

Symbols of Salvation



Jonathan O. Trebilco

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”



Have you ever heard someone say, “It’s *just* a symbol?” The operant word in that sentence is *just*. The word *symbol* is from a Greek conjunction meaning “to throw together.” A symbol is a happy collision: a marriage of the sign, and the thing signified. Nothing is *just* a symbol. Symbols mean something. Symbols are powerful. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a symbol is worth several thousand. It seems like a paradox: symbols are silent, yet they speak, and they speak volumes.

It is *impossible* to avoid symbols. Every community has them. The question is, where will they come from? Will they emerge from the culture at large, or from Scripture and the church’s culture? I once visited a church website which used every symbol from the world of computer social networking. Fellowship events at the church were exhibited by the Facebook icon. Bible study discussion groups with the Twitter symbol. Videos of church events and sermons were a YouTube link. The monthly church periodical was BlogThis, and so forth. The fad-symbols of the contemporary culture’s internet social networking had replaced “religious” symbols.

I once visited a church where the gym doubled as the “sanctuary.” The congregation worshiped in a room with basketball hoops. Some might say: “It doesn’t matter what items are in the room.” But can you concentrate upon God and His glory while staring at sports symbols? Why not fill the sanctuary with signs that help us focus on our ascent to God’s throne room?

When someone says “It’s *just* a symbol, they are trying to be dismissive of the sign; they are attempting to silence the sign’s speech. Consider the symbol of the American flag. What if someone stomps on it or burns it? Are they not trying to express something, and wouldn’t their action evoke a passionate response? Would you shrug your shoulders and say, “Oh well, it’s just a symbol”?

A former professor of mine once visited a church which was deliberate in its rejection of all symbols, including the cross. They did not permit a cross on the wall or on the pulpit. The Sunday he visited they sang the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” “But,” he said, “we weren’t allowed to survey the wondrous cross!”

The church is itself a culture, and like the culture at large, it is filled with symbols; symbols that we employ in our common life together, and especially in our celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

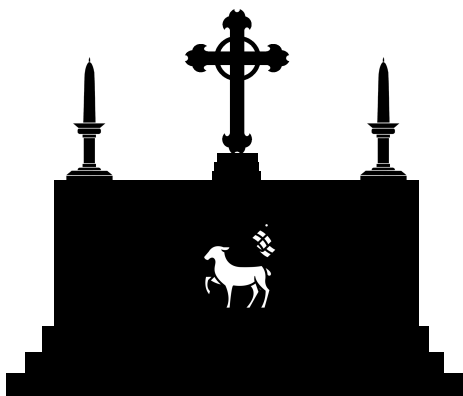
When you walk into our church, or any Christian church, the central symbol is the cross. Think for a moment just how many words would be required to express what this central symbol communicates. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Christ died for sinners, taking the curse of sin and death upon Himself. Jesus entered fully into the horror of this world’s sin and suffering, and knows what it is to be rejected, hated, misunderstood, spurned, betrayed, tortured, and killed.

The central riddle in the riddle of life, is the love of God and His standing in solidarity with us in suffering. We are called to repent of our sin and cast our confidence in His death for our sins to be pardoned. We are summoned into union with Jesus so that the body of our sin may be crucified, and we may rise again to walk in newness of life. In His death death was conquered, and we shall rise again at the last day. Meanwhile we are to take up our cross in self denial, and follow Him as His faithful disciples. All of that, and more, is loudly proclaimed in the silent cross.

Our parish has several crosses. A lighted Celtic style cross hangs above our altar. The Celtic knot design celebrates the union of God and man in Christ, the marriage of heaven and earth in God's redemptive plan. The large brass cross shining on the altar is the sign of the royal standard of the King into Whose Presence we have come. The processional cross goes before the acolytes and ministers as they ascend to the altar because it is only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ that we are granted access into God's holy Presence. We sign ourselves with the sign of the cross to place the sign of redemption upon our persons, and to express that we are disciples of the Crucified.

We love the cross. We honor the cross. We plant the cross at the center of our lives, and of our church community. It is no mute or worthless trinket, but a sign that speaks volumes, a silent witness loudly proclaiming the love of the Savior Who gave Himself for us. The cross is a symbol that refuses to be silenced.

