of personally experiencing "the glory of the Lord shining forth within the context of prayer." A great number of significant people (not least of which were my dad, aunt/godmother and a neighbor whom I had known all my life) died within a three-week time span. While praying for the deceased, I saw unmistakably in my mind's eye all these people, and others too, gathered with the Lord in the Communion of Saints. The sense of peace and fulfillment they conveyed I still feel right now, as I recall that event. Some may dismiss this as coincidence, overwhelming grief, even emotional exhaustion, but I know that within the context of prayer, the glory of the Lord does indeed shine forth...even to and for me.

*I look up at your heavens, shaped by your fingers,
at the moon and stars you set firm –
What are human beings that you spare a thought
for them,
or the child of Adam that you care for him?
Yet you have made him little less than a god,
You have crowned him with glory and beauty...*
(Psalm 8:3-5)



Seven Sorrows of Mary





The Seven Sorrows of Mary

“As the child’s father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed – and a sword will pierce your soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare’.” (Luke 2:33-35)

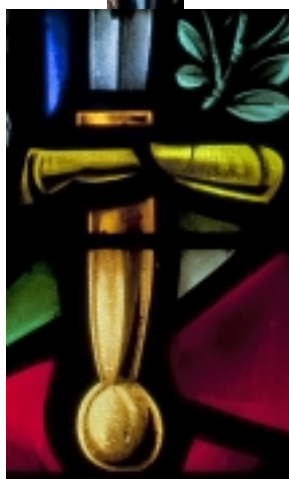
All seven of these stained glass panels are split by a lancet (sword), reaching from top to bottom, hilt and blade extending through the full length of each. A red heart with an increasing number of daggers is depicted in each. Why such “lancets”?

In multiple texts of the Old Testament, a sword is presented as a metaphor for God’s judgment (Ezekiel 5:1-2; 6:8; Wisdom 5:20), separating the wicked from the good. Isaiah in one of his “suffering servant” passages (49:2) writes: *“He made my mouth like a sharp sword....”* The New Testament builds this image: the book of Revelation (19:11-15) presents: *“And now I saw heaven open, and a white horse appear; its rider was called Trustworthy and True; in uprightness he judges and makes war....He is known by the name, The Word of God. From his mouth came a sharp sword with which to strike the unbelievers....”* And the letter to the Hebrews (4:12-13) weighs in with *“The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than*

any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from marrow; it can pass judgment on secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and stretched full open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves.” Suffice to say that the sword represents justice, and who but Jesus, the Word of God, wields it, for He is the Just One.

“Saving justice, Lord, is yours; we have only the look of shame we wear today...”
(Daniel 9:7)

The “secret thoughts” of Mary are laid bare within these windows; some interpreters consider Mary as the personification of the nation Israel, others the church, and as such she represents all people. Simeon’s words – “and a sword will pierce your soul too” - refer not only to Mary as an individual but to all of humanity. Her thoughts are our thoughts; her answers to the Word of God should be ours, too.



Before meditating upon any one panel, consider these windows together as a whole: appropriate to this Seven Sorrows series, **begin by contemplating the facial expression of Mary in each window:**

- ◆ In the Presentation scene, the profiled Mary is rapt in attention to Simeon.
- ◆ As the Holy Family flees, she seems turned inward to all that is happening.
- ◆ Next, with eyes cast down Mary's half-smile is filled with admiration, yet a sense of "letting go," as if to say "my Son is growing up, becoming His own person...." What mother hasn't felt that?!
- ◆ Again in profile, this time Mary is overwhelmed with sorrow.
- ◆ Before dying, Jesus uttered "*it is fulfilled*" (John 19:30); could Mary be groaning the same.
- ◆ The pieta moment for this Mary: like Job, is she praying "*Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!*" (Job 1:21)
- ◆ Finally as Jesus did, might Mary be feeling: "*Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34)



Look at the hands, their positions, actions, etc. in each of these seven windows:

