

A Symbolic Guide of Zebaoth Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Church History  
May 7, 1992

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library  
1182 N. Seminary Drive. 65W  
Madison, Wisconsin

Throughout our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) it would be a matter of debate if it was asked, "Who has the most beautiful church?" Opinions would vary and prejudiceness would be inevitable. As a part-time vicar at Zebaoth Evangelical Lutheran Church, I would certainly put my vote in for it. "Zebaoth?" you ask. Yes, we have a church called Zebaoth located on Sixth and Melvina, a somewhat unknown church in the WELS. In fact, when its present pastor, David Moore, received a call there three years ago, he had never heard of Zebaoth. It's rather unfortunate that Zebaoth isn't better known because its beautiful stainedglass windows and its unique architectural structure are a sight to behold. Zebaoth would be my vote for the most beautiful church. Yet as I said at the outset, an opinion such as mine would be debateable.

There is one thing about Zebaoth which is not up for debate. Zebaoth has more symbols in it than any church in the WELS. This is a fact. The amount of them would be difficult to tally. There isn't anything in Christianity that has symbols of which there isn't at least one in the church, and there are over fifty different cross configurations. Just as the church's beauty, the symbols are a sight to behold. Everytime I'm at Zebaoth I always go into the sanctuary to look at them. One day while gazing at them, this thought went through my mind, "Why don't I write a guide to these symbols as a resource for the Seminary student body?" I think it would be a worthwhile requirement that every Seminary student go to Zebaoth and take time to look at all the symbols. Unfortunately, the possibility of this happening is not realistic, so this paper is going to try to bring the symbols to

them.

Before a guide to symbolism of Zebaoth can be given, it's important that the man behind them be recognized. From 1917 to 1966 Pastor Arthur B. Tacke showed his faithfulness to his God and to God's children at Zebaoth. His lasting memory of 49 years is remembered none better than his work on all the symbols in the church. Although Pastor Tacke would be the first to downplay his artistic ability, he did like to draw and he was very creative. The symbols in Zebaoth bear this out because Pastor Tacke was directly behind all of them. It has even been rumored that he made up some of the symbols on his own. The funny thing about Pastor Tacke and all the symbols is that no one, not even his sons or daughter, know why he had such an obsession (meant in a good sense) with the symbols, other than the obvious -- they were tools used to illustrate the foundations of the Christian faith and reminders of what such faith means. Whatever the case, Pastor Tacke has given the WELS a piece of historical beauty unmatched by any church. He has given lasting representations of God's Word.

It would be difficult to show the beauty of these symbols without seeing them firsthand. Likewise, it would be difficult looking at the symbols without a guide. So, I encourage all to go to Zebaoth, take this guide in hand, and see many Christian symbols as never seen before in a WELS church.

In the Nave arch bands there are the cross of Christ and the triangle and circle, symbolical of the Trinity and eternity. These two symbols alternate repetitively from one end of the band

to the other. The shields at the ends of the Nave arch bands show the symbols for the 12 Apostles and St. Paul. On the southside from right to left: St. Matthias (Bible and double battle-ax) - St. Jude (sailboat) - St. Simon (Book and fish) - St. Matthew (three purses) - St. Bartholomew (three flaying knives) - and St. Thomas (square and spear). On the north side from right to left: St. James the Less (saw) - St. Philip (cross and two loaves of bread) - St. John (chalice and serpent) - St. James the Great (three scallop shells) - St. Andrew (cross saltire and boat-hook) - St. Peter (inverted cross) - and St. Paul (Bible with "Spiritus Gladius" and sword).

In the side-aisle windows, eight parables of Christ are shown. They are: "The Parable of the Sower," "The Parable of the Good Samaritan," "The Parable of the Lost Sheep," "The Parable of the Wedding Banquet," "The Parable of the Lost Son," "The Parable of the Talents," "The Parable of the Rich Fool," and "The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant." In the clerestory windows you will find eight symbols pertaining to Christ: the Messianic Promise (Rose), the Annunciation (Lilium Candidum), the Nativity (Christmas Rose), the Epiphany (Star), the Light of the World (Candlestick), the Suffering Savior (Cross and Crown of Thorns), the Resurrection (Pomegranate), and Immortality or Eternal Life (Butterfly). In the seven-paneled sanctuary window you will see in the first three panels from left to right: the Shepherds, the Nativity, the Christ-child in the Temple; then from right to left: the Sermon on the Mount, Gethsemane, the Crucifixion. The Resurrection is in the center, depicting the ultimate proof that the pictures to its right and left happened and have meaning.

