

## The History of Immanuel Lutheran Church Altar Cross - Appendix B

During the ministry of Pastor Sidney Johnson at Immanuel Lutheran Church, in 2007 an altar cross was commissioned to be made by Joel Nickel of *Liturgical Art & Design* in Salem, Oregon. The cross was dedicated in the service of September 30, 2007. The cross is made in cloisonne enamel on oak on walnut and is 31" by 44" in size. The descriptions provided here are those of Joel Nickel in the photo story books, *Altar Cross, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Volume 1 and 2* found at the church.



*The descriptions of the various tiles on the cross are provided below, starting with the four evangelists that are seen on the top, bottom and ends of the arms of the cross. This is followed by the "tree of life medallions" seen at the same general cross locations. This is followed by the "life of Christ panels seen through the remainder of the cross. The following are quoted from the above Volumes 1 and 2 of Joel Nickel.*

### **The Evangelist Symbols:**

Revelation 4: 6-7 is the text on which the traditional images for the four evangelists are based (see also Ezekial 1: 6-10). While the text itself isn't explicit in stating that the "four living creatures" are the four evangelists, the interpretive connection is certainly fitting. All four evangelists "fly high" in perceptively proclaiming from the throne of God the victory of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

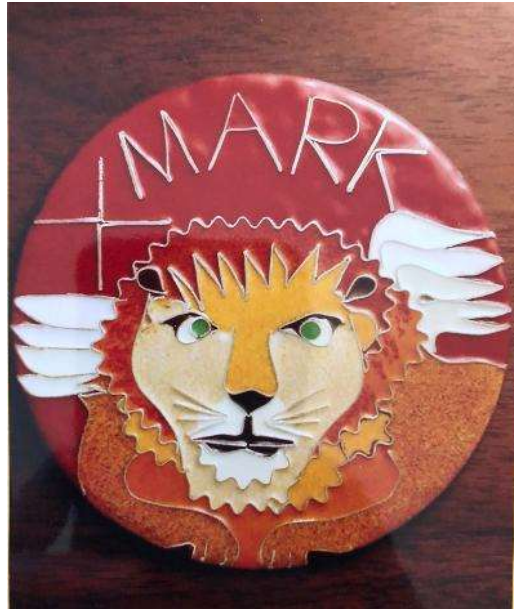
#### **Matthew symbol: The Winged Man**

Matthew has been pictured as the "winged man" in part because Matthew emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, the Son of man, and his connection with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. There is an emphasis on wings and eyes since the good news proceeds from the lofty vision that sees the redemptive connection between heaven and earth.



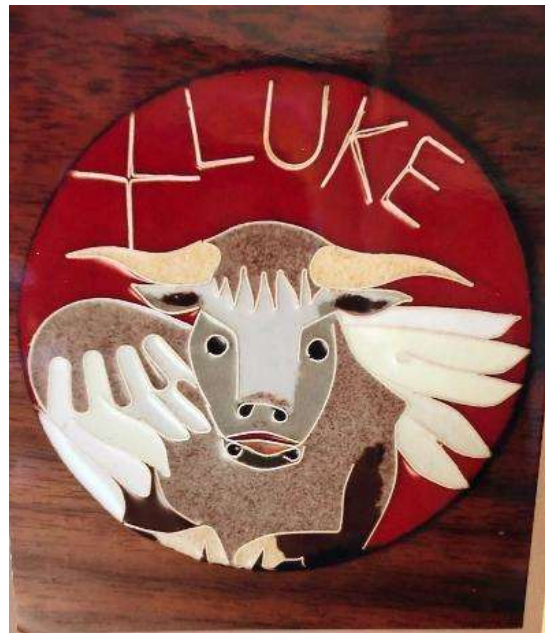
#### **Mark symbol: The Winged Lion**

Mark is imaged as the winged lion, in part because Mark is impressed with the power of Jesus' miracles for which he uses the Greek word 'dunamis' (from which comes the English word, dynamite). In a world impressed with the power of the Roman Empire, Mark presents the power of Messiah Jesus to heal and make whole.



### **Luke symbol: The Winged Ox**

Luke is imaged as the winged ox, in part because the ox in the ancient world was a symbol of patient servitude and peaceful strength. Luke tells the story of how the peace of Christ, the peace of a servant, arrives in Bethlehem in humble circumstances and at the end finally arrives in Rome with St. Paul to rival the vaunted "pax Romana."



### **John Symbol: The Eagle**

John the evangelist certainly "flies high" in proclaiming the divinity of Jesus the Christ, who comes from on high as the "Word made flesh" to tell us about his Father who is light, life and love. John is the gospel of dialogue: it is "through the Word" (Greek 'dia-logos') that God converses with us as we listen



in on the conversations which Jesus has with numerous seekers, from Nicodemus at night to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb.



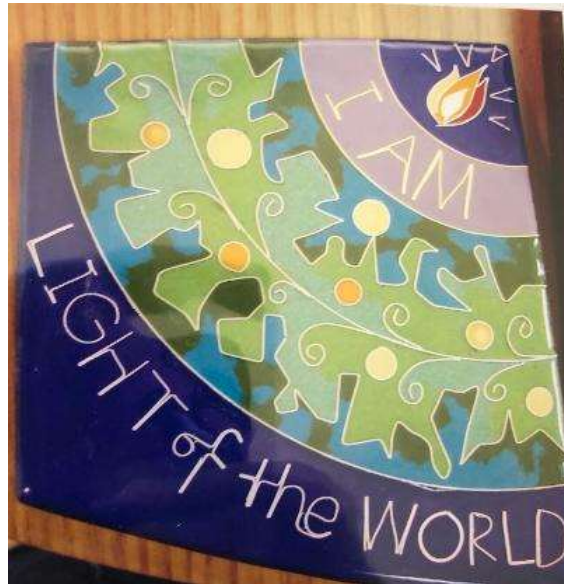
### **Tree of Life Medallions: The I AM sayings of Jesus**

#### **The Tree of Life Medallions:**

On either side of the evangelist symbols there are two medallions with a garland design which represent the "tree of life" (eating of its first fruit = life eternal, Genesis 2:9, Revelation 2:7). The cross-tree of Jesus was transformed from a device of death into a tree of life by his resurrection. On each Tree of Life medallion there is an "I AM" saying of Jesus from the Gospel of John. The "I AM" sayings trade on the holy name of God, Yahweh, which literally means, "I am the One who chooses to save." In the Gospel of John there are seven "I AM" sayings from Jesus (eight if you count his words to the woman at the well).