- ◆ In the first scene, Mary embraces the sword with her while Simeon's extended palm might indicate "thus it shall be!"
- ◆ Joseph's hands in the Flight to Egypt speak exhaustion.
- ◆ The hands of the elders in the Temple move in every direction, confused.
- ◆ As Jesus meets His mother on the way to Calvary, one hand cradles this woman while the other embraces His cross.
- ◆ At the crucifixion, the hands of Mary droop as if to say "it is indeed over."
- ◆ In the embrace of her dead Son's body, there is such tenderness, one hand holding Him up while the other draws His head to her breast.
- ◆ And finally, John, the beloved disciple, grasps the shroud of Jesus as he places His dead body in the tomb.



Notice the symbols added subtly to some section of each window:

- ◆ The pair of turtledoves or young pigeons which was expected for purification.
- ◆ An olive branch near the donkey, a traditional symbol of safe travel recalling the dove's return unharmed to the ark of Noah.
- ◆ A scroll of the Torah in the hands of an elder while Jesus holds a "book."
- ◆ No symbol here, but look at the face of Jesus, surrounded by His cruciform halo, in front of the center of His cross, directly in line with the sword's blade...layer upon layer upon layer of meaning.
- ◆ The nailed right hand of Jesus...
- ◆ and the nailed left hand of Jesus.
- ◆ A stylized crown of thorns.

As I pray with these windows, I notice that panels 5, 6 and 7 are unique in the whole series of windows at Holy Cross. Crucifixion is depicted in the fifth scene, but the left hand of Jesus extends into the sixth; the body of Jesus being entombed in the seventh panel has His feet reaching back into the sixth. The artist seems to be implying that this event is too large to be contained! In iconography, whenever such "borders" of the art work are breached (i.e. going beyond the established outline or frame), holiness is present. Holiness knows no restrictions; holiness cannot be contained by conventional limits. If to be holy means to be in relationship, impacting others in ways which are good, then these windows fit the definition, for they ex-

tend into one another, they extend salvation. The logical question becomes: what about me? Do my life, my actions, my words reach above and beyond expected behavior, breaking into the lives of others for the good? Am I holy? Amen!

*Full of splendour and majesty his work,
his saving justice stands firm for ever.*
(Psalm 111:3)



**Now let each individual window
offer its own gift:**

The Presentation

Who or what is the center of attention? Joseph and Mary focus on the child Jesus, while He gazes to His left. There is interplay among these three, yet Simeon is the riveting presence, staring straight ahead; does he look at the viewer or more broadly at the whole sweep of Salvation? Simeon, obviously a devout Jew, spends his time in the Temple. He knows God's promises are trustworthy, and now holding this Jesus in his arms, he comes to accept Him as fulfillment; at last he says, feels, knows:

"Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace, as you promised;f my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations, a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel."
(Luke 2:29-32)





The Flight into Egypt

The rest of the world seems to have receded far from reality, as only the Holy Family is pictured. The dreamer Joseph looks worried, with his drawn face and furrowed brow; mother Mary just looks tired; and Jesus, young boy that He is, has a smile on His face, seemingly enjoying the adventure. Do they realize the fury of Herod after being outwitted by the Magi? Are they aware of the massacre of the innocents in Bethlehem and surrounding district? All they can do is focus on the now, fending for themselves, depending upon each other for the bare necessities of life, and trusting in the wisdom of God who told them to flee...as if to say: "This is our situation, and with the grace of God we will persevere."