Above the Resurrection there is the Ascension. In the ceiling panels of the sanctuary 36 symbols pertaining to the Passion of Christ will be found. Beginning below on the left side you will find from left to right, three types of the Suffering Savior: the Sacrifice of Isaac - the Passover - and the Serpent of Moses; above these in the same order: Gethsemane - Lantern - Torch - Sword and Staff - the Betrayal - "Hail Master" - Peter's Sword - Pillar-Rope - Scourges - Robe - Crown of Thorns - Basin and Ewer - Reed and Blindfold - Cock - Cross - Three Nails - Five Wounds - INRI - Vinegar and Gall-Ladder and Reed - Seamless Coat and Dice - Spear and Heart - Cross, Ladder, and Sheet - Pincers and Nail - Empty Cross - Myrrh and Aloes - Burial Cloth - Tomb - Resurrection - IHC (the abbreviation of the Greek word IHCOYC, meaning "Jesus." Often written IHS, but IHC is the ancient form, which is historically and traditionally the better form) - the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) - and Cross and Orb (Triumph of the Gospel).

In the marble front of the altar you will notice the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega with the Cross. This indicates that Christ is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End of our life and salvation. In the five upper panels of the altar there is in the center the CHI RHO, an abbreviation of the Greek word meaning "Christ." On either side there is Baptism and Holy Communion and in the end panels the Law and the Gospel.

In the seven Quatrefoils of the large window over the east portal, there is Luther's coat-of-arms in the center; in the

upper three symbols for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the lower three, the Word and the Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion). Below the seven Quatrefoils you will see a large picture of children gathering around Jesus.

In the windows of the Choir Gallery will be found symbols pertaining to music. You will see a triangle, a trumpet, and a lyre. Also in the pew ends six different symbols are present: Fall of Man (Thistle) - God the Father (Hand) - A Type of Christ (Serpent of Moses) - Christ's Baptism (Escallop Shell) - The Holy Spirit (Dove) - and the Suffering and Death of Christ (Cross and Crown of Thorns).

Besides these symbols many smaller ones are scattered throughout the church:

- 1) Symbols of God the Father: the Hand of God - the Right Hand of God.
- 2) Symbols of God the Son: the Fish - the Vesica (closely related to the fish symbol) - the Light of the World - the Sun of Righeousness - The King of Kings - the Agnus Dei and Banner - the Shepherd's Staff - and the King's Rod.
- 3) Symbols of God the Holy Spirit: the Seven-Tongued Flame (Pentecost) - the Descending Dove (earliest symbol used for the Holy Spirit) - the Menorah (a seven-branched candlestick traditionally referring to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit).
- 4) Symbols of the Trinity: the Equilateral Triangle - the Triquetra - the Triangle in Circle - the Fleur-De-Lys (French:flower of the lily) - the Trefoil with Points.
- 5) Sacred Monograms: the CHI RHO - the IHS - the IHC.
- 6) Cross Configurations: (these are just a few of over fifty) the

Tau Cross (traditional cross of the brazen serpent) - the Anchor Cross (symbolizes life and salvation from sin in Christ) - the Latin Cross - the St. Andrew Cross (traditional cross on which he died) - the Greek Cross (arms of equal length) - the Celtic Cross (ancient cross in Ireland) - the Jerusalem Cross - the Cross Patee Fitched (just very decorative) - the Cross Fleurie - the Budded Cross (symbolizing the Trinity).

7) Symbolic Stars: the Star of Bethlehem (five-pointed with rays) - the Star of David (six-pointed) - the Star of Baptism (eight-pointed).

8) Symbols of Doctrine: the Escallop Shell with Drops of Water (Baptism) - the Chalise (Lord's Supper) - the Scroll (God's Word) - the Bible (the Gospel) - the Ten Commandment Tablets (the Law) - the Rose (Messianic Promise) - the Anchor (Hope) - the Shield (Trust) - the Palm Leaves (Victorious Christian's Reward when this life is over) - the Wheat (the Bread of Life) - the Cluster of Grapes (Lord's Supper) - the Phoenix (the Resurrection) - the Lamp (the Word of God).

9) Roman Numerals: III (God) - V (the five senses/human emotions) - VII (Judgment) - X (Completion) - XII (the Church).

There are several more symbols not mentioned. But after reading all of the ones listed, I think one can certainly imagine the awesome display at Zebaoth.

There are two symbols that have caused some disturbance. The upside down cross which is a symbol for Peter, but also used as a Satanic symbol in the Satanistic Cult. The other controversial symbol is the Swastika. This was an extremely early Christian

symbol, and it obviously referred to Christ. Unfortunately, its symbolism became distorted when Adolf Hitler used it as his own.

The benefits of these symbols are priceless. The sheer beauty is one thing, but they offer so much more. They have been used as teaching tools for Catechism classes and sermons. They have offered sermon series. They have been constant reminders of the heroes of faith, of Christ's life, of Christ's deeds, and of our Lutheran heritage. They have set before thousands of people actual happenings and examples to grow in and live by - all from God's Word.

Some may argue what does this paper have to do with history. Well, just look at the symbols at Zebaoth and history will stare you in the eyes. They illustrate the history of Christ and the Christian church. They are a guide through history. They are a landmark which display the faith of a church and a pastor in Christ Jesus. Architecturally, there are many, many beautiful churches. Symbolically, there's none like Zebaoth. That's history in itself.

After I finished researching this paper, I came across Pastor Tacke's farewell sermon, and I think the text tells the story behind the symbols. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58). Ironically, that's our graduation verse for the class of 1992.