“We Have an Altar”



There I was, a new member of All Saints Reformed Episcopal Church in Vacaville, California, and a freshly minted Anglican. At our Wednesday night Bible study we had a gentleman who regularly attended the study, but who was not a member of our parish, and not of the Anglican tradition. He asked the priest, Fr. Jerry, one evening, “Why is it that your church has an altar?” Fr. Jerry turned to me and said, “Jonathan, do you want to answer that question?” I knew exactly what he was on to. We had just had a discussion about this topic not very long ago, and I had been struck by Fr. Jerry’s unusual way of addressing this issue. So I turned to the man who had asked the question and responded, “Because, our altar’s name is Ed.” I wish you could have seen his face. He thought I had really gone over the bend this time! Then Fr. Jerry explained.

There’s a rather obscure passage in the book of Joshua. The tribes of Israel had made significant headway in possessing the land of Canaan. Some of the tribes settled on the west of the Jordan river, while others settled on the east, or Transjordan, on the other side of the river. Those who took their allotment of land on the east side of the Jordan set up an altar. The tribes on

the west side of the Jordan assembled to confront them. It was not appropriate to establish an altar as a rival to the altars of God's sacred Tabernacle. The western tribes were actually ready to attack their brethren on the east. Israel was on the cusp of civil war. Then the tribes in the Transjordan explained why they had set up their altar. They were afraid that in the years to come, their children would be disinherited from participation in Israel's covenant with the Lord. So they set up an altar so that future generations could be told, "Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you" (Jos. 22:28). So the altar on the far side of the Jordan river, was a witness and sign that the Transjordan tribes were indeed participants in the offerings and the services of the Tabernacle on the other side of the river. The Hebrew word for *witness* or *testimony* is *ed*, hence Fr. Jerry's little joke that the altar's name is Ed.

The Altar which stands in our parish is indeed an *ed*, a witness, a testimony, a silent symbol speaking volumes. It proclaims that we who are part of the Church Militant on "this side of the river" so to speak, are participants in the presence and glory of God in the Church Triumphant on "that side of the river." In the epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament, Christian worship is described as the ascent of earthbound worshipers into the heavenly temple and presence of God Almighty. The author tells his recipients that they don't need to go back to Tabernacle/Temple worship and that they are not "missing out" because in union with Jesus Christ they have access into the very courts of heaven. In chapter 12 the author describes the ascent into the heavenly city and throne room of God which takes place in worship as we draw closer and closer to the divine presence. Then in chapter 13 he says, "We have an

altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat” (Heb. 13:10). The Altar in our parish stands as a powerful testimony to the fact that we are participating in the heavenly liturgy as we worship God on our earthly pilgrimage.

When the children of Israel made their pilgrimage out of Egypt across the wilderness enroute to the Promised Land, they carried with them that sacred shrine which was called the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was three things: it was an *altar*, it was a *table*, and it was a *throne*. It was an altar, because every year on the solemn Day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel walked into the Most Holy Place, and standing there amid clouds of pungent incense he applied the blood of the sacrifice on the lid (“mercy seat”) of the Ark to atone for the sins of Israel. It was a table, because inside the Ark was a pot of the strange manna which sustained the Israelites on their journey through the difficult desert. The pot of manna in the Ark signaled that all of Israel was being fed at God’s table. Finally, the Ark was a throne, the sign of God’s presence and reign among His people. It was flanked by those strange angelic creatures the Cherubim. Anytime the cherubim are referenced in the Old or New Testaments, we are being confronted with the throne of Almighty God (Ezek. 1; Rev. 4:2, 6-8).

Our Altar is at once an Altar, a Table, and a Throne. It is an Altar, for it is the summit of our sanctuary, the place from which we offer to God the memorial of His Son’s broken body and blood, pleading His once-for all death on Calvary, recognizing that while His presence in heaven shows forth His wounds of redemption there before the Father, so we proclaim His death on earth. Surely in our celebration of the Holy Eucharist, God’s will is “done on earth as it is in heaven.” It is an Altar because there we offer to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as His royal priesthood. It is an altar because there

we offer to him our very selves, “our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice.”

It is a Table, for there God feeds us body and soul. “The body of Christ given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.”

It is a Throne, for on it stands the sign of our Savior’s reign, the paradoxical cross. By this sign of degradation Christ has conquered, and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, so that before Him every knee shall bow (Philip. 2). In the ancient world, when the king or emperor was not in the throne room, the sign or standard of his royal authority was placed on the throne to show that he reigned. Our ascended Christ reigns, and His presence and rule is felt among us as we worship Him.