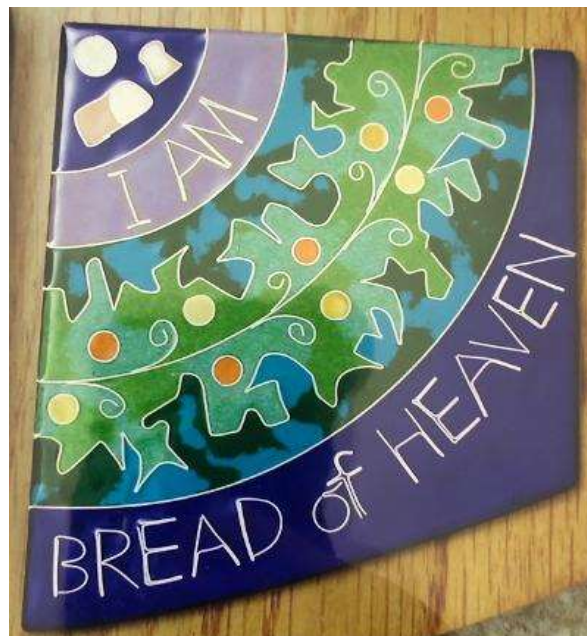
#### **I AM the Light of the World** (John 8:12-20, 9:1-41)

In healing the man born blind, Jesus touches off a controversy. The hope was that when the Messiah came, he would give sight to the blind and light to those who sit in darkness. Because "God is light," the Son of God can say, "I AM the Light of the world." It is in his light that we see the light, and are sent to testify to the light, that Jesus is the Messiah who came into the world with healing power. Even today we are led out of darkness by Christ to live out our true relationship to God, who said, "Let there be light!"



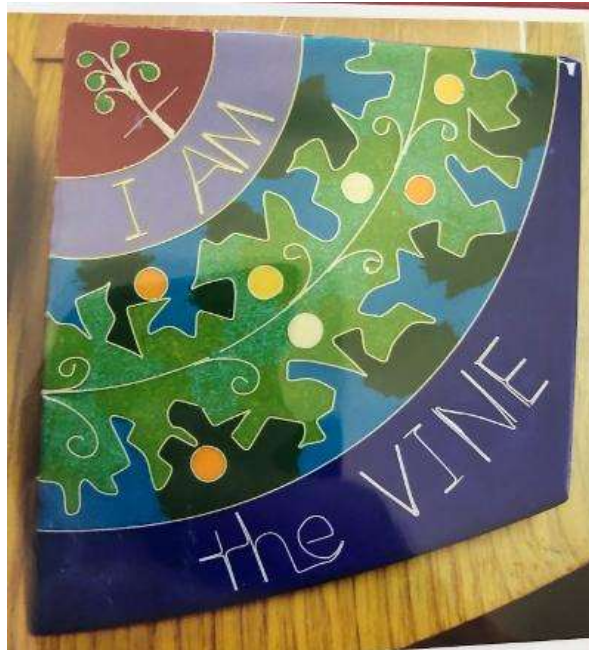
**I AM the Bread from Heaven** (John 6:1-15, 25-71)

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 prompts Jesus to claim, "I AM the bread that came down from heaven" ("I AM the Bread of Life"). Popular piety at the time expected that when the Messiah came, he would renew the sending of manna (Ex. 16:40). Jesus is the Bread that satisfies spiritual hunger forever, a much greater gift than the multiplied bread or mysterious manna which satisfied physical hunger only for a day. Jesus teaches us to pray for daily bread, but in the Eucharist offers his body to us "in, with, and under" the form of bread.



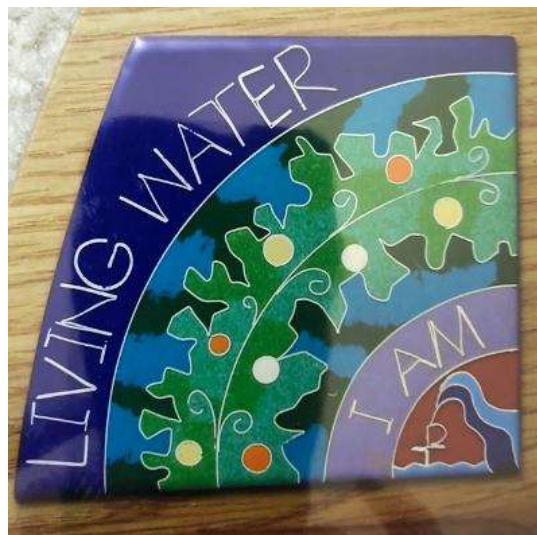
**I AM the Vine, you are the branches** (John 15:1-17)

In a world of change, Jesus wants his disciples of every generation to know that when they are joined to him by faith, the relationship will be permanent. The word Jesus uses to convey this truth is the word "dwell" (Greek: 'Menein' = to remain, abide, dwell). Connected to Jesus we can bear good fruit, but apart from him we can do nothing. We are grafted into the vine, rooted by the vine, nourished by the vine. In the Old Testament the people of God were described as a vineyard, a "planting" of Yahweh; in Christ we are chosen and equipped to bear fruit, to live in love. Remain in the Vine!



**I AM the Living Water** (John 4:1-42)

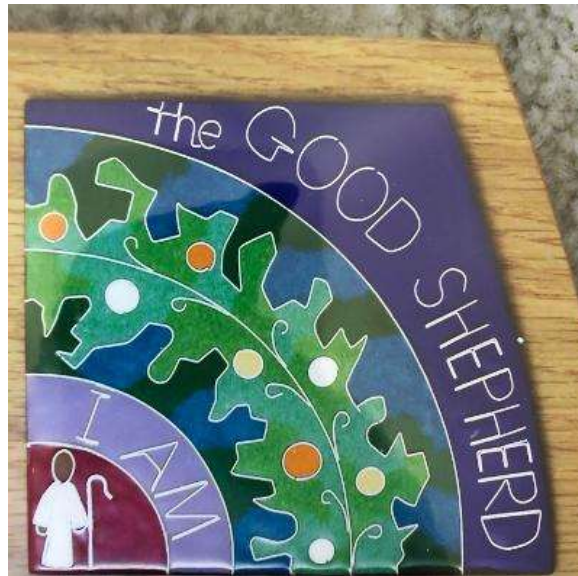
Jesus tells the Samaritan women at the well that he is the source of "living water" (lively, flowing water, compared to stagnant cistern water), and that when we drink "Jesus water" we will never thirst again. The woman's compromised past has made her spiritually thirsty even though she has a bucket and access to well water. Her gracious encounter with Jesus makes her realize that he is "the Savior of the world." Like this woman we also have our thirst slaked by the Savior who knows "everything we ever did" and thus our need for the water of baptismal grace.