Finding Jesus among the Doctors of the Law

Jesus is seated in the place of prominence, all the more emphasized by the fact that His is the only full-length body in this window (all the others are torso at best), and that His garment is brilliant red, the color of passion, blood and fire. And is this “boy Jesus” in an adolescent pose of Christ, the Pantocrator, creator of all? So much of His posture reflects this classic form of iconography: a figure of great dignity, facing front fully with an hypnotic glance, motionless, holding a book (traditionally that of the gospels, though at this point not yet written) in His left hand, and His right hand, rather than raised in a gesture of blessing, is pointing to Himself. Is this a moment when we glimpse for the first time that Jesus has a special identity, Son of God, which He will continue to reveal throughout His life? The text of Luke (2:52) which draws this event to its end, closes with the reflective words: *“And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men.”*

But there’s still a question to consider: who is the strange, eerily green figure in the upper left of this scene? Besides Jesus, there’s three doctors of the law; there’s Mary, who seems to be receding into the background both by placement in the scene as well as posture; that’s not Joseph, for there’s no resemblance to his face in the prior two windows. Does Jesus give a hint when He’s quoted as responding to His parents: *“Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* (Luke 2:49) Could the artist of this window be inferring the divine parentage of Jesus, making both His presence and influence known? Now having experienced the wisdom of Jewish tradition, does Jesus begin to express the acceptance of His Abba’s mission?





While Carrying the Cross, Jesus Meets His Mother

Only Luke's gospel tells of Jesus encountering the "daughters of Jerusalem" on His way to Calvary (Luke 23:27-32), but Mary is not mentioned. In the fourteenth century, a series of devotions called the Stations of the Cross became popular, influenced by Franciscans of the age; station number four is known as Jesus meets His sorrowing Mother. This scene brings to mind the Letter to the Romans (9:2-5), in which Paul laments the failure of his people to accept Jesus as their Savior: *"...there is great sorrow and unremitting agony in my heart: I could pray that I myself might be accursed and cut off from Christ, if this could benefit the brothers who are my own flesh and blood. They are Israelites; it was they who were adopted as children, the glory was theirs and the covenants; to them were given the Law and the worship of God and the promises. To them belong the fathers and out of them, so far as physical descent is concerned, came Christ who is above all, God, blessed forever. Amen."*

Certainly this scene testifies to Mary's sorrow! She witnesses the painful suffering and ensuing death of her Son, such personal tragedy; but she also experiences the rejection of her Son/Messiah by her own people, such communal loss. This is Mary's double grief, for her Son as well as for her people.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

As Jesus hangs on the cross, Mary is confronted with all the treasures she has pondered in her heart over the course of a lifetime: her Son's miraculous conception, the adoration by shepherds and foreigners, His public teaching and miracles, His compassion and love...all this and so much more is now ending brutally. Like Abraham the patriarch, she is challenged to offer her Son back to God; yet she hears Jesus speak to her, "*Woman, this is your son,*" and to the disciple whom He loved, "*this is your mother.*" (John 19:26) Now Mary is not just the mother of Jesus, she is to be the mother of all who come to believe in Him. Then finally, unlike Abraham with Isaac, she watches her Son breath His last.





Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

How often has it been said: “This is not the way it’s supposed to be, a child dying before his/her parent!” Imagine the grief of Mary, knowing that her miraculously conceived Son who was called Son of the Most High from those first moments, has not just died, but has been consciously put to death. Innocence means nothing; a life’s worth of love and compassion count for naught. All that’s left is Mater Dolorosa, the mourning mother, cradling her Son’s corpse. Through the centuries, this factual event has grown to a devotional image, the Pieta, Mary numb as she supports the dead weight of Jesus’ body.

*Is there one who would not weep,
whelmed in miseries so deep
Christ’s dear Mother to behold!*

*Can the human heart refrain
from partaking in her pain,
in that Mother’s pain untold?*

(Stabat Mater Dolorosa,
traditional hymn)

The Entombment of Jesus' Body

In this final sorrow of Mary, she almost swoons in disbelief as John wraps a shroud around the body of Jesus. But still, she stands tall trying to comprehend all that has happened. And it's not by chance that she holds a lantern, the only one depicted in these windows of Holy Cross church. Lanterns often symbolize wisdom and intelligence; here in the darkness, with the smell of death and decay in the air, the grief of Mary lights the way.