Let us then rejoice in this majestic symbol of our privileged access into God’s presence through Jesus Christ, and in the words of the psalmist pray,

Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling!
Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God. (Ps. 43:3-4)

“Let Your Priests be Clothed”



In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John soars into the heavenly realms, and finds himself blinking in the white light of God’s throne room. God is seated on the throne, the epicenter of the cosmic drama. Christ comes to the forefront under the symbol of the sacrificial Lamb, wounded, but standing alive again. The Holy Spirit proceeds with fiery energy as the seven-fold lamp of fire flowing swiftly from the throne. The four living creatures surround the throne and chant ceaselessly, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty” (Rev. 4:8). But the courts of heaven are not only populated with angelic creatures. “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads” (Rev. 4:4). The elders are redeemed human beings, and they are vested as God’s priest-kings.

In the beginning, God installed man as His vice-regent with king-like dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6-8). God also ordained him as priest to offer the sacrifice of praise and

thanksgiving for the glory of creation. The redeemed priest-kings in God's throne room in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 are doing just that. But their theme is not only God's goodness in *creation*, but also in *redemption*. They sing of both themes.

And they are vested when they sing. The symbol of the white robes are right out of the Old Testament: the priests and Levites who tended to Tabernacle and Temple were vested in white robes.

It makes perfect sense that in the ceremony of our worship, we take a symbol from the heavenly worship described in Scripture, and use that symbol in our worship. For the heavenly liturgy is the pattern for our worship on earth where we pray that God's will might "be done on earth as it is in heaven." In the heavenly liturgy described through symbolism in Revelation the elders wear vestments. The Greek word for *elder* is *presbuteros*, from which we get our English words *presbyter* and *priest* (*priest* is from the Middle English *prest*, a shortened version of the word *presbyter*, hence *elder*). Priests (as well as others assisting in the worship like acolytes and musicians) wear vestments as we ascend to God's throne because that is what they do in the Scriptural vision of the heavenly worship.

What is the purpose of vestments? Well, for one thing, they are beautiful. When God commanded Moses to make vestments for the Tabernacle priests, He gave no other reason. They were crafted "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2). Contemporary Christians are often puzzled by beauty. Is it really important? God thinks so. Vestments also help to exhibit the courtly nature of worship, its glory, its weightiness. Worship is not a concert at the rodeo or a business meeting, a lecture, or an entertainment event. It is entrance into the Throne Room of the King of kings, the God Who is the source of all goodness, truth,

and beauty. His glory spills over onto His faithful subjects, and they wear the regal garments of glory.

And that leads us to another reason why our ministers wear vestments. The minister who stands before God's people each Lord's Day does not do so on his own authority. He is not there to shoot the breeze or advance his own opinion. He is an ambassador, an emissary from another Kingdom. He speaks only by the authority of that King. And for that reason he covers himself up. The vestments point away from himself to the King and His glory.

In the service of the Holy Eucharist, the minister's basic vestment is the *alb*, or white tunic-like robe he wears which is the symbol of the elders in God's throne room in Revelation 4. The alb is gathered by a rope belt called a *cincture*. This rope demonstrates that he is ordained, or placed within an order, a specific office and function within the church. Over the alb he places a *stole*. The stole is a yolk-like garment which reminds us that we are to take Christ's yoke upon us (Mat. 11:29—Jesus speaks these words as part of a larger invitation that is used in the Comfortable Words in our liturgy where He invites us to come to Him and be refreshed).

Another garment he may wear over the alb is a *chasuble*. The chasuble is a very ancient garment that used to be street clothing in several ancient cultures. It is a square or oval garment with a hole in the center (basically, a poncho). Both Jews and Romans of the first century wore a chasuble (called by a different name). The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to bring him his *pheloneis* (2 Tim. 4:17), which is this poncho-like cloak. We know from ancient sources that Jews of Jesus' day wore this garment. Jews would place a tassel on each of the four corners of the garment to remind themselves they were under God's law (Num. 15:38). Our Lord Himself wore it (see the book *Immanuel*

by artist Robert Doares who depicts Jesus in accurate attire for a first century Jew). When the minister dons this garment, he is wearing a stylized version of a garment which our Lord Himself used when He presided at the Last Supper and instituted this holy feast.