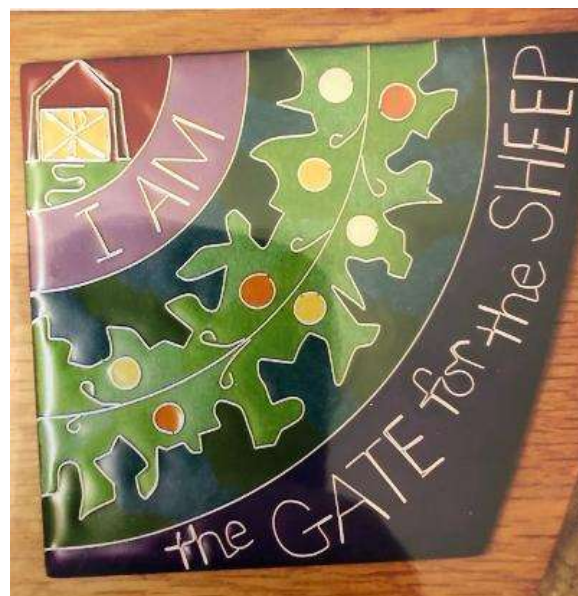
**I AM the Good Shepherd** (John 10:11-18, 27-30)

In Jesus' day shepherds didn't have a good reputation. Most were hired hands and many grazed their sheep on another's pasture land. Jesus understood that sheep (lost, unprotected people) need a shepherd (pastor). What a tragedy when shepherds only feed themselves, ruling harshly (see Ezekiel 34). Jesus is the GOOD shepherd, the model shepherd, because he gives up his life to protect and save the sheep under his care. He finds the lost sheep, feeds them, heals them...and we are the sheep of his pasture. We know the shepherd's voice as he calls us by name.



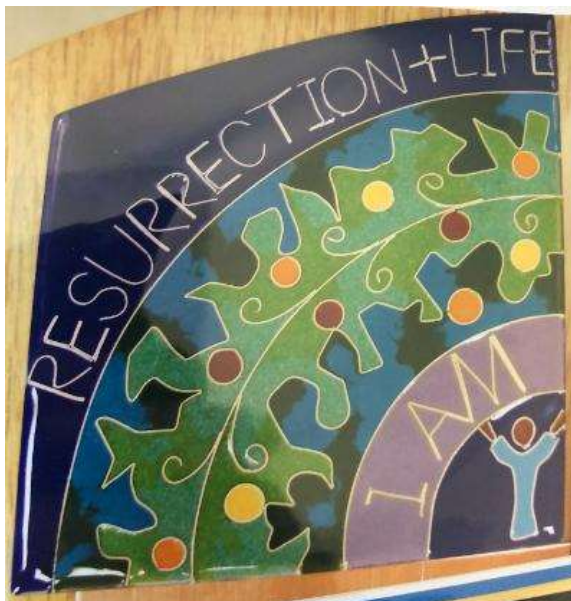
**I AM the Gate for the sheep** (John 10: 1-10)

Jesus is the gate of the sheep pen, protecting those within from predator's without. He is the One who watches over our "going out and coming in"; he is the gate of salvation (Psalm 118:20). Ultimately it is Satan, the thief, who would steal us from the sheep-fold, but his death plan is thwarted by the full life plan of God in Christ.



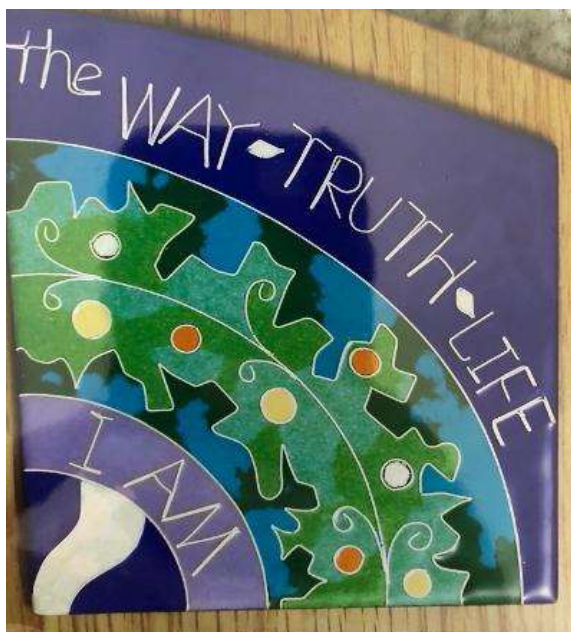
**I AM the resurrection and the life** (John 11: 1-57)

It is the raising of Lazarus from the dead that prompts Jesus to claim, "I AM the resurrection and the life"...right now, not only at the end of time. Lazarus (he is our "stand-in"; his name means "God helps") lives in Bethany (this town's name means "house of affliction") and he is dead four days. But God is "the God of the living, all are alive to Him" (Luke 20:38), and Jesus shows us what that means. "Lazarus, come out!" Because he is "life from above" Jesus will conquer physical death, and whoever has his life will not suffer spiritual death. The life Jesus bestows is eternal.



**I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life** (John 14: 1-14)

Early Christians called themselves "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2). Disciples learned that it was Jesus' way of love which was unique, it was his revelation of the Father that was true, and his glorious resurrection that foreshadows our own. Jesus is the path that leads to the Father's house, he is the One who makes known the Father's name (the "I AM" = Yahweh is part of the Hebrew name, Yeshuah = Jesus), and giving life to the dead crowns his work as the Messiah.