*Holy Mother! Pierce me through;
in my heart each wound renew
of my Savior crucified:*

*let me share with thee His pain,
who for all my sins was slain,
who for me in torments died.*

(Stabat Mater Dolorosa,
traditional hymn)





The Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus

This is a particularly non-traditional presentation of the resurrection of Jesus. There are no women approaching with spices in hand, no discussions of how to open the tomb, and no angel announcing *"He is not here; He has risen."* (Luke 24:6)

Those people and events all happen later; this window offers the scene but a few moments after the resurrection itself! Here, Jesus is not merely the focus of attention, but huge drama is playing itself out all around Him.

In the brightening morning sky, the sun is backlighting this tomb hillside and some buildings of Jerusalem.

Yet, in the sky are two important symbols counterpointing the action: **a sun and crescent moon** together normally appear in crucifixion scenes, referring to the timeless, universal sorrow of all people at the death of Jesus.

The phoenix, a mythical bird with the head of a pheasant, encircled by flames, has been a symbol of Jesus' resurrection for centuries. The legendary phoenix could live for hundreds of years, until it felt old, then it would build its own pyre of twigs in the sun, and ignite it by fanning with its own wings. From the ashes,



a small worm would grow into another phoenix within three days.

An angel actively rolls back the stone from the tomb.

Jesus resurrected, with cruciform halo behind His head, has the visible wound in His side and triumphant banner unfurled in the breeze.



Now focus on the guards, the element that draws us into these first moments of resurrection. Recall the words of Matthew, the only gospel writer to speak of guards: “Next day, that is, when Preparation

Day was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to Pilate and said to him, ‘Your Excellency, we recall that this imposter said, while he was still alive, “After three days I shall rise again”. Therefore give the order to have the sepulcher kept secure until the third day, for fear his disciples come and steal him away and tell the people, “He has risen from the dead”. This last piece of fraud would be worse than what went before.’ Pilate said to them, ‘You may have your guard; go and make all as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the sepulcher secure, putting seals on the stone and mounting a guard.” (Matthew 27:62-66)

When Jesus actually rose, supposedly they were the only eye-witnesses to the event. Was there bright light and loud noise? Were they asleep as the story is later told in Matthew 28:11-15, and see only the aftermath? Or was it like this: two men with looks of surprise, disbelief, perhaps fear? How did the resurrection of Jesus actually happen...with thunder and lightning, earthquakes and sound, or simply, silently? And a final question: are these two figures both guards? The one on the left grasps a spear with a large hand and wears a helmet and breastplate; the right one has a lighter complexion, smaller hands, no weapons...is this figure female?

Finally, almost as an afterthought, the stained-glass artist includes two Easter lilies in the lower left corner, today’s traditional symbol of Easter. Quietly, subtly resurrection enters into the lives of believers.

As I pray with this window, I come to wonder why the stone needed to be rolled away. After all, in post-resurrection stories Jesus appeared in locked rooms on several occasions; could His resurrected body not pass through stone? And yet, the answer is so simple: the stone is rolled back not for Jesus’ sake, but for the women, the disciples, for us, for me. How would we know the tomb is empty if not able to experience for ourselves “*the linen cloths lying on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.*”

(John 20:7) All to help my belief! Thank you, Lord, for attending to such details.

*Direct me in your ways Yahweh,
and teach me your paths.
Encourage me to walk in your truth, and teach me,
since you are the God who saves me.
(Psalm 25:4-5)*

The Descent of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost

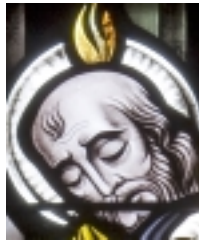
“When Pentecost day came round, they had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind, which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves.”

(Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4)

Ah, the Spirit of God descends upon the disciples and Mary. This dove looks determined; this is not the dove of peace just flying by. No, its head is pointed directly down, it knows exactly where it is going. And no simple halo surrounds this head; rather, red and yellow flames burst in all directions, which are then reflected above the heads of all present. Red almost always connotes passion; add to that yellow, a color that represents illuminated truth, truth removed from the shadows.

