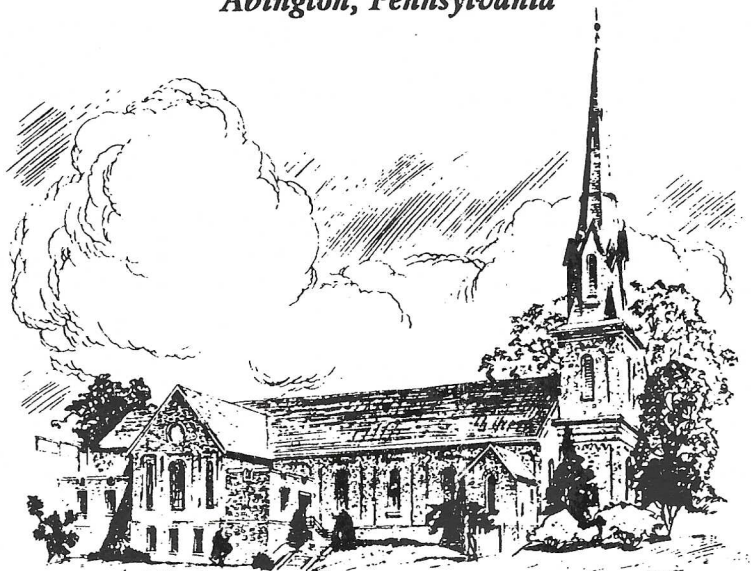


Abington Presbyterian Church



Founded in 1714

Abington, Pennsylvania



Religious Symbolism
in
Abington Presbyterian Church

ENTERING THE SANCTUARY

MAIN DOORS

The main doors of our historic sanctuary contain two decorative trees in sculptured lead, covered with gold and palladium leaf. This design represents "The Tree of Life" which flourishes and remains whole - no matter how many branches are cut. This tree is symbolic of the Gospel of Christ, which always remains intact, wherever it is proclaimed throughout the world.

Above "The Tree of Life" in the center of the transom, is a decorative symbol--The Phoenix. This is a bird of great beauty which lived in the Arabian wilderness. Its life span was from three hundred to five hundred years. Periodically, it burned itself upon a funeral pyre and rose from its own ashes, restored to all of the freshness of youth to enter another cycle of life. This resurrection from the dead, and the triumph of eternal life over death, symbolizes faith and constancy.

This symbolism has a special appropriateness for the congregation of the Abington Presbyterian Church, for out of the ashes of this edifice destroyed by fire in 1895, a new sanctuary was built. Out of the ashes, this church rose to a greater ministry and influence in this community.

THE TOWER ENTRANCE

The theme of "Prayer and Praise" is indicated in the two windows in the tower entrance. Prayer is represented by praying hands and a book of petitions. Praise is symbolized by an ancient lyre and trumpets, such as might have been used to accompany the Psalms when they were first sung.

The history of this church that is rooted in the earliest days of American Presbyterianism is captured in the historical plaque that has been placed there.

THE NARTHEX

THE SOUTH NARTHEX ENTRANCE

In the South Narthex Entrance are found three beautifully designed windows. The acts of Christian Mercy are depicted in the large window. These are suggested in a part of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew: *"I was hungered, and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink...Naked, and ye clothed me...I was sick and ye visited me."*

The Christian duties of harboring the harborless, of ransoming the captives and burying the dead are also shown.

The two smaller windows are symbolic representations of the two Christian Sacraments. Baptism is represented by the descending dove of the Holy Spirit hovering over the Chi Rho, symbol of Christ. Superimposed on this device is the scallop shell of baptism from which the living water flows into the font. Communion is symbolized by the bread and wine cup in front of a Cross. The ICHTHUS is a very early symbol--the Greek word for fish, from which a rebus was formed. Each letter was regarded as the initial of a word in the sentence, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*.

GLASS SCREEN

Inside the narthex is an exquisite glass screen which separates the sanctuary. On it are etched with sand, an illustrated interpretation of the one hundred forty-eighth psalm.