## The Life of Christ Panels

The Annunciation, the Nativity, the Baptism of Jesus, the temptation in the wilderness, the call of disciples, the Sermon on the Mount, the Healing of the Blind, the stilling of the storm, the feeding of 5000, Love one another, the entry into Jerusalem, the foot washing, the Lord's supper, Gethsemane, the trial before Pilate, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension.

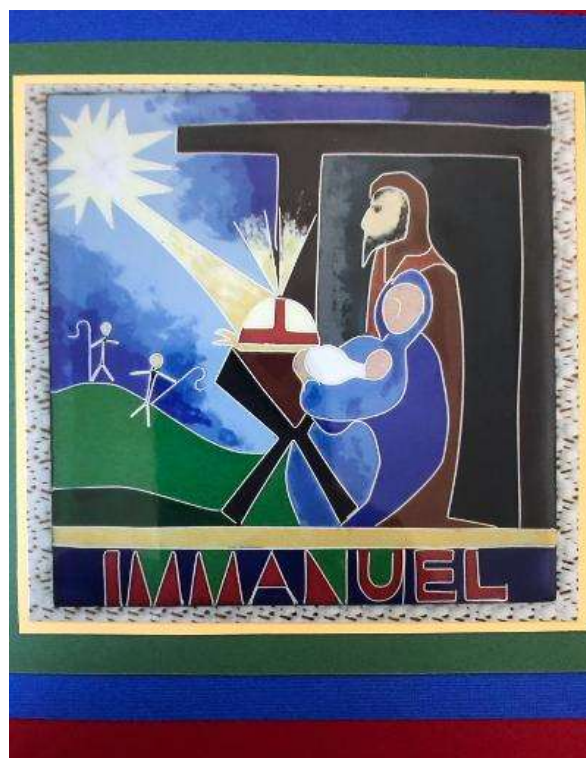
### The Annunciation (Luke 1: 26-38)

In the beginning God said, "Let there be light..." and called the universe into being by His powerful Word. Now God will begin His new creation by placing the Word within the womb of Mary. The world needs a Savior; his name is to be Jesus (literally "Yahweh saves"), Mary's son. Mary's womb is the "holy grail," the 'chalice,' which the Holy Spirit "overshadows," so that the child "shall be called holy, the Son of God." In effect, God says, "Let there be a fetus within Mary's womb," and Mary consents. Mary thus is the ideal disciple, a "servant of the Lord," willing to literally hold the Christ within herself (see Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17). So in this panel Gabriel approaches Mary with the divine announcement, the Spirit descends with power, and Mary turns away from the encounter pregnant.



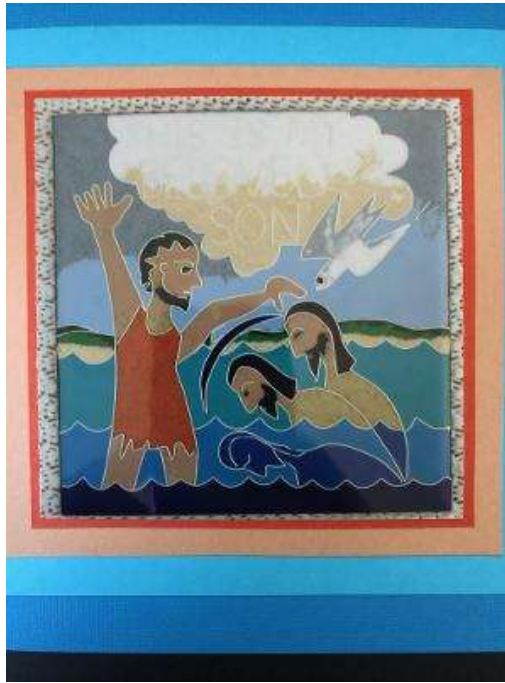
## **The Nativity** (Matthew 1: 22-25; Luke 2: 1-20)

"Immanuel" means 'God with us.' The first Immanuel sign (Isaiah 7: 14) marked the deliverance of Judah from invading armies; the Jesus-Immanuel sign (Matthew 1:23) is a promise of salvation that still continues "to the close of this age" (Matthew 28:20). God is with us in Christ, and Christ is with us by faith to the end of history. The story begins within a humble animal shelter in Bethlehem. His birth announcement is sent to unnamed shepherds who leave their flocks in the hills and come searching with the only clues they've been given: the Savior is a newborn baby carefully swaddled in cloths resting in a manger. The manger is the feeding place where the "Bread of Life" is found (see Isaiah 1:3; John 6:35). When our search is answered by the "peace on earth" of divine grace, there is overwhelming joy. In the panel the shepherds approach in the distance; Mary holds her child and Joseph stands as their protector, and God is with us in a unique personal manner, a "scandal of particularity." The incarnation is grounded in history.



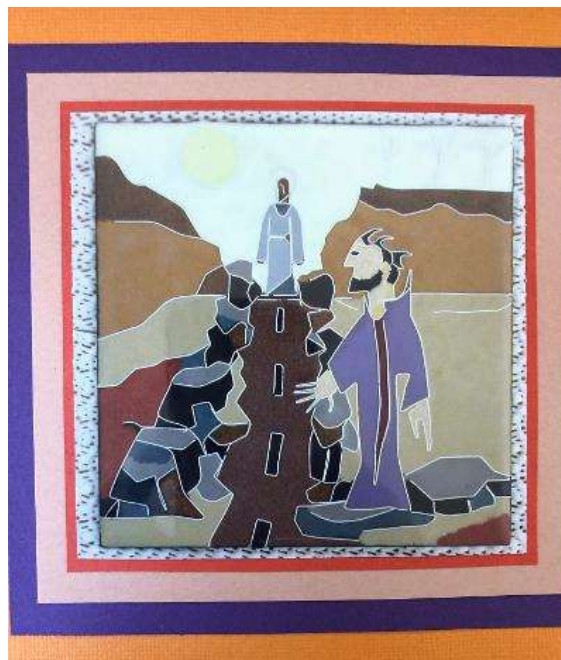
## **The Baptism** (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1: 9-11; Luke 3: 21-22; John 1: 31-34)

"Christ" is Jesus' title; it means "anointed one." Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River is his anointing to be God's messiah, an event which Jesus consciously connects with the text of his first sermon from Isaiah 61: 1-2 (see Luke 4: 16-21). He is not merely Jesus of Nazareth -- he is Jesus the Christ, and the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. On that day on the banks of the Jordan the Holy Trinity is present: the Father's voice from the clouds identifies His "beloved Son," the Spirit descends "like a dove" (peacefully, because Jesus isn't a warrior messiah), and the Son submits to John's washing of repentance (anticipating his death and resurrection, drowning-dying-rising; Romans 6: 3-11). The baptism confirms his identity; it is the beginning of his public ministry. The panel underlines the motion of Jesus' immersion, the dove's descent, and the Father's blessing.