The stole and chasuble gradually became more ornate over the years, where the colors reflect the season of the church year and the symbols reflect some aspect of the Gospel.

The vestments speak of our access to God's presence by His grace. They are poignant and glorious signs that we have been lifted up into the court of the King of kings. They—as all the signs in our worship—are powerful symbols of our salvation.

“Let There be Light”



The very first word which God speaks in Holy Scripture is “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). The light overcame the darkness and the Presence of God overcame the chaos to form cosmos.

God’s Presence was light to God’s people when He liberated them from the bondage of Egypt. When God led Israel through the Red Sea and into the wilderness pilgrimage, “the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night”(Ex. 13:21). On that pilgrimage march to the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to place a lampstand (*menorah*) in the sacred Tabernacle to shine in the Holy Place where the priests ministered before the Lord (Ex. 25:37).

In the Psalms, King David would exclaim, “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27:1). It was understood that God’s light was to shine *through* Israel to the nations of the world, to bring them the knowledge of the living God. In the book of the prophet Isaiah: “The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Is. 60:3).

When Jesus came, He proclaimed, “I am the Light of the world” (Jn. 9:5). He also said to His Apostles—and so to the whole Church—“You are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14). As Israel was God’s light to the nations in the Old Testament, so the Church is the vehicle through which Christ’s glory and Gospel shines out to the world. In the book of Revelation, St. John sees the vision of Christ the High Priest of His people walking “amidst the seven lampstands” (Rev. 1:13). He is the Light of the world in and through His Church which shines in the darkness of this world.

So it is no wonder we light candles in church! The Anglican priest and author Colin Dunlap, in his book *Anglican Public Worship*, tells the story of a man who was explaining the ritual of the church to an uneducated rustic many years ago. When the symbolism of the candles was explained, the man responded, “Ours is a yon religion.” What a remarkable insight! By *yon*, the man meant, *transcendent*; he meant that lighting candles in church was not *functional* but *symbolic*: the candles were not *needed* for light, but *meaningful* because they represent truth. In the creation narrative of Genesis chapter 1, when God creates the sun and moon, He declares “let them be for signs” (Gen. 1:14). The lights signify the God of light Who reveals Himself to us.

The candles we light are profoundly significant. There are basically three kinds of candles that we use in Anglican ceremony. The Eucharistic candles stand on the Altar and are lit each time the Eucharist is celebrated. They are two in number because they stand for the two natures of Christ—divine and human—by which the light of God’s Presence is revealed to us, and by which we are united to God.

Second, we have what are called Office Candles (three or seven candle candelabras) which are lit for the Daily Office of

Morning and Evening Prayer (our parish does not currently have office candles, but we need them!). The seven branch candlesticks recall the *menorah* in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, and reflect the seven-branched candlestick in the heavenly temple in the book of Revelation.

Finally, we light the Paschal Candle each year at Easter. *Paschal* comes from the Hebrew word for *Passover*. The Paschal Candle is a large candle which represents the light of Christ's Presence with His people in the period between the Resurrection and Ascension. It is customarily lit on Easter eve and each Sunday until the Feast of the Ascension, when it is ceremonially extinguished after the reading of the Holy Gospel to represent Christ's departure from us, and our yearning as His Bride to be reunited with Him one day. The Paschal Candle is a meaningful sign lit for the greatest of all festivals, the festival of light, when we celebrate the light of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ Who burst forth from the darkness of the tomb.

When we kindle candles in church, we are demonstrating that we have been lifted up into heaven. The pattern for our worship on earth, is the heavenly liturgy, and the worship of heaven is depicted in the Scriptures with candle and torch symbolism. St. John saw Christ walking in the midst of the seven lampstands of brightly burning oil (Rev. 1:13)—Christ's presence within His people is their light so that they will become light to the world. Before the throne of God, burns the sevenfold torch of God's Holy Spirit (Rev. 4:5). At the end of Revelation, St. John sees the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth illumined by Christ (Rev. 21:23). In our worship on earth, we light candles because He Who is our light in the darkness, will chase the gloom of sin away, and usher in the everlasting day.

