



ST PAUL'S
EPISCOPAL

Baptistry



The Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Rite of Confirmation, which were originally one rite of Christian initiation, are symbolically represented in the woodcarvings in the Baptistry of St. Paul's Church. This booklet has been written for the purpose of interpreting the outward meaning of the symbols and showing their relationship to Baptism and Confirmation.

In Christian art, symbols are used as a means of expressing infinite truths in finite language. The inner and spiritual meaning of these Signs of our Faith are revealed when they are identified with the Sacramental Life of the Church, through which God bestows His Gifts of Grace.

Holy Baptism

Baptism is one of the Sacraments ordained by Christ that the Church considers to be "generally necessary to salvation." Baptism is a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.

The font, meaning fountain or spring, is the universal symbol of Baptism and, by ancient tradition, is placed near a door to signify that Baptism is the door through which we enter to become members of the Church.

The octagonal shape of the font recalls the fact that our Lord received His name when He was eight days old. In Baptism we receive our Christian names and are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

Around the font are carved the words, "One Lord, One Faith. One Baptism."
Ephesians 4:5

Around the top of the paneling is carved the Baptismal Formula: "I Baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Confirmation

In the center panel on the walls is the symbol which that associates Baptism with Confirmation: seven doves surrounding a scallop shell dripping water.

The scallop shell is symbolic of Baptism. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, for in the account of our Lord's Baptism, the Holy Spirit was described symbolically as descending from heaven like a dove. *John 1:32*

The seven doves are symbolic of the Sevenfold Gifts of the Holy Spirit: the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, godliness, and holy fear. *Isaiah 11:2*

The flight of the doves converging in a circular formation around the scallop shell is expressive of force and is symbolic of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church.

The circle, having no beginning or end, is a symbol of the Everlasting God, Who was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

The Gift of Wisdom

The Tree of life is the symbol for the Gift of Wisdom. As leaves and fruit identify the life and species of a tree, so Wisdom is a manifestation of the quality of life that comes from union with God.

A healthy tree, whose roots are planted deep in the earth and fed with the moisture and richness of the soil, grows silently and steadily toward the sun, and a life that is "rooted and grounded in love" *Ephesians 3:17* and nourished by the Sacramental life of the Church, is drawn toward Christ, the Sun of Righteousness *Malachi 4:2* Who is the Source of life and the Giver of Wisdom.

The Psalmist, seeing an analogy between a tree and a man whose life is God-centered, wrote: "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." *Psalms 1:3*

Man cannot attain Wisdom by his own efforts, for Wisdom is not an intellectual achievement, but a Gift of God.

The Gift of Understanding

The flaming heart symbolic of zeal and devotion is expressive of the Gift of Understanding, through which our human faculty of reason is enlightened and quickened by the Holy Spirit, and our hearts set on fire with love for Him.

In Old Testament literature, the heart was considered the seat of understanding – the very center of a person's being. Christian art has accepted this interpretation to express, in figurative language, the depth of God's understanding.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit appeared as "cloven tongues as of fire." *Acts 2:3*

On the first Easter Day, our Lord appeared to two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus. After He revealed himself to them, they exclaimed, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?" *Luke 24:32*

The realization of the Presence of our Living Lord always sets our hearts aflame!

The Gift of Counsel

The Gift of Counsel is expressed by a hand with the index finger raised, suggestive of godly admonition and guidance.

The Hand of God, as a symbol of His guidance and counsel, is associated with His mighty acts in history: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel." *Psalms 73:24* After the deliverance from Egypt, the children of Israel sang: "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power." *Exodus 15:6* The Commandments, "two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" *Exodus 31:18* were described by the Psalmist as "my delight and my counselors" *Psalms 119:24*. And again: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." *Psalms 139:9-10*

In the Confirmation Service, the Church's prayer for the candidates includes this petition: "Let your fatherly hand ever be over these your servants." *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 419

The Gift of Strength

The Gift of Strength is portrayed by an eagle with a fish clutched in its talons.