**The Temptation in the Wilderness** (Matthew 4: 1-11; Mark 1: 12-13; Luke 4: 1-13)

Immediately following his baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness "by the Spirit" to have his Christ-identity, his servant self-understanding, and his allegiance to his Father put to the test. Astonishingly, it is the Spirit who sets him up in the wilderness, the place where the scapegoat gets driven to its death on the Day of Atonement (See Lev. 16:10). Satan, the tempter and accuser, is waiting for him (see Job 1:6-12). The panel doesn't indicate the tree temptations which Satan puts before Jesus, which suggest other ways to "save" the world, but rather visualizes the approach of Jesus on the path into the waterless place of demons. "Do not bring us to hard testing," Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. He knows why prayer is necessary. In the upper right hand corner of the panel are three trees - - suggestive of the three crosses on Golgotha where the "last temptation" of Christ happens when those who mock him say, "Come down off the cross and we will believe in you." Indeed, Jesus "was tempted as we are, yet without sinning." (Hebrews 4:15).





### **Calling the Disciples** (Matthew 4: 18-22; Mark 1: 16-20; Luke 5: 2-11; John 1: 35-42)

Jesus' call to discipleship is simple and direct: "Follow me!" His student followers will get "on the job training." They already know something about the art of fishing, but gathering people in the net of the good news is an art they must learn from the Master teacher. The call of Jesus is pure grace: it connects Peter, James, John and the others to his person, his forgiving love and compassion, and his divine authority without any preconditions of piety or knowledge. Jesus reminded them: "You did not choose me. I chose you..." (John 15:16). They trust his voice and answer his call without any future guarantees, and leave their fishing business behind them. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." His disciples' obedience is based on faith, and their faith is deepened by obedience that will lead to the cross. Jesus sends them out: "Go to the lost sheep ...preach the message--'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick..." (Mark 10: 6-8).

In the panel, Jesus extends his call with his voice and touch. The tangled net at Peter's feet will be left behind, but their boat may be useful later. The sun shines a promise in the shape of a cross. The call of Jesus is compelling, for in hearing it even today we hear the will of God.



### **The Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6: 20-49)

Jesus must teach his followers a new kind of righteousness (Matthew 5:20) that is based on faith (Romans 1: 16-17). For them he models humility, mercy, peace, purity, love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control under the pressures of poverty, sorrow, and persecution. Disciples are blessed by God's grace in Christ, and they know who to thank for their clothing, food, and shelter. Having Jesus by their side and within their heart, mind and soul, they are emboldened to be salt for the earth and light for the world, empowered to love enemies and renounce violence and vengeance. They are enriched to generously and joyously help those in need with "the shirt off their back." This is a new righteousness, unlike that of dill seed counting legalists, religious traditionalists, and blind patriotic zealots. Jesus calls us "blessed," we who climb the mountainside to listen to him, to see ("hunger and thirst for") righteousness and be filled with the gift of his grace which makes all the qualities of discipleship possible for us. We are changed in the process of hearing, seeing and believing, doing

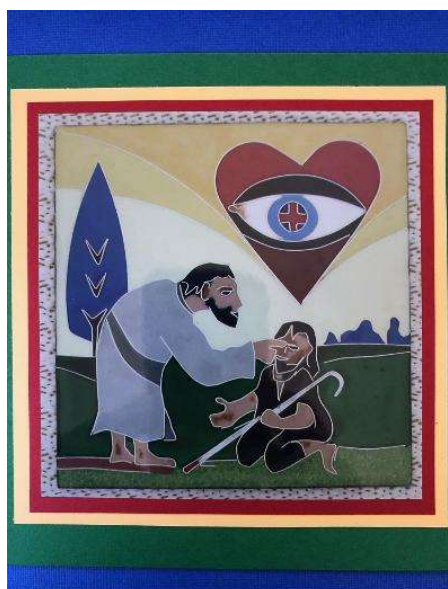
and forgiving. Jesus' way is the only way to live. In the panel he holds an orb in his left hand, symbol of sovereignty and power; his blessing is given by his right hand. "I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 16: 23).



### **Healing the Man Born Blind** (John 9)

Mark calls the miracles of Jesus "mighty works"; John calls them "signs" which point to the significance of his person. Among all the different types of healing miracles, the most frequent is the healing of blind people. Giving sight to the blind was a predicted messianic activity (Isaiah 29: 18; 35:5, 42:7). By seeing Jesus compassion at work we are led to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we have life in his name" (John 20:31). Thus physical eyesight and the sight of faith are connected, and this connection is best illustrated when Jesus heals a man born blind.

In John 9 the testimony of the formerly blind man exhibits how faith-sight grows, symbolized in the panel by the heart with an eye whose pupil is a cross. "I was blind, but now I see" - - that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God. Failure to see this truth is blindness.



**Stilling the Storm** (Matthew 8: 23 -27; Mark 4: 36-41; Luke 8: 22-25)

Caught in a sudden squall on open water, the disciples were afraid for their lives. Jesus, who had been sleeping in the back of the boat, was awakened and stood up to rebuke the winds and waves.

"Rebuke" is a strong word in Greek; it is used in the healing of demoniacs, and in other situations to order chaos in nature and in humans. The implication is that there is a parallel with the beginning, Genesis One, when God takes the chaotic earth, darkness and waters and creates order by His word, "Let there be." The disciples suspect this connection, and ask, "Who is this?" Even the wind and waves obey him!"

