



Chrismons of St. Peter's

AN EXPLANATION OF THE ORNAMENTS KNOWN
AS CHRISMONS WHICH ADORN THE CHRISTMAS
TREES EACH CHRISTMAS SEASON HERE AT
THE CATHEDRAL!

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Jacque Clemens, a charter member of St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral. In 2010, after researching the history and making of Chrismons, she wrote to our rector with her idea of cross-stitching Chrismons to be hung on Christmas Trees in our church. Through the years she has faithfully recruited people to stitch them, she has made them, has catalogued them, and has helped to display them on our Christmas trees for the Christmas Season. Thank you, Jacque, for your inspiration and all you have done to bring this meaningful project for all of us to admire and learn from.

References for Patterns and Written Descriptions
Chrismons Basic Series, by Frances Kipps Spencer
55 Christian Symbols—Cross Stitch Patterns, by Designing Women
36 Christian Ornaments Book, Volume 1, by Michelle Roberts

THE STORY BEHIND CHRISMON TREES

During the Christmas Season at St. Peter's Cathedral, you will find in the Chancel two Christmas Trees decorated with Chrismon ornaments. Chrismons (Christ monograms) are adaptations of symbols from early Christianity and many of today's signs and symbols referring to Jesus' life, ministry and teachings.

The idea of a Chrismon Tree was first conceived in 1957 by Frances Kippa Spencer, a member of a Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia. Mrs. Spencer wanted to decorate a Christmas tree in her church that would be more suitable for a sanctuary and worship setting. Thinking of the tradition of decorating a birthday cake with the honoree's name, she wanted to place the name of Jesus and His title, "Christ," on the tree. However, rather than using English, she used the Greek monogram for Christos, the Greek word for Christ. Thus, "Chi Rho," created by superimposing the two letters, became one of her first Chrismons. Several of this simple monogram and some crosses decorated her Chrismon Tree that first year, and over time she added other designs referring to our Christian faith.

Chrismons are made in white and gold and/or silver. They are placed on a Christmas tree with white lights, signifying Jesus is the Light of the world. In the Anglican tradition, white is the liturgical color used for Christmas and symbolizes Christ's Majesty and Glory. On our trees you will find Chrismons of Chi Rho, a dove, a fish, a shepherd's crook, a chalice, a shell, Alpha and Omega, a variety of crosses as well as many other symbols of our Christian faith. There are 47 different Chrismons on our trees with more than one of many of them. The whole purpose of a Chrismon Tree is to direct our attention to the nature and work of Christ. And for that reason, it is very much a part of our worship in this Holy Season, for the Chrismons serve to remind us of the One we follow.

This is written with the hope you will take time to look at these impressive creations of art on our Chrismon Trees during the Christmas Season, not only for their meaning, but also for the beautiful stitchery done by members of our parish and members of the Canopy Oaks Chapter, Embroiders' Guild of America. Each and everyone is a gift of talent.



CHI-RHO

The Chi-Rho monogram is composed of the first two letters in Greek for the word Christos, Christ, (Greek: chi, x=ch; rho, P=ρ). It was a symbol used by early Christians and gained popularity during the time of Constantine in the 4th century.



ALPHA AND OMEGA – BEGINNING AND END

The Greek letters “alpha” and “omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They are referred to in the book of Revelation and symbolize Jesus as the Christ who has come and will come again. It also symbolizes the continuity of God’s presence in human history.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega”, says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”—Revelation 1:8



ANCHOR CROSS

The anchor is one of the oldest symbols in Christianity and was used by Christians in the Roman catacombs. The anchor was adopted by Christians as a symbol of hope because it was regarded in ancient times as a symbol of safety. The anchor also forms a cross, and is a reminder that Jesus is our anchor.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place beyond the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

—Hebrews 6:19-20



ARMENIAN CROSS

The Armenian cross is a symbol that combines a cross with eight floral postaments or elements. Because the number eight was sacred, the eight points came to symbolize Christ. The design was often used in Armenian high crosses (khachkar) - a free-standing cross made of stone and often richly decorated. For Armenians, because the cross is the instrument on which Jesus sacrificed himself in order to save mankind of its sin, it is a symbol that shows the power of life over death.



AVELLANE CROSS

An Avellane Cross has arms resembling four hazelnut filberts in their husks joined at the great end. The three points on the arms symbolize the Trinity. This cross is also called the Fish or Tulip Cross. It was used in 18th century on English Coats of Arms and as a heraldry symbol.



