

While the original idea had been to use only monograms of Christ to decorate the tree, a few other symbols of the early church were added to tell a more complete story. Because Christmas (Christ + mass) is a celebration of His festival, designs were limited to those which referred primarily to Him. Because we wanted the tree to speak directly to anyone who happened to come into the Church, designs which pointed to denominations were omitted. The first Chrismon tree in the nave of our Church in 1957 held only a dozen different ornaments. We thought that the story of the Christ was told symbolically.

But we found that the more we grew as Christians, the more we had to say about our Lord. In 1958, some new Chrismons were added to the tree. When the same thing happened in 1959, we realized that our tree would never be completed. There is always something new to say about God, always a better way to say it. Through the ages the church has found varied ways of telling the Good News, and the living church of today will find still other ways of making God's love more meaningful and apparent to humanity.

We affirm these beliefs in our decoration of the Chrismon tree at Ascension Church by adding new designs each year. Some of the new ornaments are developed from symbols of the church in its earliest years. Others were first used by the inspired writers of the Bible. And still others are new interpretations which add depth to our understanding of our Lord and our relationship to Him. But we have always insisted that any symbol on the tree must, first of all, point to our Lord and God.

All Chrismons are made in combinations of white and gold. White, the liturgical color for Christmas, refers to our Lord's purity and perfection; gold, to His majesty and glory. We point to the Christ as the Light of the world by using tiny white lights on the tree.

This background information about the CHRISMON CHRISTMAS TREE and the interpretation of the CHRISMONS has been secured from books written by Frances Kipps Spencer.

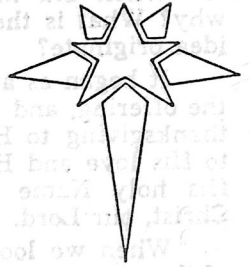
We invite you to study and enjoy our tree during this joyous holiday season. May God bless all of us in our desire to keep our Lord at the center of our Christmas celebration.

AMERICAN BAPTIST WOMEN

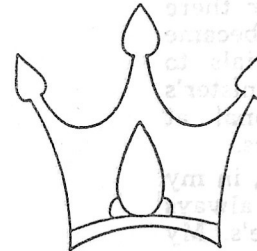
THE CHRISMON CHRISTMAS TREE

CHRISMONS

Epiphany Star



The Crown



THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

South Florida St. at Hart Ave.

BUCKHANNON, WEST VIRGINIA

THE CHRISMON CHRISTMAS TREE

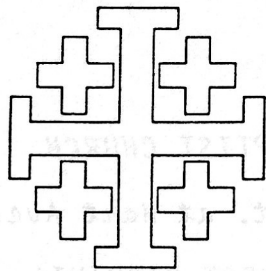
When did the Chrismon tree begin? And why? What is the reason for it? Where did the idea originate?

It began as an offering to God. God blessed the offering, and it became a song of praise and thanksgiving to Him. It continues as a witness to His love and His glory, as a proclamation of His holy Name through His Son, Jesus, the Christ, our Lord.

When we look back, we see one beginning of the tree during the Christmas season of 1940. An elderly minister, the Reverend George Pass, came by our home to wish us a Merry Christmas. He saw the discarded Christmas gift wrappings and asked for them. He wanted to use the pretty papers and ribbons to make Christmas ornaments for a tree in his little church. There was no money to buy decorations; but there was a willingness to glorify God with the talents which he had and the materials that he could get.

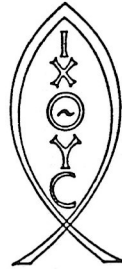
Mr. Pass's devotion moved us. For some years after that, it was difficult to buy ornaments to decorate our home tree. But we still wanted a Christmas tree. So, my husband and I began to make our tree decorations. Each year there was a different tree; every Christmas we became more proficient in using various materials to carry out our ideas. Because of the minister's inspiration, I became a semi-professional at creating new and unusual Christmas trees.

The earliest beginning was, of course, in my home as a child. The tree in the house always seemed more beautiful than anyone else's. My parents, I knew, worked hard to make it so.

