

# The font



The font and plaque



The font's wooden cover

The word font comes from the word *fontare* meaning fountain and is essentially a bowl for water. The main font in St James's is a large octagonal (eight-sided) bowl-shaped stone which is made of portland stone with marbel decorated outer columns. It holds the water used in baptism which has been sanctified (made holy) by the priest. The number eight and the octagon represent the resurrection and rebirth in Christian symbolism.



The portable font and plaque

This is because Christ rose from the grave eight days after his entry into Jerusalem, so the eight sides became symbols of baptism, the spiritual rebirth of a person.

St James's font has a brass plaque on the east side of the base which is inscribed *"In memory of Sir Henry George Ward GCMG father of Alice Ward, Governor of Madras died August 2nd 1860."* It has an oak cover with a decorative cross.

When a baptism takes place in the nave, a smaller, wooden font is used at the front of the church. This portable font has a wooden base which supports a copper font. The base is inscribed *"Let the children come to me. In memory of Vivienne Prentice, 1898 - 1995"*.

Often fonts are decorated in a way to draw out the meaning for people of aspects of Christian faith especially relevant to baptism. Four sides of St James's font have symbols which represent the four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They contain the good news of Jesus which a baptised person has heard. They are the four 'living creatures' who surround God's throne and come from the prophecies of Ezekiel 1.4, and Revelation 4.2, which became associated with the evangelists. Each of the symbols is depicted with wings following the biblical sources. These symbols were developed as a way of helping people to remember the different Gospels and the perspectives that they took, especially at a time when many people could not read.

- The image of **a man** or angel represents the Gospel of St Matthew and signifies Christ's human nature.
- **The lion** represents the Gospel of St Mark and is a traditional symbol of royalty and power, and therefore denotes Christ the King.
- **The ox or calf**, the sacrificial victim, represents the Gospel of St Luke and highlights the priestly character of Christ's mission.
- **The eagle** stands for the Gospel of St John, the evangelist 'who soars to the heavens', because his theology is much more developed than the three Synoptic Gospels. Just as an eagle soars above the earth, so John's theology soars above the other Gospels.

The other four sides all have symbols which point to a name or title of Jesus, directing people towards Jesus and his identity.

- **A and O** - Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In the Book of Revelation Jesus is referred to as the alpha and omega, beginning and end, first and last.
- **IHC/IHS** - the first three letters of the Greek for Jesus (Iota, eta, sigma).
- **XP** - the Greek letters 'chi' and 'rho', the first two letters of the Greek for Christ. The two letters are superimposed on one another and this was a Christian symbol from the 3rd century onwards.
- **The Star of David** - a reminder of the Jewish heritage of Jesus, who is referred to in the Gospels as 'Son of David.'

Or • **A Double Trinity Star** showing that God is triune (three-in-one) - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (A second possible interpretation)



A Winged Man  
St Matthew



A Winged Lion  
St Mark



A Winged Ox  
St Luke



An Eagle  
St John



Alpha  
and Omega



IHC  
Jesus Christ



XP  
Jesus Christ



The Star  
of David