Across the top of the screen is etched:

*Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the Heavens.
Praise Him in the heights.*

On the screen windows from left to right the Psalm is illustrated as follows:

- 1st - *Praise ye him, all his angels; praise ye him, all ye hosts.*
- 2nd - *Praise ye him, sun and moon:*
- 3rd - *Praise ye him, all ye stars of light.*
- 4th - *Praise him, ye heavens of heavens and ye water that be above the heavens. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:*
- 5th - *Fire and hail; snow and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word;*
- 6th - *Mountains, and all hills; fruitful*

- 7th *Trees, and all cedars;*
- 8th *Beasts, and all cattle; creeping*
- 9th *things, and flying foul:*
- 10th *Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth:*
- 11th *Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children:*
- 12th *Let them praise the name of the Lord.*

THE SANCTUARY WINDOWS

(SOUTH)

The stained glass windows in the sanctuary portray in part the progressive revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments.

1. In the first of the three nave windows on the south side of the sanctuary after entering from the Narthex are depicted the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, lower window. The central medallion is Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac, and at the top is Noah building the Ark. The small symbol above is the hand of God the Father.
2. The middle window portrays Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, Moses descending from Mt. Sinai bringing the Tables of the Law to the Children of Israel. At the top King David is portrayed, harp in hand, in the act of writing the Psalms credited to him. A censer, the symbol of prayer, completes this window.
3. Elijah, ascending into heaven in a fiery chariot, Isaiah the prophet whose lips were sealed by a flaming coal, and Amos, the champion of social justice are portrayed in the third window. Interesting symbols in the top medallion are the shepherd's crook, the plumbline, the grasshopper and the basket of summer fruit. Above the medallions appear the Lamb of God, symbol of the Christ.
4. The Twenty Third Psalm is the theme of the window in the south transept vestibule entrance. David the shepherd boy is shown with his harp, with his flock, at a well filled table and beside the still water. In this same area are marble wall plaques listing the church pastors beginning with Malachi Jones.
5. In the south transept, the large central window depicts the Nativity of the Christ and the Baptism of Jesus. The Star of Bethlehem shines brightly above the Holy Family.

6. To the left of the large Nativity window, the lancet window contains the symbols of the Annunciation, the descending dove of the Holy Spirit, the lily, denoting purity; and the folded hands, denoting the resignation of the Virgin Mother and her response in the offering of the Magnificat.
7. The window to the right of the Nativity window depicts Christ's childhood, the carpenter's chisel and a board, the candle for education, and the Torah, or scroll of the law, representing the boy Jesus in the Temple with the doctors.

THE SANCTUARY WINDOWS

(North)

8. The Window of Triumph is the large central window in the north transept. In this window is depicted the Resurrection of Christ, who rises from the Tomb carrying the banner of victory. The centurion guard is at his feet. The bursting pomegranate, the symbol of the Resurrection appears above the risen Christ. Below the Resurrection scene is depicted the Great Commission when Christ sent His disciples out into the world to preach the Gospel.
9. To the left of the Window of Triumph in the lancet window there is depicted the descending dove of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The tongues of fire represent those divine flames which appear above the heads of the believers.
10. The right lancet window is a window depicting the ecumenical church. The symbol of the cross in the boat is the seal of the World Council of Churches. The rays of this association of churches illumine both primitive native huts and city sky-scrapers.
11. The Book of Revelation is illustrated in the window of the north transept vestibule. Christ in glory is the central theme. Around the throne are the four beasts, symbolic of the four evangelists. At the top is St. John the Divine writing the account of his vision on the isle of Patmos. Below the enthroned Christ is the Lamb of God, wearing the banner of victory. On each side are the Alpha and Omega, indicating the beginning and the ending.
12. The additional nave windows on the north side of the sanctuary, present the Christ in three of His important aspects. The central panel portrays the Sermon on the Mount, and above and below are two of His well known parables, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, lower window and of The Good Samaritan, upper window. The symbol at the top of the window is the Lamp of Enlightenment.

