

An Explanation of Zion Church's Symbolism

(A summary of information found in the 1929 Dedication Booklet)

Zion's church was dedicated on February 3, 1929. It was located on the upper end of Rhinelander's main business street to impress upon people that there is more to life than just buying and selling; there are spiritual values that need everyone's attention.

The floor plan of the church is in the form of a cross, declaring to the worshiper: "We preach Christ crucified." The congregation faces the east, the rising of the sun, to remind us that it is out of the east that the glory of the gospel came, providing us with the source of all spiritual light. The Gothic architecture of the church swings the worshiper's eyes upward to heaven, the goal of our earthly pilgrimage. That the unvarnished truth of God's Word is proclaimed in this church is brought out by the fact that nothing in the framework, woodwork or other materials is imitation or fake. Even the edges of the statues are left unsanded. There is nothing in the church to cheat the eye and the heart of the worshiper.

Set into the lower part of the front south transept (alcove) arch is "The Luther Stone." This stone was broken out of the wall of the old castle church at Wittenberg closest to Luther's pulpit and grave (approximately 75 feet away). Luther's coat of arms is engraved on the stone. This stone reminds us of our ties to the Reformation.

God, in all His grace, used the Reformation to restore for us the blessings received only through His Word. That Word

is "our great heritage." The purpose of Zion Church is to proclaim the gospel and defeat unbelief with the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Zion's Church Seal pictures the battles and victories of the church as it goes about its work of preaching God's Word in its truth and purity. Likewise, the inlays appearing in the front steps leading into the church and in the sidewalk by the north entrance, depict by means of reptiles, snakes and other animals the efforts of Satan to oppose the work of the Church. The worshiper is reminded by them that as he leaves the house of God he will meet this kind of opposition to Christianity everywhere in life and that, as he meets them, it is his responsibility to "stamp out" such things with the Word of God that he has heard in God's house.

The Gothic reredos of the sixteen-foot high oak Altar is built around the Lord's Supper scene, modeled after Leonardo da Vinci's painting. The front bottom center panel of the altar depicts the chalice and wafer, symbols of the blood payment for sins made by Jesus in our behalf. This central truth of our salvation in the death of Jesus is guarded by two worshipping angels. The hyssop is an Old Testament symbol of purification and reminds us of the purifying power of the message of the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world. On the ledge below the Lord's Supper scene are six candles, symbolic of the six days of creation, and the crucifix, the symbol of Jesus' death on Calvary. The right eye of Jesus in the Lord's Supper scene is said to be within 1/8 inch of the center of the carving to remind us that Jesus is the center of our worship.

The five crosses behind the altar candles point to the five wounds of Christ as He hung on the cross. The statues of Moses and Elijah, on either side of the Lord's Supper carving, are representatives of the Old Testament and are reminders of prophecy and fulfillment. Beneath the two statues are the

symbols of the Alpha and Omega, the two letters of the Greek alphabet declaring that the beginning and end of our faith rests in the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. The two candle standards flanking the altar represent the two natures of Christ, God and Man, as well as the truth that He is the Light of the World. These two candles are lighted in connection with Holy Communion and festival days. It is to the stems of these two candle standards that carvings of our Church Seal are attached. Four shields of the Evangelists, the holy writers of the Life Story of Jesus Christ, appear in the woodwork above the Lord's Supper scene: Matthew, the winged man; Mark, the lion; Luke, the bullock; and John, the eagle. The four praying angels with wings spread upward rest on the upper ledge pointing to those angels God used in announcing His plan of salvation to the world. The middle canopy of the altar ends in the empty Easter cross of victory.

The Pulpit is carved out of American oak. The three front panels speak of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The two remaining panels depict the apostles Paul and Matthias (the replacement for Judas).

The Baptism Font is ten feet high topped with a dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, who through Holy Baptism regenerates our children into believing children of God. The angels reliefs and hyssop again portray the purifying power of the Sacrament and the special care of God surrounding our baptized children. Eight carved symbols of Jesus' life surround the base of the font: 1) Star - Jesus' birth; 2) Crossed Swords - Herod's attempt to kill Jesus; 3) Scroll - the twelve-year old Jesus; 4) The Loaves - Jesus' ministry; 5) Tied Hands - Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane; 6) Crown of Thorns - Jesus' suffering under Pontius Pilate; 7) Draped Cross - Jesus' death; 8) Rising Sun - Jesus' resurrection.

Shields of the Apostles are presented in the choir loft railing and the short railing on the steps leading to the altar. Matthew, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, James the Less, Jude, Simon, Thomas, Judas, Peter, John and James the Great are represented.

Interwoven throughout the altar, pulpit, baptism font and railings is the theme: "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Through Word and Sacrament, Jesus supplies the life to make us fruit-bearing Christians in His Kingdom, producing spiritual life and service to His glory.

The stained glass windows throughout the church are imported from Germany, made by Franz Mayer and Company of Munich. The **Chancel Window** behind the altar points us to the Ascension of Jesus, with the promise: "I will come again." At the very top is the approval of the Father: "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him."