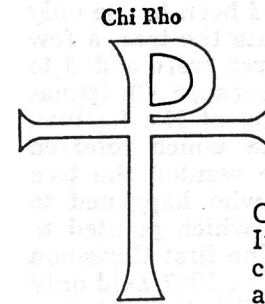


Jerusalem Cross

Over the years these ornaments have developed so that now a Chrismon may be a monogram, a sign, a symbol, a type, or a combination of such figures. The one requirement is that it refer primarily to our Lord and God.



The Fish



Chi Rho

In 1956 there was a tree in the Lutheran Church of the Ascension that I did not ignore. It was not unusual; it was the kind of tree with colored lights and balls that one saw anywhere at Christmas time. But that year I saw, and appreciated, the people behind the tree. That tree made me aware of those members who cared enough to do what they could; I again recognized the simple and profound dedication of being willing to give.

The next beginning was the following spring when I volunteered to decorate the tree in the Church, and the pastor accepted the offer. I had no ideas or plans except to try, with the ability which God had given me, to create something more suitable for the Church. Months went by while I tried to think of a way to do the job; many ideas came and were discarded; none were good enough.

Then, perhaps, came the real beginning; I realized that Christmas was the birthday of the Christ Child. Suppose it had been the custom in His day and time to decorate birthday cakes for children? How would Mary have decorated a cake for Son Jesus? His name, yes. But what else would please Him?

That was the answer; Let the Child be honored, the Person He is! Oh, there were weeks of research before the Chrismons came to my attention. I knew nothing of Christian symbolism. But now I knew what I was doing, what I wanted to say. Since then, the glory of God and His love have been and are the song which we sing through the Chrismon tree. We talk about the Gift that He gave us that day. We say what we can where we are, with the materials which He gives us; we say it to the people around us, in their language; and we try to help others sing a similar song. This is the Chrismon idea.

* * *

While searching for a way to honor the Christ, I came across some drawings of designs called chrisma. "Chrismon" is a combination of parts of two words: CHRIS and MONogram. A Chrismon is just that—a monogram of Christ.

- 37 This Greek Cross has a background of the rays of the rising sun. The Greek word NIKAI stands for conquer. Jesus conquers sin and death.
- 38 The Latin Cross with Alpha and Omega, Jesus is first and last.
- 39 Celtic Cross - The original meaning of this cross is lost in antiquity. Some scholars suggest the circle was a symbol for eternity, or the eternal nature of God.
- 40 The Greek letters Chi Rho (XP) correspond to the English letters Chr of Christ. Christ is on the simple Latin Cross.
- 41 NIKAI IC XC with the cross means Jesus Christ conquers even on the cross. The lilies of the valley express simple humble beauty in contrast to the horror of death on a cross.
- 42 Chi and Rho (XP) are Greek letters that are the same as the first three English letters of the word Christ. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus is the first and last.
- 43 Cross and Chi in Greek correspond to the first two letters in English, that describe Jesus being the Christ. Christ is on the cross.
- 44 Iota, Eta and Sigma are Greek letters which look like IHS and correspond in English to Jes of Jesus. The Greek Cross is used too, having four arms of equal length.
- 45 Iota, Eta, and Sigma are repeated in this Chrismon with a circle, a line which has no beginning and no end.
- 46 Iota Chi (IX) with daisies and lilies of the valley would be J.C. in English, standing for Jesus Christ. The lilies of the valley and daisies tell of Jesus humility and innocence.
- 47 Chi and cross woven through two circles suggest the Christ who died on the cross at a specific time in history to provide people with eternal life.
- 48 Here again are the letters standing for Jesus Christ, Iota Chi (IX) which means the "promised one".
- 49 On the lowest branches of our tree, children will find the creche, or manger scene. Although most Chrismons are symbolic, this one is pictorial. This section of our tree is called, "The Children's Corner" and is surrounded by miniature size Chrismons.

