

Trinity's Stained Glass Windows

History. Early in 1973, the congregation engaged the Henry Willet Studios of Philadelphia to create stained glass windows for the church. Although the original church windows were of colonial design and consisted of tinted panes without images, the Willet artists were asked to create images in a modern style which would tell the Christian story vividly to all who worship in their light. The ten windows in the sanctuary portray key scenes from the biblical story and the history of the Church. The two windows in the narthex illustrate the mission of the Church. The clear, etched glass window between the narthex and the sanctuary was part of the original church construction of 1958 and represents eternal life. Over the next two months we will explore the images for all of the windows. For this issue, the images of Windows one through five are described. If you can't wait, you can read about all the windows on the Church website (www.trinity-nn.org).

In the Sanctuary - Beginning at the front of the church facing the altar and letting the eye move to the right we see:

Window 1 - Creation and Alienation

The upper panel depicts God as the Creator of the world with the inscription "In the beginning God created." The images reflect the detail and sequence of the creation story of Genesis 1: Sea and dry land, fruit trees and flowers, the fish of the sea, sun and moon and stars, the birds of the air, wild and domestic animals, and , ultimately, human beings fashioned in God's image. God is



pictured with a triangle behind the head representing divinity and perfection. God's arms are spread in benediction. We can almost hear the words of the ancient creation story, "let there be ..." and "It is good ..."

The lower panel shows us the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden after they failed to obey God. Adam covers his face in grief; Eve covers her breasts in shame. The tree of good and evil and the serpent remind us of the ancient story of temptation in Genesis 3. God appears in the window with downcast eyes; one hand points the way out of the garden. Yet God continues to care for alienated Adam and Eve. They eat the clothes God has made for them, and God will journey with them into the challenges and opportunities of life east of Eden.

Window 2 – Moses and Abraham

The upper panel shows us Moses on Mt. Sinai holding the tablets of the Law. The inscription reads, "The Law was given by Moses." It was in the wilderness of Sinai that the people of Israel received their special identity and mission. This identity was centered in the Law and the reminder, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 20:2).

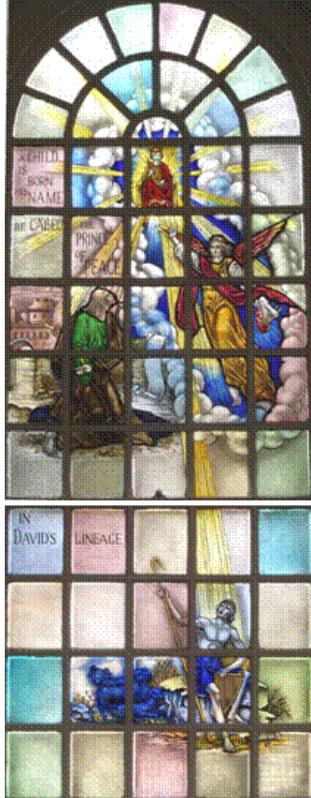
The lower panel pictures the patriarch Abraham as he is ready to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God's command. The angel is ready to stay his hand, and a ram in the bushes will provide the substitute sacrifice. One strain of religious tradition sees this



story as the epitome of unquestioning faith in God. Another strain sees this story as representing God’s prohibition of the ancient practice of child sacrifice.

Window 3 – Isaiah and David

The upper panel portrays Isaiah the Prophet and an angel pointing to a reigning child king. The inscription, “A child is born, his name be called the Prince of Peace,” recalls the prophets word to King Ahaz in a time of national danger and turmoil. The message was that God would provide a deliverer for the people. Christian tradition has interpreted Isaiah’s words as presaging the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.



The lower panel shows us David the Shepherd with the inscription, “In David’s lineage.” The inscription reminds us of God’s promise to David that his family would reign forever and of the Christian tradition which points to Jesus as the Messiah from David’s line. “Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel ... and I will make for you a great name ... and I will establish the throne of [your] kingdom forever” [II Sam. 8:8-9-12].

