



The Stained Glass Windows
in the Church of
St. John the Baptist,
Hillsdale, NJ





Part I: The Call of Abram
The Twelve Tribes
Clerestory Tower
The Twelve Apostles



The Salvation Story

I recently read that people are isolated, lonely, and disconnected in today's society. There is a need to belong that is not being fulfilled. At St. John's, we cannot help but feel our belonging as we celebrate the liturgy in a worship space filled with reminders of our story. Part I presents the call of Abraham (Sunday sacristy), Jacob and his sons-12 Tribes of Israel (west wing), Jesus (tower clerestory), and the Twelve Apostles (east wing). In Part II, the lower windows of the west wing symbolize the lives of familiar persons in the Old Testament. The lower windows of the east wing and the windows of the center clerestory symbolize the saints: persons who chose to take up the Cross of Jesus and follow in his footsteps, from earliest times to present day. We recognize our familial connection to them through our sacramental life (windows in Our Lady's Chapel) in the Church. Truly, we belong.

Mary Elbert

Introduction

This presentation guides the viewer/reader through the stained glass window art in the Sunday Sacristy, the upper windows in the west wing (Old Testament), the tower clerestory windows, and the upper windows in the east wing (New Testament).

The upper windows in the wings symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel (west) and Jesus' twelve apostles (east). According to Jewish tradition, the number twelve, a minyan, is the prescribed number of persons whose presence is required for a communal worship service. Jesus and his followers were devout Jews; they followed the laws. The tower clerestory windows present five significant events in Jesus' life.

The descriptions of the windows come from the book published for the dedication of the Church, copyright, 1969, Custombook, Inc., Ecclesiastical Color Publishers, The Custom Building, South Hackensack, NJ. Printed in the United States of America.

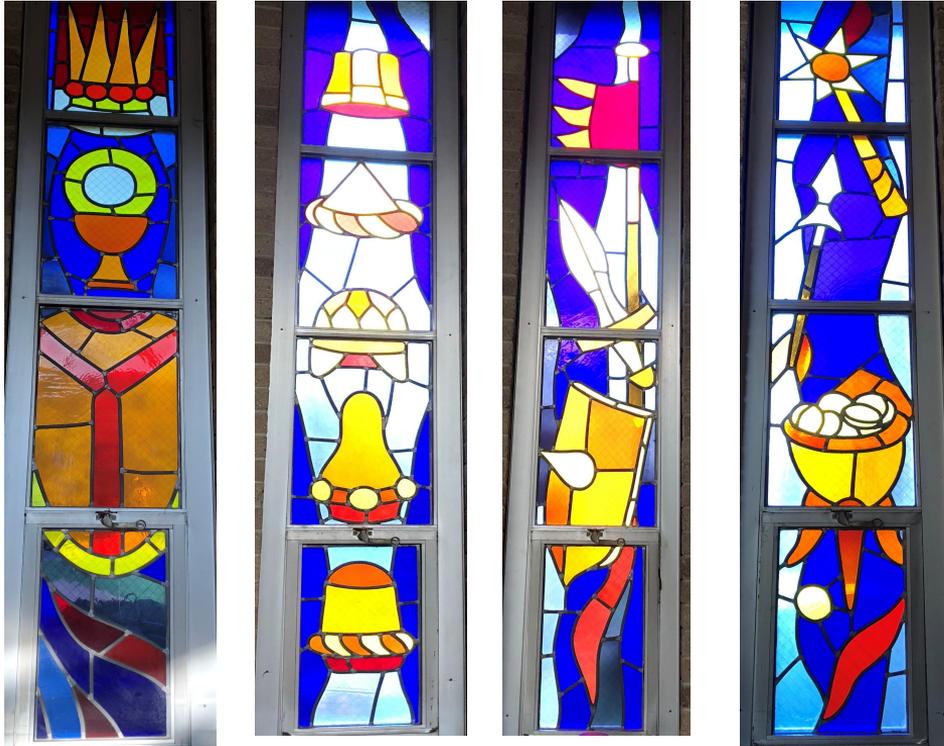
Additional information: www.USSCB.org, and The New American Bible, St. Joseph Edition, 1970.

Part I: Old Testament: The Call of Abram



In Genesis, chapter 12, God calls Abram to take his family and flocks to a new land. The crowns and weapons symbolize the warring among the kings of the lands God promised to him. Abram obeyed God, left Ur, and came into the lands as a peacemaker. For that he was blessed.