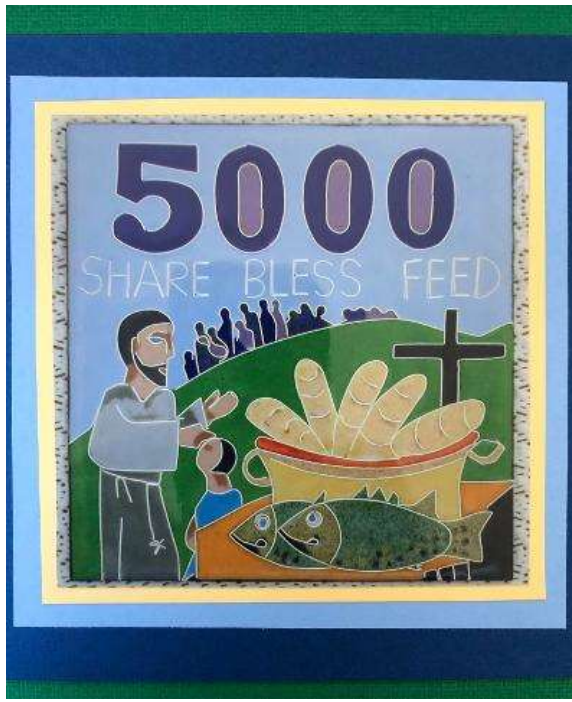
In Christian iconography the church is often pictured as a ship, tossed about by the changes and chances of life, but remembering Christ's command, "Fear not!" That is the message which comes from angels to shepherds and to women at the empty tomb. Do not be afraid. Jesus is in the boat with us.



**Feeding the 5000** (Matthew 14: 14-21; Mark 6: 32-44; Luke 9: 10-17; John 6: 1-15, 25-59)

This miracle story is recorded by all four evangelists, indicating how central it was to the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah of God. Moved by compassion, Jesus meets the crowd's hunger for both physical and spiritual food. The meager supplies of five barley loaves (the bread of the poor) and two small fish are sufficient when they are shared by a young boy, blessed by Jesus, and freely distributed by the disciples. This simple meal becomes mysteriously profound -- a lesson in itself about giving thanks for simple gifts, being satisfied with what is given, and thankfully recognizing Jesus and his Father as the source of daily bread. Jesus teaches his disciples to "ask the Father in my name" (John 16:23) for what we need, and it is up to us to make sure that what we need is what Jesus wants us to have. It is his "spiritual food" that satisfies us for all eternity, while physical satisfaction only lasts a day. The multiplication of the loaves and fish is a "sign" of abundance that points to Jesus as the "Bread from heaven." Nourished by him we will have our human hunger and thirst satisfied beyond calculation, and it is all "free" (Psalm 23: 1,5; Isaiah 55: 1-3; 1 Peter 2: 3). In the panel, Jesus blesses both the boy who shared his lunch and the bread and fish that will satisfy the multitude.





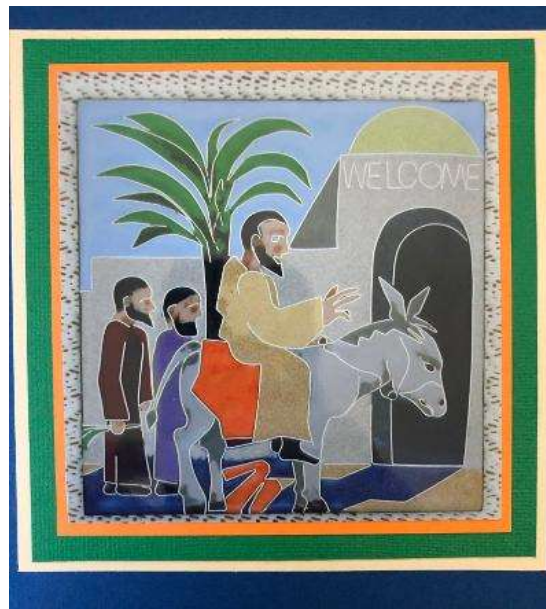
**Love One Another as I Loved You** (John 15: 9-17; Luke 22: 24-27; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13; 1 John 4: 7-21)

This command of Jesus indicates that love is "the most excellent way" of living, a way that he sacrificially models and asks servant disciples to follow. We love Jesus by obeying his command; we obey Jesus by loving even enemies. It is also proper to speak of Jesus' love in the present tense, for his presence among us is real and effective, located not only in the food of the Eucharist but also in the needs of strangers, orphans, widows and the poor. The love which Jesus defines is not an emotion but an action, not just wishful thinking but concrete compassion. Love is also a tactic which can be used by the oppressed to overcome their enemies (Luke 6: 27-36; Romans 12: 9-21). Contrary to arrogant, oppressive powers in the world, Jesus knew that it is love that keeps human life human. In the panel, the words of Jesus are seen as pivotal around the center of the cross. Love makes the world go 'round.



### **The Entry into Jerusalem** (Matthew 21: 1-11; Mark 11: 1-10; Luke 19: 29-38; John 12: 12-15)

Jesus' march on Jerusalem comes at the climax of his ministry. He enters the city non-violently, riding on a donkey, an animal of peace, rather than on a war horse or in a chariot. He has already predicted that no prophet will die except in Jerusalem (Luke 13: 33), and so he must go to cleanse His Father's house of those who steal and profane it, making money off the practice of religion. The crowd that follows him proclaims him to be the Messiah, "who comes in the name of the Lord." They wave palm branches and lay their cloaks on the path before him. They proclaim him "blessed." Jerusalem's "welcome" is muted by the question of incredulous residents, "Who is this?" (Matthew 21: 10). There is an ominous future awaiting Jesus. Yet the Messiah "must go to Jerusalem," because it is the place where salvation will be worked out for the whole human race. In the panel, Jesus is at the point of entry into Jerusalem, the "city of peace," where the religious and secular leaders will ironically deal death to the "prince of peace." Would Jesus be welcome today in our city? What would he have to cleanse? What would we have to change?



### **The Foot-washing** (John 13: 1-17)

It was common practice to wash one's feet upon entering a home in Palestine. Stone jars holding water were found just inside the door of most homes, and if it was a wealthy home, a servant did the washing. That explains Peter's distress when he thinks Jesus assumes a position and activity beneath his dignity. Jesus is a servant, with a towel and basin of water, and lets his disciples know he expects the same kind of devotion from them. "No servant is greater than his master." If we are not washed by Jesus we have no part in him. There is a parallel here to our baptism, our initiation into Jesus' family. Grace, symbolized by light, flows from above through the hands of Jesus to the somewhat mystified Peter.

