

ST MICHAEL AND ST MARY MAGDALENE, EASTHAMPSTEAD. NOTES ON THE STAINED GLASS:

[2] THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, WILLIAM WAILES, 1873.

The 'Baptism of Jesus' window is in the west wall behind the font. It is one of three windows in the Church designed by William Wailes and dates from 1873.

Like all the windows in the church, Wailes had to fit his design into an already existing window frame. The Baptism Window is unusual because the design is placed within the shape of a cross.

The window is possibly cross-shaped because in baptism we begin our discipleship of Jesus. In the top of the window this is shown by a symbol showing taking up the cross to follow Jesus. The upper arms of the cross are filled with the four symbols of the Gospel writers which surround the descent of the Holy Spirit who is active in the sacrament of Baptism.

The four symbols of the Gospel writers represent the four living creatures (tetramorphs) which surround the throne of God in Ezekiel's vision of heaven in *Ezekiel 1:5-14*. They reappear in the Throne vision in *Revelation 4: 6-8*. They also appear in the reredos behind the High Altar.

In the Rabbinic tradition they represented creation praising the Creator.

"Man is exalted among the creatures, the eagle among birds, the ox among domestic animals, the lion among wild beasts; all of them have received dominion....Yet they are staged below the chariot of the Holy One" *Midrash Shemoth R 23*.

St Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c.200) first connected the tetramorphs with the Gospels. The lion symbolised the royalty of Christ; the ox, the sacrifice of Christ; the man, the incarnation of Christ; and the eagle, the Spirit that sustains the Church. It was St Jerome (c.345-420) who ascribed these Four Living Creatures to the Four Evangelists. St Matthew's Gospel begins with the incarnation therefore his symbol is the man. St Mark begins with the figure of St John the Baptist who roars like a lion in the wilderness, hence the lion. St Luke received the Ox because of his concern with the Temple and the sacrificial aspects of Christ's life. St John received the Eagle because his gaze has pierced furthest into the mysteries of heaven.

At the foot of the cross is a panel showing Jesus being baptised by his cousin, St John the Baptist, in the river Jordan. The baptism of Jesus was the beginning of his ministry. It was a public declaration of who he is. As Jesus is baptised he is anointed with the Holy Spirit and voice from heaven declares "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

In the Old Testament being anointed with holy oil was a sign that a person had been chosen by God for a special purpose. In Hebrew the word for "anointed one" is *messiah* and in Greek the word is *christ*. The prophet Samuel anointed both Saul and then David as King over Israel. Later the Jews looked back to those kings and waited for a new Messiah or Christ, a warrior king like David, who would save them from their troubles.

In his baptism Jesus is anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and declared to be the Son of God. He is the long awaited Messiah or Christ. Jesus is not a warrior king like David but a universal king whose reign of justice and peace becomes a reality in our world through our love of God and love of our neighbour.