The Call of Abram



Genesis 14:18 says that Melchizedek, king of Salem, “brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram.” Hebrews, chapter 7, refers to this blessing of Abram that is repeated in ordination: “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The center window (left) pictures the host and chalice of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

The 12 Tribes of Israel: Jacob's Sons

In the west wing, the windows read from right to left, as appropriate in Hebrew, our Old Testament legacy. The beautiful images represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel—each named for one of Jacob's sons, born of his two wives, Rachel and Leah, and their slaves Bilhah and Zilpah. In Genesis, chapter 49, Jacob, also called Israel, gives his sons his final instructions, describing each with his own symbol.

“Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather around that I may tell you what is to happen to you in days to come’”(49:1).



Ruben

Ruben, first-born son of Leah, is represented by the alpha, a Hebrew letter inside a 6-point star, mandrakes-herbs of fertility, and a fish in unstable water.

“You, Ruben, my first-born, my strength and the first fruit of my manhood, excelling in rank and excelling in power! Unruly as water, you shall no longer excel, for you climbed into your father’s bed and defiled my couch to my sorrow” (Gen. 49:3-4).



Simeon and Levi

Simeon and Levi, also sons of Leah, slew the Hivite men after circumcising them, in retaliation for the violation of their sister, Dinah, by Shechem. The swords of violence are their symbols.

“Simeon and Levi, brothers indeed, weapons of violence are their knives. . . Cursed be their fury so fierce and their rage so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob, disperse them throughout Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7).



Judah

The lion is Judah, son of Leah. He fathered a kingly tribe from which came David and the messianic son of David, Jesus Christ.

“Judah, like a lion’s whelp, you have grown up on prey, my son. . . The scepter shall never depart from Judah. . . While tribute is brought to him and he receives the people’s homage, he tethers his donkey to the vine, his purebred ass to the choicest stem. . .” (Gen. 49: 9-12).



Zebulon

Zebulon, son of Leah, is symbolized by a ship moving into safe harbor. He is a peaceful man, living by the seashore.

“Zebulon shall dwell by the seashore and his flank shall be based in Sidon” Gen. 49:13).



Issachar

Issachar, son of Leah, lives a country life of toil, depicted by a burdened donkey crouched between saddlebags and blessing hands.

“Issachar is a rawboned ass, crouching between the saddlebags. When he saw how good a settled life was, and how pleasant the country, he bent his shoulder to the burden and became a toiling serf” (Gen. 49:14-15).



Dan

Dan, son of Rachel's slave Zilpah, "shall achieve justice," says Jacob. The root word for Dan is the same as the word for justice in Hebrew.

"Let Dan be a serpent by the roadside, a horned viper by the path, that bites the horse's heel and throws the rider backward" (Gen. 49:17).



Gad

Gad, son of Leah's slave Zilpah, is read in Hebrew as an assonance to the words for raid, raiders, and raided. The tribe of Gad was allotted a beautiful and fertile portion on land in the Jordan valley. The men were strong and warlike. They defended their land from raiders. The tents symbolize their nomadic life.

“Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels” (Gen. 49:18).



Asher

Asher, brother of Gad, is seen as a well-laden fruit tree.

“Asher’s produce is rich, and he shall furnish dainties for kings” (Gen. 49:20).



Naphtali

Naphtali, son of Rachel's slave Zilpah, is shown as a hind.

“Naphtali is a hind let loose, which brings forth lovely fawns” (Gen. 49:21).

Fawns are metaphors for “goodly words.”

Jacob's Son Joseph

There is no window or tribe for Jacob's son Joseph. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and ended up in Egypt. In Genesis, chapter 39-46, we read of his life in Egypt. He eventually was installed as an advisor to Pharaoh. Meanwhile the land of his brothers suffered a great famine and the brothers traveled to Egypt for food. Joseph tested them by demanding that one of them return to get their youngest brother, Benjamin, and bring him to Egypt, while the others remained in prison. When the two returned, Joseph again tested them, but finally revealed his identity. Pharaoh decreed that their father and all their families should come to Egypt and live prosperously.

In Genesis 47: 27-31, Jacob blesses Joseph's sons by his Egyptian wife, Ephraim and Manasseh.