13. The central window shows Christ, The Great Physician. At the bottom, He is shown healing the blind man and in the top medallion, He is revealed in the act of raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. The middle section of the window is the Christ, in the mood of His invitation *Come Unto Me* with His arms outstretched to people of various nations. The jar of oil at the top is a symbol of healing.
14. In the window at the rear of the nave are depicted three examples of the Good Pastor, or of the intimate ministry of Christ. In the center he is speaking to Nicodemus, who came to him at night; at the bottom, Christ is seen speaking with the woman at the well, and at the top, He is seen in the home of Mary and Martha at Bethany.

THE CHANCEL

CHANCEL ARCH

This is the focal point of our worship from the moment we enter the church. When entering the chancel area, the arch and its inscriptions reminds us of the teaching of Christ as reflected in The Beatitudes which are inscribed upon it. We have entered the sanctuary for worship; we go forth to live a life consistent with that worship.

REREDOS

The ornamental screen or decorated back piece on the chancel wall is the reredos.

Cross

We see in the reredos, the beautifully hand-carved cross, the symbol of our Christian faith, the perfect symbol of Christ, the symbol of his vicarious suffering, and of our salvation and redemption. Vine and Grapes--symbolic of the Christian life, a growing thing. Chi Rho (XP) a sacred monogram, the oldest monogram used with reference to Christ. The word Christ, spelled in ancient Greek capital letters took the form of XPICTOC.

Dossal Cloth

Behind the cross in the reredos is the dossal cloth in white and gold with the woven PAX signifying the *peace that passeth understanding*. The cloth is changed to purple for Advent and red when the church is decorated for Christmas.

Orphreys

On each side of the cross are the orphreys, a band of rich embroidery, wholly or in part of gold affixed to ecclesiastical vestments. The orphreys (sometimes called galloons) changed during the season of the liturgical year are red. signifying love, fervor, zeal; purple, the color of penitence; the color white, light, purity, joy; green for growth, life, hope; blue for truth, faithfulness, wisdom, charity.

CHANCEL WINDOW

The central figure in the window is Christ surrounded in glory ascending to heaven where he is welcomed by angels. He holds the cross-topped orb denoting the triumph of Christianity over the whole world. The other hand is raised in benediction.

The symbols, following clockwise in the succeeding half circles are "The Seven Last Words of Christ from the Cross" and are illustrated as follows:

1. *Father forgive them for they know not what they do*
The spears of his persecutors point toward Christ represented by a Chi Rho (XP) superimposed on a heart symbolizing love. Above, God the Father is represented by the all-seeing eye enclosed in the triangle.
2. *Verily I say unto Thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*
The cross of Christ is flanked by the crosses upon which the two thieves hung. Lightning flashes. The cross of the repentant thief stands in a ray of light from above.
3. *Woman behold Thy son...behold Thy mother*
A large Chi Rho (XP) represents Christ on the cross flanked by the traditional symbols of John - a chalice from which a serpent emerges, and Mary - a fleur de lis.
4. *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me*
The momentary despair of Christ is shown by the instruments of torture, a knotted club, a reed and the crown of thorns.
5. *I thirst*
When Christ called out, "*I thirst*," a sponge on a long reed of hyssop was dipped into a vessel of vinegar for him to drink.

6. *It is finished*

The spear pierces Christ's side releasing blood and water. The dove, representing his spirit, ascends.

7. *Father into Thy hands I commend by spirit.*

The hand of God reaches forth to welcome his beloved son. A crown and palms of immortality are combined with the butterfly, traditional symbols of the resurrection of the body.

CHANCEL CEILING

High above the chancel are inscribed the words of the angels' song on that first Christmas-- "Glory to God in the highest. On earth peace, good will toward men."

In the chancel ceiling have been included the symbols of the Four Evangelists:

St. Matthew - the winged man, in reference to his detailed account of the Incarnation of Christ. The book and pen illustrate him as writer of the Gospel.

St. Mark - the lion (strength, courage, fortitude), dwells most fully upon the Resurrection and proclaims with great emphasis the royal dignity of Christ.

St. Luke - the winged ox (a symbol of sacrifice) which is shown because of his emphasis upon the sacrificial aspects of the Lord's atonement, as well as his own divine priesthood. The wings signify his divine mission.