“A Sweet Smelling Aroma”



It is simply not possible for us to envision the heavenly worship. It taxes our finite ability to comprehend what it would be like to be immersed in the presence of God wholly, to live by sight and not by faith. Now we only see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to Face (1 Cor. 13:12). And so, the heavenly worship scene is communicated to us through the vehicle of symbolism in Revelation chapters 4 and 5. In the center is the Throne of the Almighty to represent sovereignty. Christ is presented as a wounded Lamb. The Holy Spirit is represented by the seven-branched menorah. The redeemed are priest-kings surrounding the Throne wearing white vestments and crowns. And what are those priest-kings doing? “The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8). The incense represents prayer to God, the communion we enjoy with God, the worship we offer Him, our Maker and our Redeemer.

The white-robed elders in the heavenly temple scene in Revelation are offering their “incense,” their loving worship to the Lamb of God for His love in giving Himself for their

redemption. St. Paul exhorted the Christians at Ephesus: “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2). Christ’s love for us—concretely demonstrated when He gave Himself for us on the cross—is described as the pleasing aroma of pungent incense rising up to God. Christ showed the perfect love to God and man (thus fulfilling the law: love God and your neighbor as yourself). Christ offered the perfect obedience and the perfect worship. When the redeemed offer to Christ their utmost devotion and worship, their prayer is likened to swirling clouds of incense rising up in God’s holy temple. He offered Himself for their salvation; they offer to Him their full devotion, body and soul. In fact, the *only* truly sweet smelling aroma, the only acceptable worship, is the sacrifice that Christ offered. When we worship we do so *in Christ*. It is only in union with our High Priest, that we, God’s royal priesthood, can offer any true and acceptable worship to God: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”(Heb. 13:15).

In our worship service at St. Francis we employ symbols to portray the spiritual realities taking place. In concert with the wider tradition of the church, we take the symbolism of the heavenly worship described in Holy Scripture, and employ those symbols in our ceremony, that God’s will may “be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). For some reason, even those who take no issue with candles and vestments and other symbols, react negatively to using incense in the church. One reason may be that incense is considered un-hygienic and sneeze-inducing. These days, however, incense is allergy-free. But there seems to often be a deeper reaction to using incense. I am not entirely certain why. Perhaps some think that because Roman Catholics use incense we should not. But if that is the case, we would have

to get rid of a lot more than incense just to “not be those Roman Catholics.” Should we get rid of altar, pulpit, and lectern, stop saying the creed, jettison our faith in the Blessed Trinity and quit celebrating the Eucharist just to avoid being like those folks over there? Once we accept the use of symbolism in worship, and understand the profoundly biblical meaning behind incense, then it makes perfect sense (pun intended).

I find (and I am not alone) that incense goes a long way to making worship truly holy. “Holy” means set-apart unto God, consecrated, different, special. What we do in celebrating the Holy Eucharist is unlike any other activity we engage in at any other time during the week. Incense, even more than other symbols we use, is strange, different, unusual, a holy practice for a holy occasion. God’s house looks and smells holy.

When our Lord was still a little Child, the Magi came from the east bearing gifts, and one of those gifts was a type of incense called frankincense. The Magi were Gentiles, for Gentiles came to the brightness of the rising of Israel’s King (Is. 60:1-3). The prophet Malachi, had prophesied, “from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations” (Mal. 1:11). This prophesy is now being constantly fulfilled.

Of course, the true incense is our prayer, our unreserved love and devotion offered to God through Christ. But using incense in our worship reinforces the fact that we are offering that worship as God’s royal priesthood in God’s heavenly temple. Through Christ, we give ourselves body and soul without reserve to God and become a sweet-smelling aroma in His holy courts.

“A Sea of Glass”



When you walk into our sanctuary at St. Francis, you will see the baptismal font sitting on the left side. It stands at the back of the church. This particular piece of furniture is placed deliberately in the back of the church. You must walk past the font to enter the holy place. Why? The font is the sign of our gracious Lord’s summons to appear before Him. Let me explain. When the children of Israel were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt, God took them up through the Red Sea. And where did they arrive when they made their passage through the sea? They came to God’s holy mountain, before God’s blazing Presence. On the mountain, Moses was given the Tabernacle design and its system of worship, the means by which God summoned them into His holy space to worship Him.

The Apostle Paul called the Red Sea passage a baptism: “all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). So, in other words, the passage of the Israelites through the sea was an *ascent*, through baptismal waters, and up to God’s Presence, up to God’s mountain where God met with His people.

