

# Symbols in the church

A symbol is something that makes us think about something else. It is said that early Christians did not think it reverent to write the names of God or Jesus in full, so they made different symbols for them. There are various symbols in the carvings, embroideries and stained glass of the church.

## Crosses

A cross is the most important Christian symbol and reminds us that Jesus died for us.



Altar cross



Processional cross



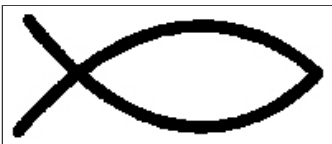
Sunday school cross



Altar frontal cross

A crucifix makes us think about Jesus on the cross. People may wear a crucifix to remember Jesus. An empty cross reminds Christians that Jesus did not stay on the cross. He is alive!

## Symbols of God the Father



In Roman times, Christians were disliked by rulers such as Caesar. They were not allowed to meet together and worship as we do in church today. Any Christians who were discovered would have been persecuted. So they developed a secret symbol which enabled them to easily identify each other as Christians. It was the symbol of a fish, like the one to the left. They could easily draw it in the sand or mud with their feet without being noticed. In this way they could discover other Christians.

A hand coming from a cloud, or a hand raised in blessing is another symbol of God the Father.



Hand on a grave

## Symbols of God the Son, Jesus Christ

'IHS' or 'IHC' - the first three letters of the Greek for Jesus (IHCOYC).

'INRI' - the initial letters of the Latin words for 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' (IESUS NAZARENUS REX IUDAEORUM). This was the inscription which Pilate wrote and put on the cross (see John 19, v. 19).

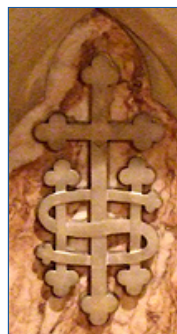
'XP' - the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ (XPICTOC).



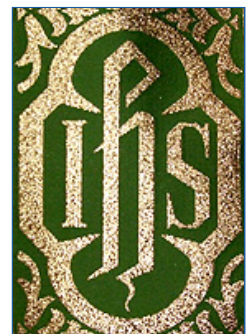
IHS on a bishop's chair



IHS on a grave



IHS on the pulpit



IHS on a chasuble



INRI on the war memorial



XP on a paschal candle



XP on the font

### *Symbols of God the Holy Spirit*

A dove was seen at the baptism of Jesus. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. A dove with a halo, or a sevenfold flame, are symbols of the Holy Spirit's power (see Acts 2, v. 1-4). The Holy Spirit came to Jesus' friends looking like flames of fire. Flames are another symbol of the Holy Spirit.



Dove on the high altar reredos



Dove in the small nave stained glass



Dove on a pulpit fall



Dove on an altar frontal

### *Symbols of The Trinity*

Christians believe that the One God is made up of three Persons or aspects, **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. This godhead is called the Trinity or the Triune (three-in-one) God. Think of it as a clover leaf which has three parts to it. The symbols of the Trinity always have three parts.

The **Father** is the creator of all things; **Jesus Christ, his only son**, is the redeemer or saviour of all people; the **Holy Spirit** blesses everyone and everything and makes them holy.



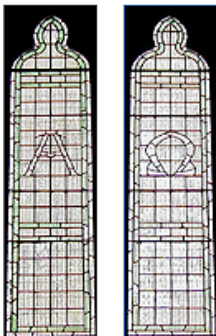
## *Candles*

Candles are lit during services. They show that Christ is the 'Light of the world' (John 8:12).



## *Alpha and Omega*

Alpha and Omega (A and O) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They mean the beginning and the end and so remind us that God is the beginning and the end of all things and suggest his everlasting nature (see Revelation 1, v. 8).



A & O in the baptistry windows



A & O on the font



A & O in the chancel woodwork



A & O on a paschal candle

## *Cockle shells*

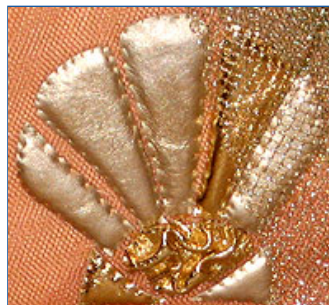
The Acts of the Apostles records that Saint James was martyred (killed for his faith) by Herod Agrippa around 43 AD. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. He was buried in Jerusalem but it is claimed that his relics were transferred to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 830 AD where they remain today. There are cockle shells on the beaches of Galacia in Northern Spain where his relics were brought on the way to Compostela and these were adopted as symbols of St James from Medieval times up until the present day.



Shell in the hall consecration stone



Shell in a pulpit fall



Shell in an altar frontal



Shell above the vicarage door

## *Bread and wine*

In communion, the bread and wine have an important meaning. Christians break up some bread to remember the body of Jesus was 'broken' on the cross. Christians drink red wine to remember that Jesus bled when he died for us.



Wheat and bread in the reredos



Wheat in the organ capital



Grapes in the organ capital



Grapes and wine in the reredos

## *Trees, shrubs and flowers*

Some of the trees, shrubs and flowers growing in the churchyard have long been thought to have a symbolic meaning. They remind us of things connected with the Christian faith. The yew trees are slow-growing and very long-lived trees, so they have been looked upon as a symbol of immortality and therefore a suitable tree to be planted in the place where people are buried. The prickly leaves of the holly tree have often been thought of as a reminder of the crown of thorns which Jesus wore when he was crucified. The red berries are like drops of blood, and serve to remind us that Christ's blood was shed for us. Thus the holly tree has come to be known as a reminder of the Passion of Christ. Graveyards usually have yew trees and holly in them. Yew trees and holly are 'evergreens' - the leaves do not die in winter. These plants remind us that we can live for ever in heaven.

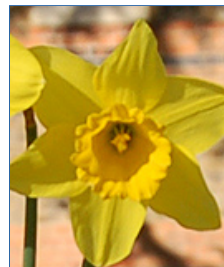
The daffodil and the lily remind us of everlasting life. Though the bulbs look dead when they are placed in the ground, new life springs within them and they blossom into beautiful flowers. So our church is decorated with such blooms especially at Easter time. The lily of the valley, with its white blossoms is a symbol of purity and humility, and it is often associated with Mary the mother of Jesus. The clover, being a three-leaved plant is an obvious symbol of the Holy Trinity. Each leaf has three parts, which are not three separate leaves, but one leaf. So likewise, God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; yet He is not three Gods, but one. The Christmas rose has been thought of as a reminder of the Nativity.



Christmas Rose



Yew tree



Daffodil



Holly shrub