BELL

Bells represent the proclamation of the Gospel to the world. Church bells have been around since the 5th century and were in common usage in the Middle Ages. They were particularly used by monastic communities to call the monks, who during the day were in various places in the monastery, to gather for prayer in the chapel. Later on the custom became more common in parish churches and the bells were and are today used to call the people to worship.



BIBLE

The open Bible symbolizes the truth and revelation of the word of God spoken through Scripture.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. –2 Timothy 3:16-17



CALVARY CROSS

The Calvary cross with steps symbolizes the site of Jesus Crucifixion. It is also known as the Graded Cross, with the steps representing the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The budded arms symbolize the Resurrection and hope.

*So now faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love.
–1 Corinthians 13:13*



CANDLE

A single white candle symbolizes the light of Christ in the world. The flame from the candle can signify obedience, and the heat from the flame can signify humility. In medieval paintings, the golden glow of the candle called the halo or “nimbus,” symbolizes divinity and power.

Again Jesus spoke to them saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” –John 8:12

This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that “God is light.” And in Him is no darkness at all. –1 John 1:5



CELTIC CROSS

The Celtic Cross has a ring (nimbus) or circle that symbolizes eternity and eternal life. These crosses emerged in Ireland, France and Britain in the Early Middle Ages. According to legend, the ringed cross was introduced by St. Patrick when he was converting pagans in Ireland to Christianity.



CHALICE

The Chalice or cup, symbolizes the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. It also represents forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. –Matthew 26:27



AGAPE CROSS

This modern symbol is known as “The Love of God Cross”. With its four hearts, it symbolizes God’s perfect and unconditional love for us revealed in the entire life of Jesus as proclaimed in the four Gospels. Agape love is more than an emotion. It demonstrates itself through action.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” –John 3:16



CHRISTMAS TREE – HOPE

The decorated and lighted Christmas tree came into general use in Germany during the Reformation. It symbolizes the brightness, beauty, and joy of the Christmas season, and a time to celebrate God's grace. Being triangular in shape, it represents the Trinity. Because the evergreen tree is green year-round, it represents hope.



CROSS AND CROWN

The Cross and Crown is an ancient symbol of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus as the Christ. It symbolizes the suffering and death of Jesus as well as his final victory over sin and death. The Crown is often interpreted as symbolizing a Christian's reward in heaven for being a faithful servant while living on earth.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the "crown of life," which God has promised to those who love him. –James 1:12



CROSS AND FLAME

The cross represents Christ and the flame is a reminder of Pentecost when diverse witnesses were unified by the power of the Holy Spirit and saw tongues of fire. The Cross and Flame is the official symbol of the United Methodist Church.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. –Acts 1:1-4



CROSS D'ORLEANS –FRENCH

This is a Greek Fleurée Cross or Gothic cross whose open petals symbolize the mature Christian. The three petals on each arm symbolize the Trinity, while the open flowers speak of new life and resurrection.



CROSS FLEUREE –FLEUR DE LYS

The Cross Fleuree is a variation of the Fleur de Lys Cross with the arms ending in stylized Lilies. The three-petaled arms of the cross symbolize the Trinity, and the lily symbolizes the resurrection. In heraldry, the Cross represents faith, wisdom and chivalry.



CROSS WITH SHEPHERD STAFFS

A Cross combined with the Shepherd's Staff symbolize Jesus as the Good Shepherd who will lay down his life for others. The two staffs together form an X (chi), the first letter of the title Christos, Christ, in Greek. The staff can also represent the shepherds who were the first people to be told about Jesus.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. –John 10:11



CROWN

The crown with cross represents royal power and authority and symbolizes Christ as the exalted Christ, Son of God, King of kings, and Prince of Peace.

...to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

–1 Timothy 6:14,15



DOVE

The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, recalling the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus as a dove at His baptism. The "nimbus" (halo) three-point rays around its head is a symbol of the Trinity. The dove can also represent peace.

And when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am pleased".

–Luke 3:21-22



DRAPED PASSION CROSS

The drape on this Cross is white and silver and is a symbol of purity and Jesus' resurrection and victory over sin and death. In the Anglican Church during Holy Week, the Cross is draped in red on Palm Sunday, in black on Good Friday, and in white on Easter.