At first thought, this window seems to interpret the passage from Acts of the Apostles quite literally, although the text says nothing about a dove, just the wind and fire. But look at the gestures and postures of the dis-





ciples and Mary; no two are reacting in the same way, no two have the same expression. Some seem frightened while others appear awed; a few look reflective while one with his mouth open wide appears

speechless. Mary “*treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19) while the apostle below her cowers; the two on the lower left seem to reach toward each other for support. Recall another scripture passage:



“(Jesus replied...) *Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows where it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who are born of the Spirit*”. (John 3:7-8)

Consider the focus of this work; only a few of the assembled disciples are facing the dove. Rather, they are looking in all directions. Are they as a group totally confused or is the artist hinting at Paul’s reflection years later:

“*On each one of us God’s favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it....And to some, his ‘gift’ was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; to knit God’s holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ, until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.*” (Ephesians 4:7,11-13)

As I pray with this window, first of all I can’t help but ask: will everyone count to twelve...as I did? Do we need to make sure they’re all there, adding in Mary, of course. (Remember that the selection of Matthias to replace Judas has already taken place in Acts 1:15-26, i.e. during the days between Jesus’ Ascension and this Pentecost event.) More importantly, this window affirms each of us as individuals, different from the others but somehow united, together. It’s a reflection on diversity within unity: must we be uniform in order to be unified? Is it true that the whole is so much bigger

than the sum of the parts? In that context, what gifts of the Spirit are uniquely mine, and how well have I received them? To what extent do I offer these in service of the larger community?



*How good, how delightful it is to live
as brothers all together!
It is like fine oil on the head,
running down the beard,
running down Aaron’s beard
onto the collar of his robes;
It is like the dew of Hermon
falling on the heights of Zion,
for there Yahweh bestows his blessing,
everlasting life.
(Psalm 133:1-3)*



Jesus, the Anointed One

*“As Christ was anointed
priest, prophet and king....”*

So begins one of the final prayers of Baptism ritual for newly initiated members of the Catholic Christian faith community. This window says it all! Christ is the great high priest, the prophet extraordinaire and the compassionate king who stops at nothing to serve His people.



It is fitting to close these reflections on the life and times of Jesus as portrayed in the windows of Holy Cross Church by coming full circle. Two Old Testament related depictions began this process:

♦ David, representing the ruling line of Israel, as a youth was a shepherd, psalmist, the innocent slayer of the giant man, Goliath. As an adult, led Israel to greatness, bringing the Ark to the holy city, yet sinning grievously though finally repenting.

Now Christ, the true **Prophet**, brings to fulfillment the concept of **King** as servant to all people.

♦ Isaiah, representing the prophetic voice of God in dealing with the people, introduced the image of Suffering Servant, i.e. the perfect disciple of Yahweh. Certainly this applied to the nation as a whole but epitomized the Lord,

Jesus, as one anointed “to bring good news to the afflicted, to soothe the broken-hearted....” (Isaiah 61:1)

Now Christ brings to completion the notion that through suffering comes glory.

Add to these the role of **priest**, one who mediates between God and humanity. Surely Christ is the Great High Priest as His redemptive sacrifice is made present in every Eucharist, symbolized in the lower third of this window.



Now Christ brings salvation to all humanity through His sacrifice on the cross.

Red, the color of passion, blood and power, is the dominant color in all three sections of this window: the Sacred Heart, Christ the King, and as back-

drop for Eucharist upon the altar. Complementing each section is the color blue, symbolic of spiritual love, truth and heaven itself.

“As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may **you** (emphasis added) live always as a member of His body, sharing everlasting life....” (Rite of Baptism, Anointing with Sacred Chrism)

As I pray with this window, I’m very aware of crowns, a golden orb, rich garments...all the trappings of royalty. Yet, look closely at the feet of Jesus: nail marks. Amidst the pomp is the presence of suffering, so often the path to glory. There is no Easter Sunday without Good Fridays; do I begin to see my every Good Friday as a potential Easter?!