Where the synoptic gospels tell the story of the Lord's Supper, John substitutes the story of the foot-washing, his commentary on the meaning of Holy Communion. Peter is passive in the picture, just as we are passive recipients of God's grace in baptism. It is there that Jesus saves us for a life of serving others.



**The Lord's Supper** (Matthew 26: 17-30; Mark 14: 12-25; Luke 22: 7-20; 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, 11: 23-25)

Under ominous conditions, Jesus gathers his disciples to celebrate the Passover, a "last supper," which he transforms into the Holy Eucharist (a holy thanksgiving filled with remembering) with simple declarations about the bread, "This is my body," and about the wine, "This is my blood of the new covenant." Judas was "watching for an opportunity to betray him;" and the authorities had put a price on his head, so it is no wonder that Jesus arranges for a "safe house," instructing his disciples to follow "a man carrying a water jar" (a task usually done by women) to a clandestine but furnished upper room. The air is thick with betrayal, and each disciple has his own doubts ("Is it I?" Mark 14: 19). But Jesus is the grace-source, and by his grace we too can "participate" (have communion, fellowship - Greek 'tkoinonia') in his real presence in bread and wine. In our celebration we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again."

In the panel, Jesus breaks the bread (he is our "companion," literally "one who breaks bread with us") as Judas grasps the money bag and heads out into the night. The disciples are in various stages of conversation and awareness. They are sinners, made "worthy" of his gift through their simple trust in Jesus words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."





**The Garden of Gethsemane** (Matthew 26: 35-56; Mark 14: 32-50; Luke 22: 40-53; John 18: 1-12)

"Gethsemane" means "oil press," the place where oil was squeezed from olives grown on trees on this mount, except now it is Jesus who is in the existential press of oppression. Death is an enemy (read of Jesus' emotions at the grave of Lazarus, John 11: 35-44), and Jesus must know if the cross which certainly awaits him is indeed his Father's will. In the divine plan is this where his ministry of peace, proclamation, and healing should end up? At this place of prayer solace gives way to anguish. Jesus asks if the "cup of suffering" can pass away from him. Some prayer requests receive a divine "No." The disciples, who can't watch with him, fall asleep after a leisurely and ample meal.

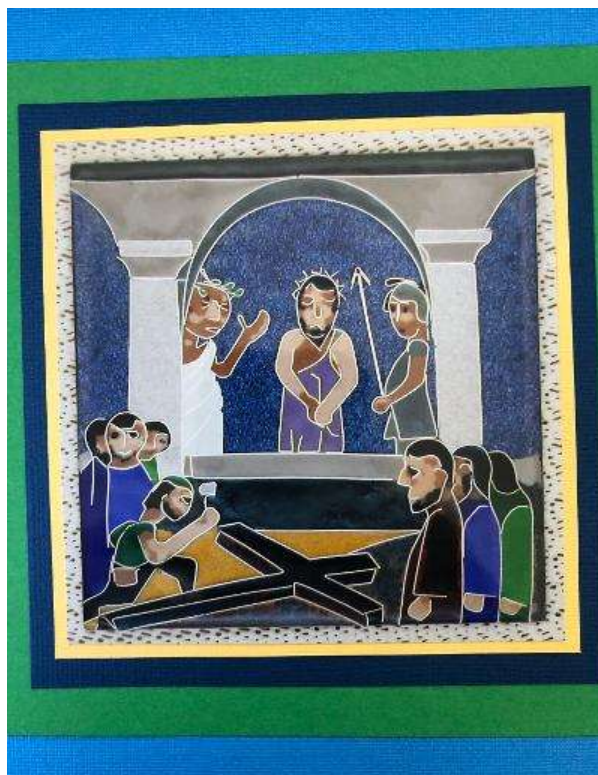
Evil loves the cover of darkness, when human sleep disorients reality and turns victims into passive pawns. In the panel the temple police, led by Judas, come with their swords and clubs to arrest Jesus, the man of peace and non-violence. The disciples, rudely awakened, will soon flee to safety, contrary to their promises (Matthew 26:35).



**The Trial before Pilate** (Matthew 27: 11-26; Mark 15: 2-15; Luke 23: 13-25; John 19:5)

There were two trials. At the first trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was convicted of a religious crime: blasphemy. Here before Pontius Pilate, Jesus is convicted of a political crime: insurrection. Both "crimes" in each jurisdiction carry the death penalty. The political charge against Jesus hangs on the question of his kingship ("It is not [according to the power politics] of this world," Jesus tells Pilate). The popular understanding of "the anointed one" is that the Messiah would be a king like David. Is Jesus the messianic king?

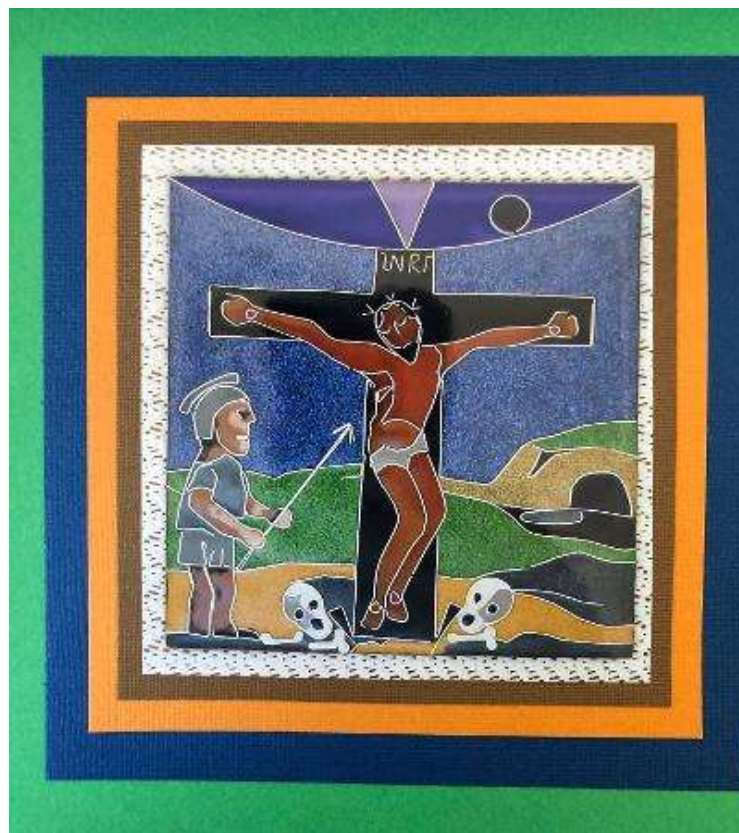
The panel highlights the question: What are we to make of Jesus? "Behold the man!" Pilate tells the crowd, having mocked his "kingly" weakness with a crown of thorns, purple robe, and reed scepter. This Galilean peasant is no military threat to Rome, yet Pilate is spooked by Jesus' calm demeanor. He attempts to release Jesus, using Barabbas as a ploy, but finally gives in to the pressure of the crowd. They could cause problems for him in Rome by casting doubt that he is "a friend of Caesar." A carpenter get the cross ready for its next occupant. Let him be crucified.