Window 4—Birth and Call

The upper panel renders the birth of Jesus with the figures of Mary, Joseph, the baby, and shepherds. The inscription “Peace on Earth” echoes the angels’ hymn. We are looking at the witness of Luke the Evangelist as he proclaims the true Savior of the world is not Caesar with his pomp and glory, but a Jewish peasant, born in humble

simplicity, through whom God works true peace on earth.

The lower panel shows Jesus calling fisherman to be his disciples with the words, “Follow me.” Jesus began his ministry by gathering twelve helpers and friends, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were a mixed lot: some fishermen, a tax collector, a couple of sword-carrying revolutionaries. But they heard Jesus’ call to follow, and they did. At first stumbling and slow to comprehend, the followers of Jesus came to embody his spirit, his power and his Gospel of love.



Window 5 – Teaching and Healing

The upper panel pictures Jesus on a mountain surrounded by people listening to his words. The inscription “He taught them” identifies this scene as the “Sermon on the Mount.” The evangelist Matthew comments “and when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority ...”] Matthew 7:28-29].

The lower panel shows Jesus healing with the words, “He anointed the eyes of the blind man.” The biblical witness is that God came to speech and action in Jesus to reveal God’s love and power in our very midst.



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This is the second part of a two-part series on the history and description of the stained glass windows in the church. Please refer to the September Tidings for part one.

Window 6 - Crucifixion and Last Supper

The upper panel depicts the Crucifixion of Jesus with the words from John's Gospel, "God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son." Above the cross is a triangle representing the Trinity. The inscription on the cross "INRI" represents the Latin words Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." A sun and a moon are also pictured beneath the arms of the cross, perhaps as a way of pointing to the cosmic significance of Jesus' death.



The lower panel portrays Jesus sharing the Last Supper with his disciples. The words "Do this in remembrance of me," remind us that this farewell meal has become the Eucharist, a lasting celebration of Jesus' presence and promise.

Window 7 - Resurrection and Thomas

The upper panel shows Jesus emerging from the tomb on Easter morning. The inscription proclaims, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." A triangle with rays symbolizes the Trinity and the power of God which has raised the dead Jesus from the grave. Jesus appears dressed in a brightly colored robe and carrying a banner of victory which is fashioned out of the cross. At the bottom of the scene, a lily trumpets the Easter Good News.

The lower panel recreates the story from John's Gospel of the apostle Thomas who would not believe the word of the Resurrection until he had touched the crucified and risen Jesus. In this portrayal, Jesus appears colorless, almost transparent, a suggestion, perhaps, that the resurrection body is both familiar and different. Thomas reaches out to feel Jesus' reality for himself, and Jesus' hand is raised in benediction: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" [John 20:29].



Window 8 - Peter and Paul

The upper panel shows us the apostle Peter preaching. The inscription reads, "Peter lifted up his Voice." The event is clearly Pentecost as other believers are pictured with tongues of fire on their heads and a dove with rays tells us that the Holy Spirit is at work creating the Church.

The lower panel depicts the apostle Paul at dockside with his traveling companion Silas. A sailing boat is in the background. The inscription reads, "Paul chose Silas and departed." This window celebrates Paul the missionary who



took the Gospel to the Gentile world and established Christian congregations throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

Window 9 - Luther and the Reformers

This window moves us more than one thousand years into Christian history with its portrayal of the medieval reformers. The upper panel shows Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the door of a parish church in Germany. The inscription gives the date and place: "Oct. 31, 1517, WITTENBERG." The dove with rays and the tongue of fire on Luther's head symbolize the continued working of the Spirit of God as the church of Jesus is reformed and renewed.