*To Yahweh belong the earth and all it contains,
the world and all who live there....*

Who is he, this king of glory?

*Yahweh Sabaoth,
he is the King of glory!
(Psalm 24:1,10)*



Angels and



the Eucharist



Angels and

Although angels appear in a number of the windows of Holy Cross church (Gabriel announcing good news to Mary, in the dreams of Joseph, or rolling back the tomb stone on Easter morning), this is the only time angels stand on their own, not involved in the lives of humanity.

The English word “angel” comes directly from Greek *aggelos*, which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew *mal’akh*, meaning messenger. In the Hebrew concept, an angel was defined by one’s function rather than being. In Old Testament encounters with angels, mortals are often unsure whether the *mal’akh* is a fellow human or somehow superhuman; function is the important issue, and both humans and superhumans might deliver the message of God.

By the 4th century in art, angels were depicted simply as men or youths, usually in white robes. Later, wings were added to the portraits, a device that emphasizes their supernatural nature. During the 5th century, Dionysius the Areopagite organized angels into nine choirs, or orders, loosely based upon the political organization of the Byzantine Empire of the time. The hierarchy he set forth, with their functions, includes:



♦ Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones – in the presence of God, dedicated to the contemplation of God

♦ Dominions, Virtues and Powers – govern the universe

♦ Principalities, Archangels and Angels – execute the orders of God

During the Middle Ages, angels were often portrayed carrying the instruments of Jesus’ passion and death, grieving for the sufferings of Christ. By the Renaissance and following, cherubs (what look like plump children

with wings) or heads/faces with six wings appear in Christian art, modeled after Cupid or Eros. Also during the Renaissance, female angels dressed in the latest of fashions, were added as an attempt to make angels more human and approachable; hence the precedent for the angels of these windows, located in the sanctuary of the church flanking the altar of Eucharist.

The two sets of three panels are exact copies, the artist using the same design cartoons twice over, except for two differences:

the Eucharist

♦ the natural variations within the glass itself. Stained glass has a unique texture due to the added elements for color, striations, etc.

♦ the Eucharistic raw materials held by the center angel. On the east side of the sanctuary the angel carries stalks of wheat used to make bread; on the west side, the angel presents a large bunch of grapes to make wine. In comparing the two closely, notice that the shape of the panel containing grapes and twining vines is exactly that of the wheat shafts; the artist simply fits the two different elements into the space, adding more to the wing of the angel above the grapes.

In case the viewer has not quite realized that these are the elements of Eucharist, the artist adds a host with golden rays emanating from it to the upper left corner of each center panel.

The center angel has a red halo and green wings while the adoring angels to left and right reverse this color scheme. In this setting, green indicates hope and regeneration; just as spring follows the bleakness of winter, so new life in Christ triumphs over death. It appears that the angel on the right is male, the one with head bowed, eyes closed, hands up-



raised as if in the prayer of adoration. The other two are female, with the angel of praise releasing billows of smoke from her censor, gazing straight ahead at the Eucharistic elements held by her sister.

As I pray with this window, sometimes the oddest little detail draws my attention. Case in point: all of these angels are showing only one foot, with the other hidden by billows of incense smoke. I'm reminded that in daily seeking to live as the Lord wishes me, I need to put forward my best foot, using as generously as I can the gifts, talents and resources I've been given.

But at the same time, I need to defer to the Lord, "allowing" Him to do His best work also. The old adage comes to mind: "God is God...and I am not!" And that's good.

*Come, bless Yahweh,
all you who serve Yahweh,
serving in the house of Yahweh,
in the courts of the house of our God.
Through the night watches
stretch out your hands toward the sanctuary
and bless Yahweh. (Psalm 134:1-2)*

*May my prayer be like incense in your presence,
my uplifted hands like the evening sacrifice.
(Psalm 141:2)*



St. Helena & Cross

Depending upon which reference is consulted, the finding of the “true” cross makes either no allusion whatsoever to Helena or credits her as actually digging with her own hands, has her threatening a learned Jewish man named Judas to reveal all he knew about the location of the cross or simply overseeing the construction of the church decreed by the emperor Constantine (her son) at the traditional place of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The role Helena played in discovering the cross and other related items from the day of crucifixion may be disputed, but one truth remains: Helena was instrumental in fostering devotion to the true cross. St. Ambrose in a sermon dated to 395 (long after her death in 330) remarks that St. Helena “worshipped not the wood, but the King, Him who hung on the wood.” By the middle of the 4th century, reputed relics of the true cross had spread through the world.