EGYPTIAN CROSS OR ANKH CROSS

The Egyptian Cross is a variation of the Ankh Cross, an ancient Egyptian symbol adopted by Christians to symbolize eternal life. The budded arms symbolize the resurrection and hope. The Coptic Christians of the second century adopted the Ankh as their symbol of the Cross of Christ.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the Cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen –Collect for Holy Cross Day (14 September) BCP, 2019



FIMBRIATED LATIN CROSS

The Fimbriated Latin Cross is a variation of the Latin Cross with a narrow border (fimbriation). The X (chi), the first letter of Christ in Greek, is crossed over it.



FISH

This symbol is called the Jesus fish or Ichthus. The Greek word for fish, ICHTHUS, works as an acrostic for I = Jesus, CH = Christ, TH = God, U = Son, S = Savior. The fish was a secret symbol that early Christians used to identify themselves with Jesus Christ and one another. The symbol consisted of two intersecting arcs tracing the outline of a fish. It could be quickly sketched in the dirt with the toe of a sandal and just as quickly erased.



FLEUR DE LIS

The Fleur de Lis is a stylized lily. It represents purity and so symbolizes the Virgin Mary. It also represents rebirth and hope and the resurrection. Because of its three points, it can symbolize the Trinity. The lily is mentioned 15 times in the Bible. It was said to have sprung from the tears shed by Eve as she left Eden. In France, the lily came to represent royalty.

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



THE FURCA – UPSILON CROSS

The Furca (meaning forked) or Upsilon Cross, from the Greek letter Y, is also called the Thieves' Cross and relates to the two criminals who were crucified on either side of Jesus. It is believed that criminals were crucified on a forked cross. This cross is also called the Pall Cross. Pall is an old name for robe or cloak and may be seen on clerical vestments such as the chasuble. From ancient times, the “furca” symbolized the choice between good and evil.



GAMMA CROSS

The Gamma Cross, or Gammadion Cross, is formed by an arrangement of four of the Greek letter gamma (Γ). Each gamma represents one of the four evangelists radiating from the central Greek Cross which represents Christ. The Cross is also said to symbolize Christ as the cornerstone of the Church. Often, such a cross can be seen on the robes of priests in the Orthodox Church.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

—Ephesians 2:19-22



GRAPES

In the Old Testament, grapes and the wine they produced were a crucial part of celebrations. Throughout the Bible, grapes symbolize wealth, abundance, prosperity and fertility. Sacramental wine is made from grapes and when used in Communion, Anglicans believe, by faith, that it is the blood of Christ.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

—Matthew 26: 27-29



HARP

The harp or lyre is associated with David as a shepherd boy, and so represents praise to God. It also symbolizes the angelic chorus who sang praises to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, and it represents music, instruments, joy and worship. The word harp is used about 50 times in the Bible.

*I will also praise you with the harp
For your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing praises to you with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
Psalm 71:22*



“I H S” CROSS

The “I H S” monogram, or Christogram, is composed of the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek. Here it is combined with the Budded Trefoil Cross symbolizing the Trinity. Together this symbolizes the divinity of Jesus. This monogram dates back to the 1st century.



JERUSALEM CROSS

The larger cross in the Jerusalem cross symbolizes Jesus, and the four smaller crosses symbolize the Four Gospels or the spread of the Gospel to the four corner of the earth. The five crosses can also represent the five wounds of Jesus. This cross is also known as the Crusader Cross and dates back to when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, establishing Christianity in the area.

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

—Matthew 28:19



LILY

The lily represents rebirth and hope and Jesus' resurrection. It is often displayed on Easter in Christian churches. The flower is also associated with the Virgin Mary and is a symbol of chastity and purity. The lily is mentioned 15 times throughout the Bible.

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



NATAL CROSS

This Natal Cross is a four-pointed Bethlehem Star representing the sign in the night sky announcing Jesus' birth. It is combined with a cross symbolizing the salvation that the birth of the Christ child brings.

After listening to the king, they (wise men) went on their way. And behold the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. –Matthew 2:9-10



ORTHODOX CROSS – EASTERN CROSS

This cross is the official cross of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The top bar represents the inscription placed above Jesus' head. The lowest bar represents the footrest upon which Jesus' feet were nailed.



POMEGRANATE

The pomegranate symbolizes the resurrection and Christ's burst from the tomb. It also symbolizes hope of eternal life. The seeds can be a symbol of the sweetness of heaven and can represent the many believers who make up the church. The pomegranate has been a symbol of fertility since before Christianity.



PRINCE CROWN

This crown is a variation of the prince or "ducal" (duke) crown and symbolizes Jesus as the Son of God and Prince of Peace.