The **Children's Window** in the north transept was purchased with pennies given by Zion's children at the time of the construction of the church. It reminds us of our never-ending privilege to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The **Pulpit Window** in the south transept speaks of the power of the preached Word. It pictures Paul in the middle frame, Luther, nailing the Ninety-five Theses on the castle church of Wittenberg, in the left frame, and Luther burning the papal bull in the right frame (rejecting the teachings of men). The upper panels show the scroll, Luther's coat of arms, the open Bible and the Alpha and Omega. The lower panels depict: Bonifacius - the Apostle of the Germans; John Huss - the forerunner of the Reformation; Melancthon - co-laborer with

Luther; and Muehlenberg and Walther - pioneers in American Lutheranism.

The three south **Nave Windows** picture the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. The three north Nave Windows picture the three major church festivals: Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

The **Balcony Window** pictures our Lord inviting and receiving to Himself "all those who labor and are heavy laden," promising them true rest for their souls here in time and hereafter in eternity. Coming to Him in faith before the Day of Judgment, announced in the blowing of the trumpet by the angel of God in the trefoil at the top of the window, is the wisdom that will result in "not perishing, but having everlasting life."

Four bells were placed into the belfry. They were manufactured in the St. Louis Bell Foundry by Stuckstede and Brothers of St. Louis, Missouri. The bells are made of copper and tin; their weight is as follows: first bell - 2,300 lbs.; the second - 1,000 lbs.; the third - 700 lbs.; and the fourth - 300 lbs. The first bell has the word "Gloria" cast on it. The second has the word "In." The third has "Altissimis," and the fourth has "Deo." The inscription, "Gloria in altissimis Deo," translated into English is "Glory to God in the highest."

When you have the opportunity to worship at Zion, we pray that this explanation of the symbolism incorporated into our church makes your worship here more meaningful.

A Brief History of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church Rhineland, Wisconsin (1885-2007)

The history of Zion began in the Fall of 1885 when Rhineland and other mill communities of northern Wisconsin became the target of pioneer mission work by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At first there was only a handful of Lutheran families to welcome itinerant missionaries who traveled from Milwaukee to conduct worship services whenever possible. Most of these early services were conducted on Sunday afternoons in the rented Congregational church, later to become the warehouse for the MacDonald Lumber Company, just one block west of our present church.

From those humble beginnings, the congregation began to grow. As God blessed this ministry, Zion weathered the storms of discouragement, financial shortages, pressure for change and threats of false teaching. Purely by God's grace, the history of this congregation has been characterized by faithful preaching of the Bible in all its truth and purity which is the only means by which sinners are made "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

A number of facilities have been instrumental in the ministry of God's Word at Zion. After three years of using a rented facility, Zion built its first church on north Mason Street. The first parsonage stood at its side. Just previous to the loss of this small church and parsonage in the great North Side Fire of 1905, a second church was being built on north Stevens Street

to accommodate the growing congregation. For almost twenty-five years, this new church served an increasing number of Lutherans who gathered on Sunday mornings for German and then English services. For another twenty years, it served as Zion's first school. The building later became an organ studio, and now is used as an apartment building.

The growth which God graciously granted the congregation in the mid-twenties led members to initiate plans for a larger church. Zion purchased lots for its new church on the back (south) side of the block. This new church was built in 1928 and dedicated on February 3, 1929. The \$81,000 cost of this church was a definite financial challenge for its 387 communicant members during the years of the Depression.

The year 1994 saw the beginning of an effort to upgrade our facilities over the next few years. This project involved, among other things, tuck-pointing the exterior of the church, refurbishing the interior, repair/restoration of the organ (originally installed in 1956), upgrading our heating and lighting systems, as well as completing a number of projects on the school building. An addition to the church, including a Gathering Area on the upper level, offices, bathrooms and an elevator, was dedicated in October of 1999.

In addition to the early missionaries, thirteen pastors have served Zion. From 1968 to 1983, Zion utilized a Vicarship program. A system of associate pastors began in 1984. Zion is presently served by Pastors Peter Korthals and David Sternberg. In order to better serve the membership, year-round Saturday night services were begun in the mid-seventies, and summer Monday night services were begun in 2005. Sunday morning radio services have also been broadcast live from this church since June, 1949.

In addition to the Sunday School program, which has always been a source of Christian education for our children, Zion supports a Lutheran Elementary School. A first attempt at such a program failed after one year of operation back in 1898. The school was reopened in 1931. For 20 years, classes were taught in the old Stevens Street church and in the basement of the new church. The present school building was constructed in 1951. The student body has gone from an initial group of 107 pupils all the way up to 230, and then back down to its present size of 101. The original faculty was made up of three teachers. The current faculty has six teachers (Preschool-Grade 8).

The membership of Zion has fluctuated through the years. When Zion was officially organized as a Wisconsin Synod mission in 1888, there were twelve families associated with the church. Two years later, at the time of incorporation, September 22, 1890, there were just four families. When the present church was built, there were nearly 400 adult members. That number doubled in the next twenty years. By 1979, the number of adult members had grown to 1,240. The number today stands at just under 1,000. The total membership - children plus adults - is over 1,150.

As we look back through the years at the history of Zion congregation, we see that past and future blessings have always and will always depend upon the same thing - faithfulness to God's Word and standing upon the solid foundation of Jesus Christ.