St. John - The eagle (signifying courage, faith, and contemplation), who soared upward in his contemplation of the divine nature of the Savior.

BAPTISMAL FONT

Traditionally the baptismal font was placed at the rear of the sanctuary. In this location it would be symbolic of "Standing at the beginning of the way to God", signifying ritual purification at the start of the journey; it is placed today where people can see the sacrament administered. The quotation, *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* is a reference from Ephesians 4:5. Carved into the sides of the baptismal font is the symbol of the lily denoting purity.

CHOIR PEW ENDS

The instruments of praise are indicated in the lyre, harp and flute which have been carved thereon.

CLERGY BENCHES

The symbols of alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This usage is based upon Revelation 22:13, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the ending*, signifying the complete ministry of Christ.

COMMUNION TABLE

IC-XC-NIKA - (IHCOUC XPICTOC NIKA) central panel of communion table is a repetition of the symbol on the canopy of the reredos. Greek crosses with the "nimbus", indicating eternity.

LECTERN

In the carving upon the lectern is the symbol of a "Rose" which is a symbol of the messianic promise, the prophet Isaiah foretelling that *the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose*.

PARAMENTS OR ANTEPENDIA

Purple or violet hangings - This is the color of penitence, watching, fasting. (Advent and Lent). On both the pulpit and the lectern antependia two embroidered symbols appear. The sacred monogram IHS which is the Latin representation of the first three Greek letters in the word Jesus (IOTA ETA SIGMA) is surrounded with a crown of thorns signifying the passion of Christ

White hangings - Represents the purity, joy and victory of the high days and seasons, signifying light and rejoicing. (Christmas and Easter) The hangings are embroidered with the Greek crosses and the pulpit antependia with the bursting pomegranates signifying the resurrection.

Green hangings - Stands for life and growth and is symbolic of hope and growth in the Christian life. (Trinity) Trinity season begins with the Festival of Pentecost, (eight weeks after Easter) and runs for a period of 26 weeks. The hangings are embroidered with two of the sacred monograms, the one for Jesus, the other for Christ, namely the IHS (IOTA ETA SIGMA) and XP (CHI and RHO).

Red hangings - the color of blood and fire, is the sign of the church and its martyrs; symbolic of Christian zeal, the work and ministry of the church. (Pentecost, Reformation). Pentecost (50 days) falls on the Sunday 7 weeks following Easter. Reformation Sunday is always the Sunday closest to the 31st of October. The hangings are embroidered with the alpha and omega again signifying the complete ministry of Christ. The color of the pulpit and lectern paraments should be the same color indicated in the orphreys.

THE SANCTUARY NAVE

CEILING COPING IN SANCTUARY NAVE

An Old Testament inscription will be found along the ceiling coping in the sanctuary:

*The Lord is the Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
They that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings like eagles; run and not be weary.
They shall walk and not faint.*

and the purpose of worship indicated in the New Testament inscription on the opposite ceiling coping -

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded and lo I am with you always to the close of the age.

THE PEW ENDS

At the end of each pew is a carved sign, each with its own meaning...

Pomegranate

The hope in immortality and of resurrection.

Wheat

The bounty of the earth. In relation to Holy Communion, it identifies the bread the broken body of our Lord.

Oak

The symbol of Christ...the strength of faith and virtue, and of the endurance of the Christian against adversity.

Rose

A symbol of martyrdom, and of purity.

Ivy Vine

Has always been associated with death and immortality. Because it is forever green, it is a symbol of fidelity and eternal life. It clings to its support, an indication of attachment and undying affection.

Thistle

Means earthly sorrow and sin, and the Passion of Christ--particularly of his crowning with thorns.

Olive Branch

The olives' rich yield symbolizes the providence of God toward His children, and of peace.

Grapes and Vine

The wine of Holy Communion, the blood of Christ. The vine or leaf is a symbol of the Savior, the "True Vine".

Lily

Purity - with the infant Christ, it symbolizes chastity.

A recent addition to the symbolism in the Sanctuary is the decorative woodwork over the North and South Transept Vestible doors. The carved signs of the woodwork include the various symbols now found on the pew ends.