*For to us a child is born,
To us a son is given;
And the government shall be upon his shoulder,
And his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
—Isaiah 9:6*



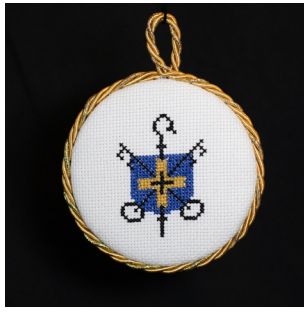
RECONCILIATION STAR

The Reconciliation Star is an eight-pointed star that is also called the Bethlehem Star. It symbolizes the world Jesus came to save. The number eight symbolizes new beginnings and is often associated with baptism and resurrection.



SEASHELL

The seashell or scallop is a symbol for Christian baptism and the baptism of Jesus. It is also a symbol for pilgrimage and the spread of the Gospel to the world. In early times, pilgrims carried a gourd for holding water and a scallop shell for drinking water. The scallop shell is particularly associated with the Apostle James who is said to have taken his ministry to the Iberian Peninsula and is to this day the Patron Saint of Spain. The baptismal font is often in the shape of a scallop, or decorated with one. The dish used by priests to pour water over the heads of catechumens in baptism is often scallop-shaped.



SHIELD OF ST. PETER

The shield of the apostle St. Peter shows two keys crossed signifying the keys to the kingdom. The crossed keys also refer to Peter's confession and the words of Jesus about the power to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. The shepherd's staff represents Jesus commissioning Peter to continue Jesus' shepherding ministry when he instructed him: "Feed my lambs, tend my sheep".

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. –Matthew 16:18-19



SHIP

A ship symbolizes the church as "the ark of salvation" which transports the faithful through the seas of disbelief, worldliness and persecution to their heavenly home. It recalls the story of Noah and the flood, as well as Jesus' calming the storm and saving the disciples. A ship was used as a symbol when Christians needed to disguise the cross, since the ship's mast forms a cross. The term "nave" derives from the Latin "navis", meaning ship, and was chosen to designate the central part of a church building that accommodates the congregation.



SPANISH CROSS–BAROQUE STYLE

The Spanish Cross with flourished arms, surmounted with an escallop (a shell), was the emblem of the twelfth-century Spanish military Order of Santiago and named after Saint James the Greater. James was one of the first disciples called by Jesus and one of the three who were closest to Jesus. James is the patron saint of Spain.

....and going on a little farther, He (Jesus) saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with hired servants and followed him.

–Mark 1:19-20



STAR OF DAVID–CREATOR STAR

To Christians, the six points of the star represent six aspects of God's: love, mercy, wisdom, majesty, power and justice. The two triangles represent the Trinity, and the circle symbolizes eternity. This symbol was used by the Christian before the first known use in Judaism. It was almost universally adopted by the Jews as their emblem in the 19th century.



STAR

The four pointed gold Bethlehem star symbolizes the birth of Jesus. The star revealed the birth of Jesus to the Biblical Magi and led them to Bethlehem. The second set of silver points form the Greek letter X (chi), the first letter of the title “Christos”, Christ, in Greek.

And behold the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. –Matthew 2:9-10



TEN COMMANDMENTS

The tablets with the Ten Commandments with a cross represent the continuity of the Old and New Testaments as well as Jesus’ fulfillment of the “law”.

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and the back they were written. The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. –Exodus 32: 15-16



TRINITY

This chrismon is a combination of a triangle and a trefoil—a stylized Shamrock. Irish legend says St. Patrick used the Shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity to nonbelievers. Both the triangle and Shamrock are symbols of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit united in one. The three leaves of the Shamrock are also said to stand for Faith, Hope, and Love.

So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
—I Corinthians 13:13



TRIQUETS

The form of the “Triquetra” is a symbol of the Trinity and comes from Great Britain. The three points represent Father, Son and Holy Spirit while the continuous interwoven line represents unity. It is thought the Triquetra began with monks who brought the symbol with them along with their faith when converting the Celts.

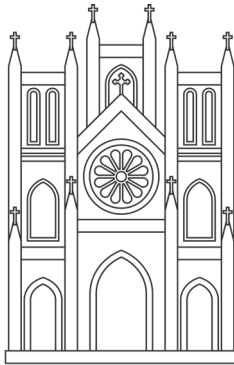


WHEAT

A head of wheat symbolizes the bread of the Communion and represents the physical body of Christ. It also reminds us Jesus is the “Bread of Life”. Wheat can also represent the church among the “weeds” of the world.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”—John 6: 35

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat, this is my body.”—Matthew 26:26



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