INTERPRETATION OF CHRISMONS

- 1 Emmanuel - A rose bud in the manger symbolizes the child, while an open rose, which looks over the manger, represents His mother, Mary.
- 2 Crown of thorns symbolizes our Lord's crown of suffering. Mark 15:17
- 3 Crown - represents Jesus as Lord and King. These crowns hung together show the tragedy of that Good Friday against the triumph of the Ascension.
- 4 In Mark 12:10, Jesus is called the cornerstone, "the very stone which the builders rejected."
- 5 This Chrismon gets its meaning from Malachi 4:2, "the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings."
- 6 The circle could mean the eternal One, who is God, or eternal life. In this Circle are symbols: Butterfly: resurrection, X = Christ.
- 7 The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is represented by wheat and grapes, the ingredients for the bread and wine, Jesus body and blood.
- 8 As it was against Roman law to be Christian, early Christians used a simple drawing of the fish as their secret pass sign. The letters of the Greek word for fish, ICHTHUS formed an acrostic on the Greek phrase, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." (I - Iota, X - Chi, O - Theta, Y - Upsilon, C - Sigma.)
- 9 The fish in a circle combines the symbol for Jesus and the sign for eternal life or God, the eternal One. The fish was used as a statement of one's faith.
- 10 Three fish made into a circle and a triangle is a way of giving symbols double meaning. The symbol for Jesus, the fish, is used three times to indicate the trinity.
- 11 The fish carrying bread represents Jesus and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

- 12 The butterfly began as a caterpillar. Such a dramatic and beautiful change in the form of life suggests resurrection either of Jesus or Christians.
- 13 The triangle and the trefoil (two geometric figures, a trefoil and an equilateral triangle combine to define the Godhead.
- 14 Three intertwined circles, a symbol for the Holy Trinity, one God in three Persons, Each eternal, All One.
- 15 Triquetra and circle describe the eternal expressions of God.
- 16 Descending dove with water symbolizes the Holy Spirit bestowing His seven gifts. Revelation 5:12. The rays reach toward crystal waves, which reminds us of the water of Holy Baptism, by which we receive the gift of the Spirit.
- 17 A combination of a rose and the five pointed star in one design is a portrayal of the two natures of the Christ: He is true God, and He is true Man.
- 18 The eight pointed star symbolizes regeneration or Holy Baptism.
- 19 The shell coupled with an eight pointed star is symbolic of Holy Baptism.
- 20 The star of David has six points. Jesus was called the son of David. The chalice was used to hold wine for the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.
- 21 The seven pointed star symbolizes the gifts of the Spirit, coupled with God's Word.
- 22 The scroll suggests the material on which the books of the Bible were written. More specifically, Isaiah predicted the coming of the Word in human form - Jesus.
- 23 Lamb - Isaiah was the first prophet to depict God the Son as the sacrificial lamb, Isaiah 53:7.
- 24 Dove with olive branch refers to the story of the flood recorded in Genesis 8, and symbolizes the deluge, victory and an expectation of new life.
- 25 Bell- The bell has always tolled the good news.
- 26 Lamp - symbolizes knowledge and truth, John 8:12
- 27 The four scrolls on the curved patee cross represented the Good News according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- 28 This Christogram is rich with symbols. XP - Christ, Triangle - Three expressions of God, M-Mary, Rose- Jesus, Shells - Holy Baptism.
- 29 A cross on top of an orb indicates that Jesus is Lord of the world.
- 30 A cross on top of a world with continents adds detail to the world that Jesus rules.
- 31 An empty cross in eternity shows our eternal life given by Jesus experience on the cross coupled with His resurrection.
- 32 Jerusalem cross is composed of four tau crosses which make the center cross represent the Savior. The small crosses represent those who take up a cross, follow Him, and proclaim and live the gospel to the four corners of the world.
- 33 This cross is formed with a shepherd's crook and the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, He is first and last.
- 34 Serpent on a tau cross refers to John 3:14, where we read, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up."
- 35 Three dimensional woven Latin Cross coupled with IHC in circle. When a cross is combined with IHC OR IHS; the letters are said to signify (In this cross is salvation).
- 36 The Greek Cross has four arms of equal length.