

## **A Lesson on Trinity's West Windows**

**by Neil Olsen, Trinity Church on the Green, November 26, 2017**

HISTORIAN. (NEIL OLSEN, at Eagle lectern)

Many of the founders of the first Trinity Church building in 1752 were Freemasons; they were members of Hiram Lodge New Haven, which was founded around the same time. So was Ithiel Town, the architect of this our 1816 Gothic church. In 1884, Trinity added this chancel to the original church. However, we don't know who designed the unusual windows, only that they contained Freemason images, and that they must have loved numbers, gothic design, and geometric symbols.

TEACHER. (ANNA FOSTER, at pulpit)

Back when most people could not read or write people learned their bible by looking at stained glass windows. Trinity windows indeed tell us many stories. But as we told the children of the Vacation Bible School last August, when we presented a version of this lesson to them, they also help us count from one to nine.

One. Look at the "one" window. We call it "the rose window", because it is like a flower with petals.

Two. The number two is represented by the two windows below it. The one on the left is an Alpha, and the other is an Omega, which are Greek letters, as Greek is the language of the Gospels. Alpha is Greek for A, and Omega is Greek for Z.

The two windows tell us that God has all the knowledge from A to Z, from the beginning to the end. It means that God governs all things from the beginning of time to the end of time.

Now we come to three, the Trinity. In the middle of the rose window a strange set of three round tiny red windows with letters are set around a center red window with letters, all connected with bands. It tries to explain the Trinity to us. Some of us call it the holy hubcap! Does it look like a hubcap to you? It does to me.

The words on the three red circling windows are in Latin and mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word on the very center window, Deus, means God. They are connected with the paradoxes of *est* and *non-est*, is and is not. That is the Trinity, and we call it the Trinity Rose Window. Though I still think it looks like a Holy Hubcap.

Our church was named after it. It means that the three are part of one rose window, and all three are connected to God, and revolve around God.

Four. Look at the center medallions. There are four winged creatures. They represent the four Greek Gospels. The second on the left holds emblems of Saints Matthew and Luke – the winged man and the winged ox. The second from the right holds symbols of saints Mark and John - the winged lion and the eagle. They all have wings. Even if you can't read, you still would know there are four gospels sent by God from heaven above to bring us the Good Word as if on wings.

## HISTORIAN.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Trinity was not a nest of “Tories” or Loyalists during the revolution. Rev. Hubbard was officially a Neutralist, but was never molested by patriots like many of his contemporaries. Out of a hundred Trinity families, only two left for Canada after the war, and many joined the American forces and were famous Patriots. The five pointed star was a rare symbol used only on heraldry until 1776, when Francis Hopkinson designed the American Flag. After, you begin to see five pointed stars appear in graphic designs and in windows.

TEACHER.

Five. There are many fives in the west windows. There are many of those five pointed stars. There are those five very thin tall windows with pointed tops, called lancets.

Look again at the two windows, the Alpha and the Omega. There are five half circles around the edge. Those half rounds are called petals in the world of stained glass windows, because they are like flower petals. At Trinity you will see a lot of petals around windows, carved on the pews, and in brass on the pulpit and columbarium – some have three, some four, some five, and some even more petals. The Latin for pedal is *foil*, so these are called trefoils, quartrefoils, pentafoil, and so forth. Trinity's two Alpha/Omega windows are pentafoil designs; they were deliberately based on pentagrams, just as the five pointed star on the American flag is, whose solid interior section is a pentagon.

Six. There are many six pointed stars. That is called the Star of Creation or the Star of King David. It represents the six days that God took to make the world.

HISTORIAN.

Amos Doolittle was a Trinity member and a Freemason, who drew the illustrations for "The Masonic Chart", which became sort of the Freemason bible. His symbols are still used everywhere today by that fraternal organization. One Masonic symbol Doolittle drew was an oval with seven five-pointed stars.

TEACHER.

Seven. There are seven five-pointed stars arrayed like a cross. After six days creating the world, God put aside the seventh day for a day of rest, a Sabbath or Sunday. It is a very special day we reserve for learning about God.

Eight. Look at those interesting round windows in the five narrow windows. We call them stained glass “medallions” and they have eight petals – they are *octofoils*. In addition to the four gospels we talked about before, they tell the whole story of Creation, Jesus’ Birth, his life, death, and resurrection, and the apostles going out into the world. I could tell you the whole story of the bible, from A to Z, or Alpha to Omega, just by looking at the fourteen medallions.

Nine. We come back to the great Rose Window. Nine is a very mystical number. It is three threes, three Trinities. The Rose Window has nine pedals. It is based on a “nonagon”, a nine sided regular polygon. You can’t construct a perfect nonagon with a compass and ruler, only a close approximation – perhaps to remind us that man cannot easily model, represent or comprehend God, and never perfectly. Hence nonafoils are very very rare in churches.

The very center of something architectural has a very special name. Look up at the arches on the ceiling, right where the chain from the chandelier hits the roof. You will see a round stone at the place where all the arches come together. It holds all the arches, all the weight of the ceiling of the building, together. Today it is called the arch stone, or the key stone – but in olden times it was call the “boss”. We get the word “boss” from that stone holding everything together.

But windows too have a boss. The center of a rose window is called “the boss.” Our boss has the word Deus, or God on it. So when you look at the windows, the alpha and omega, the history of the world from creation to the end of time, this story of Jesus and the lives of the apostles, all of it – remember that **God is the Boss**.

And here ends the lesson on the numeral windows of Trinity Church – up to nine.