THE CHAPEL

The lovely Chapel captures something of the historic significance of our congregation. Its historical alcove houses many of the interesting "Abingtonia" gathered over the years by the members of our congregation.

The two Chapel windows present scenes of Presbyterian history. In the left one some important events of American Presbyterian history are recorded - the Log College; George Duffield, serving as clerk of the First General Assembly; John Witherspoon, signing the Declaration of Independence, the only minister to do so; Frances Makemie, known as the father of organized American Presbyterianism, on one of his missions of proclaiming the Gospel.

The second window represents three prior buildings occupied by the Abington congregation. Outstanding Presbyterians identified in this window are the Reverend Malachi Jones, Abington Church's first minister; George Whitefield, prominent evangelist of the Great Awakening Era who spoke in the Abington Church yard to a congregation of over two thousand people; President Benjamin Harrison and John Wanamaker, then the postmaster general of the United States, as they were greeted at Abington on their way to the anniversary celebration of the Log College; and William Jennings Bryan, the two hundredth anniversary speaker at Abington Church.

GLOSSARY

- CAPITALS* the top portion of the two pair of columns separating the transepts from the nave. These have been decorated with four different Greek crosses and with the "nails" of the passion of our Lord and with the earliest of Christian symbols, The Fish, or "Ichthus".
- CHANCEL* in general that portion of the church wherein the clergy and the choirs conduct the worship.
- CHAPEL* the small or subordinate place of worship, adjacent to the sanctuary.
- CLERGY STALLS* the seats for the ministers in the chancel, near the lectern and pulpit respectively.
- COMMUNION TABLE*
as distinguished from "an altar". The table is away from the wall or reredos. Here the sacrament is laid and from the table is administered to the congregation.
- CROSS* the reredos provides the background for the central symbol of our faith, the empty cross, symbolic of Christ's triumph over death.
- CROWN OR CANOPY*
the overhanging shelter or covering at the top of the reredos.
- DOSSAL* the damask curtain that hangs in the reredos.
- GRADINE OR RETABLE*
a shelf at the bottom of the reredos upon which may be placed the candlesticks or flowers.

<i>LECTERN</i>	the reading desk from which the scripture lessons are read at worship services.
<i>NARTHEX</i>	an architectural term for the vestibule of the church. In ancient Christian churches the unbaptized catechumens stood in the outer court, the narthex, and observed the worship service by looking through the columns or openings that separated them from the congregation.
<i>NARTHEX SCREEN</i>	the glass and wood partition that separates the narthex (vestibule) from the sanctuary proper.
<i>NAVE</i>	that part of a cruciform church in which most of the congregation is seated. It reaches from the chancel to the narthex. Its derivation is from the Latin "navis" meaning ship, to which the church was often likened.
<i>ORPHREYS</i>	a band of rich embroidery, wholly or in part of gold affixed to ecclesiastical vestments - sometimes called "galloons" - a narrow binding or trimming, a binding of rich material.
<i>PARAMENTS or ANTEPENDIA</i>	a name usually given to cloths used to adorn the pulpit, lectern or communion table.
<i>PRIE DIEU</i>	the kneeler used in ordination and marriage services has the fleur de lis, a symbol of the trinity carved thereon.
<i>PULPIT</i>	from the Latin "pulpitum" meaning a platform or enclosed stage, in which the clergyman stands while preaching.
<i>REREDOS</i>	the ornamental screen or decorated back pieces on the chancel wall, behind the table and rising above it. The word literally means "behind at the back".
<i>SACRISTY</i>	the room where the communion vessels, linens and other chancel equipment are kept in a church. The word is derived from the Latin "sacra" meaning sacred.
<i>SANCTUARY</i>	derived from the Latin "Sanctuarium", meaning "Holy Place". In liturgical churches the sanctuary is only that part of the church in which the priest officiates; in reformed churches it is used most often to speak of the entire worship area.
<i>TRANSEPT</i>	in a cross shaped church the transepts are the portions of the transverse cross bar which projects beyond the south and north of the nave. The two transepts form the arms of the cross.