There is another passage about an ascent through waters to God’s holy mountain. In Revelation chapter 4, St. John

writes: “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here’” (Rev. 4:1). “Immediately,” says John, “I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne” (v. 2). John ascended, and when he arrived, he was in God’s throne room. God’s throne room was filled with torches, altars, clouds of incense, and cherubim, with countless angels, and with men dressed in the white vestments of priests declaring the praise of the Lamb of God for redeeming them by His blood. Where has John arrived? He has been lifted up into the heavenly temple.

But then we read this about the Throne Room of God: “Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal” (v. 6). The sea was the floor of the heavenly temple. So the “door standing open in heaven” through which John ascended, brought him up *through the sea of glass*. What is going on here? In symbolic form, John is *recapitulating the Exodus* event: like Israel of old, John passes through a sea to arrive in the tabernacle or temple, to arrive in the presence of God. Like Israel of old, John passes through a sea to ascend God’s mountain, for the place and condition where God is with His worshipping people is called God’s mountain, Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22-24).

Now consider what we are doing, what we are communicating when the procession begins at the back of the church at the beginning of our service. The minister and acolytes proceed past the font and ascend up to the high point of the church, the altar. We are recapitulating the Exodus every Sunday, we are symbolically acting out the ascent of John into God’s temple. The font stands as a sign of our baptismal passage through the “Red Sea,” through the “sea of glass” as we are elevated to God’s mountain to appear before Him. The font at the back of the church expresses the fact that we are an Exodus

people, called out of spiritual bondage to become God's royal priesthood and to enjoy God dwelling among us. We are on a journey, and God is our destination.

But the placement is not the only symbolic feature of the font. There is another symbolic aspect. Our font, like the vast majority of traditional baptismal fonts, is octagonal, eight-sided. This too is deliberate. Why? It is because when we are baptized, we are *plunged into the eighth day*. What does that mean?

In the first chapter of Genesis, the creation week is seven days. Seven becomes the number that stands for creation. But then comes the Fall into sin and the curse. All through Holy Scripture, God's work of redemption and restoration is spoken of as a work of *new* creation. If the creation week is seven days, the work of new creation takes place on the day after the seven days, on the eighth day. And so in Scripture, *the eighth day becomes a sign of new creation*.

For instance, when the waters began to recede after the Flood, Noah waited seven days, and then, on the eighth day sent out a dove which soared across the deep leading Noah and his family to the new world that rose up from the baptismal waters of the flood (Gen. 8:10). That is how St. Peter describes the Flood story: it is a type, a sign-action. As the ark emerged from the waters to a new world, so we emerge from the baptismal waters to new creation (1 Pet. 3:20-22).

Circumcision was performed on the eighth day because the child was becoming a part of the covenant community, Israel, God's new creation, God's redeemed people (circumcision is fulfilled by baptism—Col. 2:11-12).

The most important eighth day of all, comes the day after Holy Week. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the first day of the week, on Sunday. Thursday evening of that week He celebrated the Last Supper. Friday He died on the cross. Saturday, the

seventh day, the Sabbath, His body rested in the tomb. And then the following day, the day after the seventh day, the eighth day, He burst forth from the tomb. *New creation began on the eighth day.*

The eight-sided font communicates that our baptism is entrance into the community that is God's new creation. Consider these statements from the pen of St. Paul:

We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Ro. 6:4).

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

When you see the eight-sided font and walk past it to take your seat in church, remember that you are summoned to be part of God's new creation, and to walk in newness of life. The old is to die on the cross with Jesus, the new man is to come to life. When you rise from your seat and walk to the altar to partake of Holy Communion with the font behind you and the cross before you, remember that you are invited into God's gracious presence to feast at His table.

We began this newsletter series "Symbols of Salvation" with the central sign of the cross. We now bring the series to an end with the sign of the font. With the font behind us, we know that we have been called to die with Christ, and to rise to

newness of life. With the altar and cross before us, we know that Christ died for us to redeem us from the old broken sinful way, and give us new life. With the cross before us we know that we are called to take up our cross daily and follow Him. With the font behind us we celebrate that we have been immersed into new creation by God's gracious mercy. With the Holy Table before us, we know that we have been summoned to enjoy a foretaste of that new creation already in the sacred Feast God spreads for us. Font and Cross, Font and Altar. They are bookends on our journey with Christ, in Christ, to Christ.

The signs of salvation which the church employs are rich in meaning. They proclaim the Gospel, they tell us of Christ and who we are in Him. The signs are speaking to you. How will you answer?