Benjamin

Rachel, Jacob's wife, died after giving birth to Benjamin. He is pictured as a devouring wolf.

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; mornings he devours the prey, and evenings he distributes the spoils” (Gen. 49:27).



Ephraim

Ephraim, son of Joseph and his Egyptian wife, was blessed by Jacob when brought before him by his father, Joseph. He is symbolized by fishes and grapes.

“By you shall the people of Israel pronounce blessings; may they say, ‘God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh’” (Gen. 48:20).



Manassah

Manasseh, son of Joseph and his Egyptian wife, was blessed by Jacob when brought before him by his father, Joseph. The strength of oxen represent Manasseh.

“By you shall the people of Israel pronounce blessings; may they say, ‘God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh’” (Gen. 48:20).

The Windows of the Clerestory Tower

The windows of the clerestory tower represent five significant events in the life of Jesus. Jesus is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the old covenant and the new covenant.

The Baptism of the Lord

The Wedding Feast at Cana

The Raising of Lazarus

The Sermon on the Mount

The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

The Baptism of the Lord



The Wedding Feast at Cana



The Raising of Lazarus



The Sermon on the Mount



The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane



The Twelve Apostles

In Mark 1:16-19, Jesus calls his first followers: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. He calls Levi (Matthew) in chapter 2, verses 11-12. In chapter 3, Mark names all twelve: Simon Peter, James and John (sons of Zebedee), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddeus, Simon, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Later, Mathias is chosen to replace him (Acts 1:21-26).

The windows present symbols used by the Church from its beginnings in the Catacombs to the present day. The fish, one of the earliest sign of Christianity is said to have been carved on walls and tables of meeting places of Christians.



Peter

Papal Crown, Keys, Inverted Cross

Feast: June 29

Patron of fishermen, nutmakers, ship builders

Something Extra: Peter was the first pope; all popes can trace their legitimacy directly back to Peter. He suffered death on an inverted cross, believing he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.



James

Pilgrim's Staff, Shells

Feast: May 3

Patron of hatmakers

Something Extra: James is believed to have written the first letters (epistles).



John

Eagle and Torah

Feast: December 27

Patron of writers

Something Extra: John is believed to have taken Mary to Ephesus, from where he wrote his Gospel. John and his brother James were followers of John the Baptist before Jesus called them.



Andrew

Fish and Shield

Feast: November 30

Patron of Scotland, fisherman

Something Extra: Andrew is believed to have preached in India. Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist before being called by Jesus.



Philip

Basket and Dalmatic

Feast: May 3

Patron of hatters, Uruguay, Luxembourg, and pastry chefs

Something extra: Philip preached in Greece; the basket is symbolic of Jesus' feeding the multitudes.



Bartholomew

Sword and Book

Feast: August 24

Patron of tanners and persons who suffer from neurological disorders

Something extra: He was present at the wedding feast at Cana.



Thomas

Arrows, Stones, Clouds

Feast: July 3

Patron of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, stonecutters, surveyors, masons,
and people who doubt

Something extra: Tradition holds that he baptized the wise
men of the nativity.



James Major

Windmill, Dalmatic

Feast: July 25

Patron of Spain, Guatemala, Nicaragua, veterinarians,
pharmacists

Something extra: James, along with Peter and John, were present with Jesus at the Transfiguration. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred.



Matthew

Moneybags and Angel

Feast: September 21

Patron of accountants and civil servants

Something extra: He wrote his gospel sometime between 60 and 90 A.D., perhaps in Aramaic. Tradition says he preached in Judea, traveled to the East, and was martyred in Ethiopia.



Jude (Thaddeus)

Boat and Book

Feast: October 28

Patron of hope and impossible causes

Something extra: Devotion to St. Jude originated in Chicago in 1929. The devotion quickly spread to the rest of the country through the Depression and WWII, and today millions pray to St. Jude to intercede for them.



Simon

Fish and Book

Feast: February 18

Patron of curriers, sawyers, tanners

Something extra: According to tradition, Simon was supernaturally warned of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, and saved a group of Christians by leading them to the city of Pella, staying with them until it was safe to return.



Mathias

Book and Sword

Feast: May 14 (changed from February 24 in 1969 to be celebrated outside of Lent)

Patron of carpenters and tailors, alcoholics

Something extra: St. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas after his betrayal of Jesus.