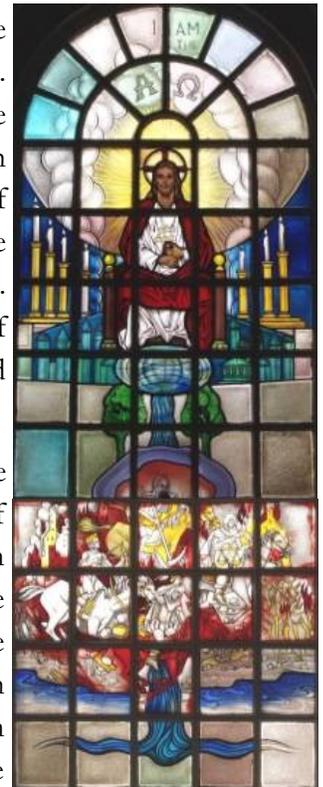


The lower panel reminds us of two additional Reformers. John Hus is shown being burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, in Constance, Bohemia. His attempts at correcting church abuses and clergy corruption were met with violent opposition. Also pictured is John Calvin, a contemporary of Luther, and a brilliant theologian whose thought was seminal for the Protestant movement and particularly for Presbyterian Christianity.

Window 10 – Revelation

The last stained glass window in the sanctuary draws its imagery from the last book of the New Testament – Revelation. The upper panel shows Jesus the Christ seated on the throne of heaven. The three-rayed nimbus behind his head is symbolic of holiness and oneness with the Triune God. Jesus holds in his hands seven stars representing cosmic power and perfection. His throne is surrounded by seven candlesticks – perhaps a reminder of the

Temple. The towers of the New Jerusalem are pictured. Christ's feet rest on the world for which he is both savior and judge. A river of water flows from the throne flanked by fruit laden trees. These are symbols of paradise, cleansing and abundant life.



In the lower panel we see the dream imagery of judgment and destruction visited upon the earth. The four horsemen of the apocalypse charge through a landscape of devastation and death. In the background we see blighted wheat, polluted water, an abandoned automobile, crumbling foundations, and raging fire – all signs of human sin, waste, and tragedy. The horsemen carry a reaper's scythe (death), scales (injustice), bow (warfare), and sword (violence). Together the horsemen represent the breakdown of human civilization through militarism, civil strife, famine and other destructive agents. This grisly vision warns us of the futility of finding the meaning of existence apart from fellowship with God. Notice, however, that the river of the new Jerusalem flows even through this panel, reminding us that God's final word is life, grace and all things made new.

In the Narthex

Window 11 – Eternal Life

This window is the only one of the thirteen which is not stained but etched in clear glass. The design depicts two peacocks, a spreading grape vine and the Greek letters Alpha [Α] and Omega [Ω]. The peacock, with its



glorious and iridescent plumage, is one of the earliest symbols of the Resurrection and eternal life. The Greek letters Alpha and Omega represent the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and, therefore, the beginning and end of all things. The grape vine may be a reminder of Christ the Vine, in whom we have eternal life, or it may reflect the vision of Baruch that in God's Eternal Kingdom every grape vine would produce 1000 branches; each branch 1000 grapes; and each grape 120 gallons of wine. When we enter the sanctuary for worship beneath this window, we are reminded that we worship on Sunday, the Day of Resurrection. When we leave worship, we leave as Easter people who embody the new life in Christ for our neighbor.

Window 12 – Service

Above the front door of the church, facing Huntington Avenue and downtown



Newport News, is a window which depicts service to the world. In the stained glass we see food, drink, clothing, an open door with a cross, a bed with flowers, and a window with bars. The images are drawn from the parable in Matthew 25 in which those people who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, care

for the sick, and visit the prisoner are rendering service to Jesus himself. In the center stands a Roman cross with rays of light symbolic of the power of the crucified and risen Jesus to lead his people into ministry.

Window 13 – Witness

Above the side door of the church, facing the James River, is a window which



depicts witness to the world. In the stained glass we see a map of the world, a baptismal shell and a Bible. The images in this window are drawn from the final scene in Matthew's Gospel in which the Risen Christ is standing on a mountain and telling his disciples, "Go ... 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 you, and lo, I am with you always ..." [Matthew 28:19-20]. As in the precious window, we see at the center of this panel a Roman cross with rays of light symbolic of the power of the crucified and Risen Jesus to lead his people into ministry.

Photos by JoAnne Rawls