Here Helena is clad with symbols of her earthly life as empress-mother, rich robes and a crown. She stands with up-raised hands, eyes closed in veneration, and her head surrounded by a halo, all symbols of her spiritual life. And the object of her attention is the cross itself. In this window, the cross is not rough-hewn wood, but jewel-encrusted and backed by a mandorla. Mandorlas, this being the second appearance of one in the Holy Cross windows, are typically placed behind Christ or the Trinity, always implying fulfillment, completion, the glorious end to the story. These almond-shaped symbols are really elongated halos, maintaining and extending the sense of holiness. Shown here in vibrant red behind the true cross, these two sym-

bols speak of the contradiction that is the Paschal Mystery: i.e. through suffering and death come resurrection and glory. Early Christians (the first four centuries) never imaged Christ as crucified; rather He was the lamb, or even the Good Shepherd. With

official recognition in 313 A.D., a jeweled cross began to represent this most basic tenet of Christian faith.

Seven stars in a sweep of blue (symbolizing heaven) swirl about Helena and the cross, seven being the number of perfect order: everything is now right! And is that a stole at the base of the cross? Appropriately so, for priests and deacons vest in a stole when celebrating Sacraments, the work of Christ, Himself.



As I pray with this window, I know that Helena was advanced in age when she made her several trips to the Holy Land. In her time, travel was risky and dangerous at best, disastrous at worst, but she did it. And she makes a bold case that just because a person is “elderly” does not mean unproductive. She contributed much to our life of faith and devotion, witness our remembrance of her some 1,700 years later. All humanity, young, old or in-between, male, female, wealthy and titled, poor and disenfranchised have gifts to offer for the betterment of others.

Lord, you have been our refuge from age to age.

*Before the mountains were born,
before the earth and the world came to birth,
from eternity to eternity you are God.*

*Teach us to count the days that are ours,
And we shall come to the heart of wisdom.*

(Psalm 90:1-2,12)

History of the Windows at Holy Cross Catholic Church

Holy Cross Catholic Church, located at 48th and Woolworth Avenue in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S.A., was founded in 1920. “Work began in August of 1953 on the...contemporary church designed by Omaha architect Carl Stengel. Rorick Construction Company had the general contract and completion would take more than a year. At the March, 1954 blessing of the cornerstone, Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan said, ‘This whole project is a great demonstration of faith in action. It shows clearly that people will always pay for what they believe in.’”

Holy Cross Church, 75th Anniversary Celebration, Historical Overview, p. 11

The process of creating stained glass windows is definitely a collaborative effort, involving the parish that commissions, the church design team, and

talented artists with an understanding of the medium as well as scripture and religious symbolism. These windows were conceived and executed by the Rambusch Decorating Company of New York.

“The iconography of the windows was developed by Harold Rambusch and Steven Bridges. The preliminary layout sketches were done by Steven Bridges. The developed color scale designs were by stained glass artist, Bud Haley, and the full size cartoons by Olaf Olsen.

“Steven Bridges was an outstanding student of iconography, and Bud Haley a beautiful artist. These windows are later, more modern Haley at his best. The glass was painted by our lead painter, Frank Kurfel, in our studio in Greenwich Village, NY.”

