

Weekly Message from Pastor Poock for December 11, 2020

Good morning, everyone. This is the weekly message for December 11th. I'd like to share with you a few things of what you will see or what you have been seeing upfront in the church on the Christmas tree. We have something hanging on them, which are called Chrismons. Now, Chrismons are really not that old, all things considered. At least not as far as the church is concerned. They were started by a Lutheran church in Virginia in the 1950s, late 1950s. And the idea was rather than just decorate the tree in the church with generic Christmas decorations of balls and candy canes or things of this nature, whatever, lights. They would make a purpose to the decorations. And so they chose symbols that would connect us to Jesus Christ, kind of like what we're talking about with the Jesse Tree in our Advent study in our devotions. But these are specifically sort of New Testament images or images that were used later on in the Christian Church, and some of them also are from the Old Testament as well.

So I thought I'd point out a few of the symbols that we use and a few of the symbols that you will see on the trees, so that you can get a better idea of what you're looking at and why they're there. The first symbol I wanted to show you was this one. It's called the Chi Rho. Chi, as in this X part, and the Rho, in Greek, the R letter looks like a P. So Chi and Rho, and this is a symbol for Christ. These are the first two letters of Christ in the Greek language. And so when Christians would signify that they were believers, this would be a symbol that would be a shorthand way of showing that they were believers in Jesus Christ, if they did the Chi and the Rho. And very often you will see this on some of our paraments and other places, the altar garments and some of our banners and various other things. Very common symbol to recognize the name of Christ, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The second symbol that I wanted to bring up and show you is very much like the first one. And this is called an Ichrys. Ichrys is first that you see an I, an Iota. And then of course, the Chi again. So the Iota Chi or I-Chi is another symbol, that this is the name of Jesus and his title of Christ. So the I represents Jesus or "ee-ay-soos" in the Greek and the Chi, the X, represents Christ. Also this symbol much like the other one is a symbol of the name of Jesus Christ. This time using his personal name, Jesus and his title which is the Christ. So it's very similar, but slightly different. So the Iota and the Chi are Jesus Christ.

Now the third symbol that I'd like to show you, you've probably seen this one very often on bumper stickers and on cars and various other places. Sometimes you might even see a word inside of there in strange letters, Greek letters, in fact. And the reason I bring up this symbol next is because it has both the Iota and the Chi in it, as it forms the name. So this is a fish, obviously, why is the fish a symbol of Christianity? There's no inherent things, you might think of the miracles of Jesus causing the disciples to catch a whole net full of fish to bursting. You might think of the Jesus Christ called us to be fishers of men. You might even think of Jonah and the giant fish that swallowed him up as a symbol of Jesus Christ. And actually those are all decent reasons to use the fish as a symbol for Jesus Christ and for Christians. However, there's a much more unique reason that we use this symbol as well. The Greek word for fish is Ichthys. And the letters that form the word **ΙΧΘΥΣ** all have a significance as an acrostic. Each letter of Ichthys has a word associated with this. So the first is Iota. Again, Greeks didn't have a J. So when we say Jesus, they would use Iota or an I. So the first letter is Jesus. And then of course, we've talked about the Chi many times, Christ. So the first two letters are Jesus Christ. And then the next letter is a circle with a line through it or a Theta and that means, God. That's the word for God in Greek. And then the next word is like a U or a Y. Sometimes it's represented as wheels, the wheels mean son. So Son of God. So the first four letters are Jesus Christ, Son of God. And then the last letter is an S or a Sigma. And Sigma is a word for Savior. So the word Ichthys means fish, but the letters each stand for a word. And that means Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. And that's why the fish is used as a symbol for Christians. And interestingly enough, since this is somewhat obscure, when Christians were being persecuted and Christianity was illegal in the Roman empire, they would draw a fish symbol on the catacombs in places where the church would meet. And so if you were a Christian and you were unfamiliar with how to meet up with other

Christians, you could go round and if you saw this symbol, like in the catacombs or the tombs where they buried their dead, you would know that a Christian community would meet in that area.

In fact, one of the other things that they used to do with this symbol is as they were talking with a person. A stranger that they don't know. And if you sort of were talking and it sounded like this person might be a believer in Jesus Christ. You might casually as you're talking along, take your foot and draw in the dust, the sign of the fish. Or maybe take a stick and draw it or something like that. And if the person you were talking to actually was a Christian, they would respond by drawing the same symbol. And you would know at that point that you are indeed speaking with a Christian. If they didn't draw the symbol, they just might think you were doodling in the sand. And it was somewhat of a safe way of signaling to other Christians who you were so that you could then gather together, maybe talk more freely. And to protect yourself from persecution.

That's why the fish is a symbol for Christianity. And nowadays, as we seem to feel like our culture is going against Christianity, more and more, this symbol might have new meaning for us. That this is a way that we need to communicate with each other and strengthen each other and protect ourselves against persecution. So all of those symbols are very much focused upon Jesus Christ.

The last symbol that I wanted to share with you is this. Now this, if you recognize is a star of David, often a symbol of the Jewish faith. And why do we use a star of David? Notice of course, there is a cross in the center of it, but this is because Jesus Christ is called David's son. And he is the Savior of the Jews promised to the Jews through the Old Testament, but also promised to all Gentiles. And this specifically, the star of David and the cross, the symbolism comes a lot from Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is a Psalm that Jesus uses when He asks the Pharisees, "Who do you think that Jesus is?" And they can't answer. He says, "What does this mean when David says..." Verse 1, "The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until you make your enemies your footstool." So Jesus Christ uses this passage from Psalm 110 to test the Pharisees, to find out what they think or actually to prove that they don't have a clue who it is that the Messiah will be. So they talk about being the Son of David, that the Messiah is the Son of David and Jesus challenged them. If he's the son of David, then he's less than David, but then why does David said, "The Lord says to my Lord," who is supposedly his descendant, his son "sit at my right hand." This is a sign that Jesus is helping them to understand that Jesus Christ is more than just a man and more than just a descendant of the son of David. But that He is indeed God Himself taking on our very flesh and blood and becoming our Savior because only God can save us from our sins. So again, when you see these symbols on our trees, you will have a better understanding and appreciation of what those symbols mean and why we have them on our tree.

Again, we want to encourage you to join us in our worship. We have our Divine Service as always on Sunday mornings at [9 and] 10:30. And on Wednesday, we have it at 5:00 pm and the Wednesday services are different during the Advent than they are on Sunday. And then also on Christmas Eve, we will be having services. They are carols and readings and meditations. It's a very fun service. It really touches on a lot of who Jesus is. And we get to do a lot of singing and that's at 4:30 on the 24th and 7:00 on the 24th, both services being the same thing. And then to celebrate the "Christ mass" or Christmas, we will be having a Divine Service at 10:30 on Christmas Day. And we'd love to have you join us for any one of those things.

God's blessings be with you and may Christ advent with you every day as He comes to you in His Word, to offer you peace and comfort. Joy to the world and peace to all the earth. May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forever. Amen.