The eagle is associated with strength and renewal of life. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles." *Isaiah 40:31*

The fish is a very ancient symbol of the Savior. The letters of the Greek word for fish are the same as the initial letters of the Greek words: "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." In the days of persecution, the Christians used the symbol of the fish as a secret sign of their Faith.

The symbol of the Gift of Strength suggests a truth of the Christian faith. The eagle holds fast to the fish for food. Life in the Church begins with a promise to hold fast to Christ, the Bread of Life. As we share faithfully in the Sacramental Life of the Church, we realize that Christ holds us fast and that He is both our Strength and the Sustainer of our life.

The Gift of Knowledge

A lighted lamp symbolizes the Gift of Knowledge.

As light dispels darkness, so the Gift of Knowledge enlightens our minds. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." *John 8:12*

The Psalmist said: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." *Psalms 119:105*

The Gift of Knowledge comes to us through God's grace, for it is not by our own intellectual ability that we know God, but only as He reveals Himself to us.

This gift enables us, within the corporate life of the Church, to examine our faith in the light of God's revelation to us, and to apply the truths of our Christian religion to our daily lives.

"And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ." *See Philippians 4:7*

The Gift of Godliness

Hyssop and a basin for blessed water, symbols of the ceremonial rite of cleansing, are appropriate symbols for the Gift of Godliness.

Water is essential for Baptism. Through this Sacrament we are regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit and made God's children by adoption and grace. The Gift of Godliness confirms this faith in us and strengthens us in all goodness (godliness).

Hyssop is a plant that was used by the Jews for sprinkling in the purification services in the Temple. The purifying element in the use of hyssop is reflected in the Psalmist's prayer: "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." *Psalm 51:7*

God is the author of all godliness and bestows this Gift upon His household, the Church.

The Gift of Holy Fear

The symbol for the Gift of Holy Fear is a triangle surrounded by rays of glory within which is a Hebrew letter, Yod.

At one period of Hebrew history, the name of God was so sacred that it was not pronounced at all. The reason for this may have been the fear of breaking the Third Commandment. Various substitutes were devised for writing the name of God, and one of these was the use of the Yod.

The equilateral triangle is symbolic of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Holy Fear, as the Christian knows it, is not to be associated with dread or terror. These emotions repel, but the Gift of Holy Fear draws and holds us within the Corporate Life of the Church. Holy Fear may be expressed as reverent awe.

The rays of glory that surround this symbol imply the radiance of this heavenly Gift.

The Continuous Life

The state of salvation to which we are called in Baptism is made possible through our Lord's death and resurrection. If God's Holy Spirit is to be renewed in us daily, the Baptismal experience of dying to sin and of being raised to a new life must be a continuous one.

At Baptism the prayer of the Church is that we may "continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior." *Book of Common Prayer, p. 307*

At Confirmation, we renew our commitment to Christ.

The Church provides the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the continued strengthening and refreshing of our souls.

In the Prayers of the People, we ask God to grant the departed "continual growth in thy love and service," and in the post-communion prayer, we pray that we, being "members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son ... may continue in that holy fellowship" *Holy Eucharist, Rite 1, pp. 330 and 339*

(Adapted with updated references from the booklet "The Baptistry, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina," May 1958, written by Rosalie S. Wilson. Quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, 1990)

Memorials:

The hand-carved paneling and symbols:

*To the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of
ROBERT EDWARD LASATER 1867-1954
NANCY LYBROOK LASATER 1877-1952
Given by their Daughters*

The marble font (encased in carved oak):

M.P.B.

The font cover:

*Given to the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of
PAUL HARRIS HENNING,
July 12, 1900 – March 28, 1955*

Design and Installation:

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*Nils Frederick Larson
Larson & Larson, Architect
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Winston-Salem, North Carolina*

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