Viggo Rambusch, 2012

Acknowledgments

This book is a long-time dream brought into reality, to provide a rich source of prayer and reflection for all who might choose to spend time with these Holy Cross Church windows. It would not have been possible without the efforts, talents and dedication of the following:

Photography:	Tom Kessler Photography
Text:	Rev. Ronald S. Wasikowski
Committee members:	Sandy Barnhart, Deacon Tom Burton, Deacon George Elster, Mary Gibilisco, Terry Leahy, Mike Pierson, Tim Rooney, and Rev. Carl Salanitro (Pastor, Holy Cross Parish).

Appendix

In 1953, the Rambusch design schema (pictured below) of Holy Cross Catholic Church provided a blueprint for the stories and parables that are presented in its stained glass windows.



Windows of Grace





Stained Glass



of Holy Cross



The process of designing each window consists of four steps prior to the stained glass craftsman physically creating each window, most of which are 16' tall. The first three steps are depicted here in the Annunciation window:



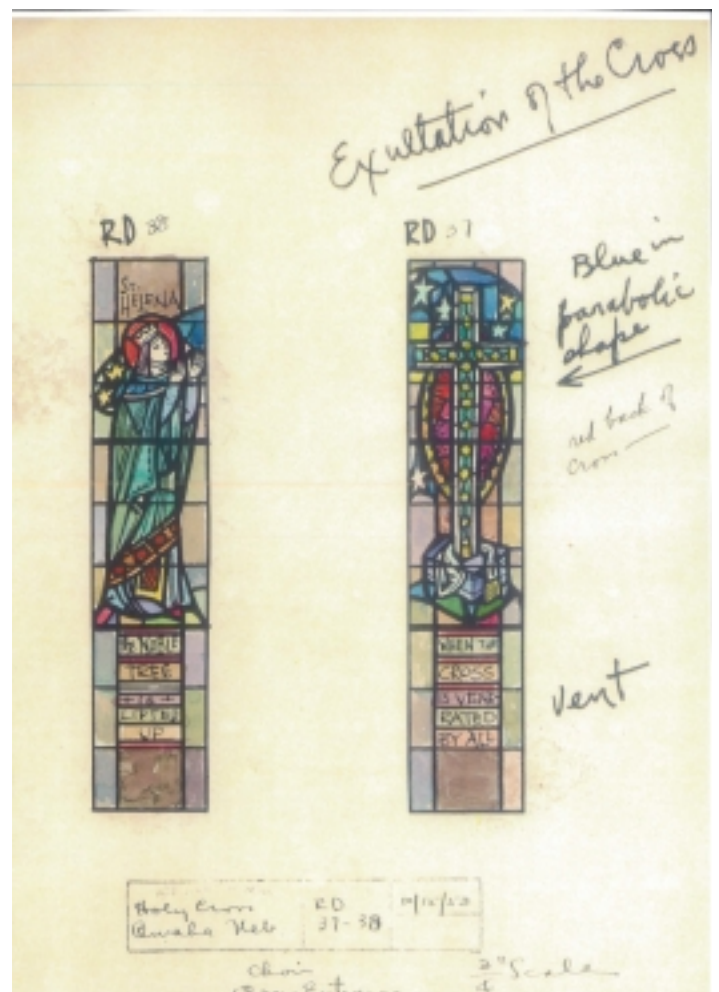
An original pencil sketch is created on tracing paper.



A black on white negative of the design is done, making refinements and/or corrections. Note the word “thee” has been corrected, adding a second “e”; the city of Bethlehem (just above “thee”) has been expanded, etc.



A reversal negative of the window:



Finally, colored sketches of the windows are created. Two examples of this phase: Above is the St. Helena/Exultation of the True Cross windows that reside above the church's original choir loft. Pictured below are The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary windows which are partially colored in this preliminary design. If compared to the completed windows contained in this book, multiple differences may be seen: this version does not include the red pierced hearts pictured in each, and all the lancets are pointing downward, etc.



Closing

Holy Cross Church sincerely hopes this book can help you on your pilgrimage, your pilgrimage to live forever in the house of the Lord.

*How blessed are those who live in your house;
they shall praise you continually;
Blessed those who find their strength in you
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
(Psalm 84:4-5)*