**The Crucifixion** (Matthew 27: 32-56; Mark 15: 22-41; Luke 23: 33-29; John 9: 17-37; 1 Corinthians 1: 22-25; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53)

The cross of Jesus is filled with contradictions: it is a place of death that becomes death's defeat, where the victim becomes the victor, where the king becomes the suffering servant who takes our death and gives us his life. The cross was erected to silence the Word, but now Christ crucified is proclaimed to the nations. Authorities tried to eradicate the One who, when lifted up, now draws all people to himself. There is darkness and an earthquake at his death, but from him streams eternal light and life; a spear punctures his side, but by his blood we are healed (indeed, "let his blood be on us and upon our children," Matthew 27:25 & Exodus 24: 4-8, an irony turned gracious).

A medieval tradition suggests that Golgotha (Hebrew: "place of a skull"; Latin: Calvary = 'calvaria' = 'bare skull') was the burial place of Adam and Eve, which is why in paintings from that era one or two skulls are usually found at the foot of the cross. In the panel, therefore, the 'crania' of Adam and Eve are universalized as our stand-ins (1 Corinthians 15:22). The borrowed burial cave awaits his body. He won't need it long.



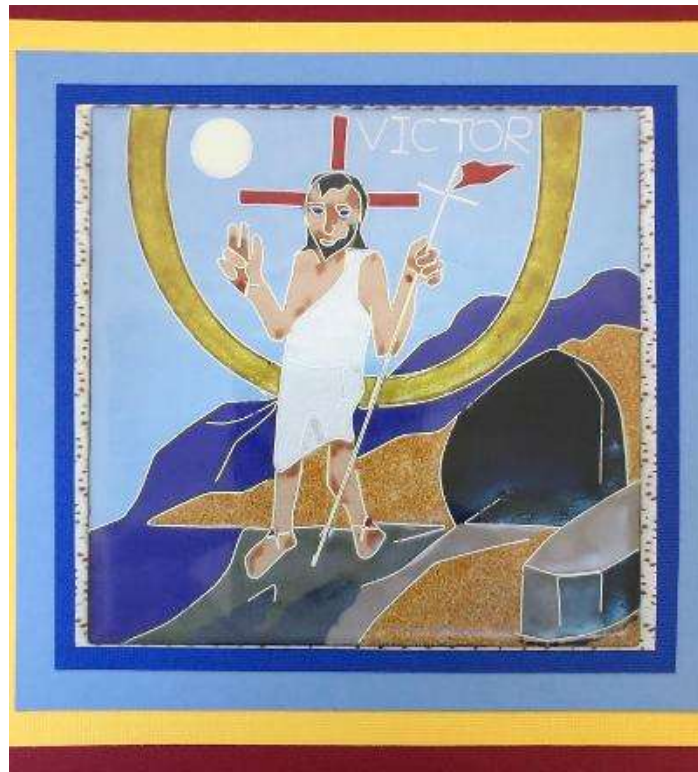
**The Resurrection** (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; 1 Corinthians 15)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is first and foremost a statement about God. If God is light, life and love, then death cannot have the last word; if Jesus is indeed God's son, then his body cannot decay in the earth (Acts 2: 22-24; Psalm 16: 8-11). Jesus occupied Joseph of Arimathea's tomb just three days (Matthew 12:40; 16:21; Hosea 6:2), which was in keeping with his approach to life: Jesus owned nothing and borrowed everything - a stable and manger as a place of birth, Peter's boat as a pulpit, meals and lodging, a donkey for transportation, an upper room for a last supper, and a grave cave in which to be buried.



In the resurrection, Jesus is vindicated and his message of love and service receives a divine stamp of approval. The victim has become the Victor; the crucified One now lives, and most important, can live in us. It is here at the empty tomb that Christian hope begins. Just as the disciples of Jesus were transformed by this event from fearful cowards into bold preachers of his name, so we are transformed as well (Romans 12: 1-2).

In the panel, Jesus the Messiah strides forth from the tomb to bring peace to believers. The stone is rolled away and lies flat. Jesus moves from darkness into the light. His hand is raised in blessing and his cross has been transformed from a means of death into a sign of life. In anticipation of the next panel, the "U" shape reverses the law of physics: "what comes down must go up."



**The Ascension** (Matthew 28: 16-20; Luke 24: 50-52; Acts 1: 6-11; Colossians 1: 15-20)

The ascension of Jesus to "God's right hand" is the universalizing of the resurrection. During his approximate 33 years on earth, the Son of God shared our human limitations, especially the limiting reality of space and time. But if the Son of God is to "fill all things" as the second person of the Trinity, then he must transcend the limit of space and time. There is now a theological reality parallel to another law of physics: it is in Christ that all things hold together. The incarnation and ascension are the visible "bookends" of the life of Christ on earth. Even though we no longer see him physically, we trust that he will come again at the end of this age.

In the panel the disciples, soon to be apostles, look up into the clouds that begin to hide Jesus from their sight. The figure of Jesus is surrounded by seven red circles with imbedded crosses indicating the saints in light. The Church is comprised of saints on earth and in heaven, a community of believers who sing God's praises. The ascended Lord is the head of the Church.

