

The History of The Church of The Messiah

The first Episcopal Church was a building on Ridge Street which was erected in 1843. However the first service of confirmation and ordination was conducted in August 1840 by Bishop Onderdonk of New York in the “Old White Church”, the First Presbyterian Church structure in the city of Glens Falls when John Alden Spooner was ordained to the priesthood and 14 persons were confirmed. Eleven years later work was started on the current building on Glen Street.

The corner stone of the current building was laid on Monday, June 12, 1854 by The Right Rev. Jonathan M. Wainright, Bishop of the Diocese. Progress in erecting the new church building was slow. The walls went up in 1862, the roof in 1864 and finally when The Rev. Edwin Butler was called to the parish, the current building was finished and formally consecrated in June 1866 by The Rt. Rev. Horatio Potter, Bishop of the Diocese. However, at that time it was carpet-less, cushion-less, bell-less, spire-less and chancel-less. These lacks were supplied gradually through the years.

The nave of the church was consecrated in 1865, the tower and steeple were added in 1885, and by 1890 the chancel and sanctuary were added. The building is an example of the Victorian Gothic churches which are similar to English village churches. It is one and a half stories, rock faced limestone, with a four story bell tower, off center tent roof, a tower of polychrome slate gable roof, an attached sanctuary and sacristy pavilion. The windows are Gothic arched with tracery and quatrefoil designs, stained glass transept window, wall buttresses a Gothic arched entrance as designed by John W. Summers, architect.

The Gothic design is best adapted to a northern climate and a colder zone. The mass of stone is wonderful at trapping heat in the winter and cool air in the summer. The mortared stone allows for a certain amount of elasticity, so as to endure the drastic temperature changes that accompany the shifting of the seasons. The tall gabled roof with its slate covering allows the snow to easily slide off, taking the stress off of the roof and walls of the structure. Other Gothic elements found on the outside of the church include the stepped buttresses. They help to support the walls of the church and add interest. The roof is the “gingerbread” style slate roof. It involves an alternating of the pattern of the slate. On The Church of The Messiah, about four rows of tile are laid straight across in the traditional flat style and the next few rows are tilted diagonally. This pattern is repeated throughout the roof.

Inside the church, the actual floor plan is typically Gothic. It follows the basilica plan which consists of a nave with a central aisle surrounded by side aisles, and the sanctuary at the head of the church. The ceilings are high vaulted supported by the pointed arches. The pillared aisles are also typically Gothic.

The spire rising from the tower was given in 1883 by Mrs. Wright Merriman and Mrs. J.M. Parker in loving memory of their father Abraham Wing. The original bell cracked in 1915 and was donated to be melted down for the war effort. It was not replaced for many years and in 1951 the rector, The Rev. Schuyler Jenkins, found an old bell in a junkyard in West Glens Falls and it is still in the tower today.

On the outside of the church between the two doors, is a sculptured bas relief of a scene from the Sermon on the Mount which was blessed at the Thanksgiving morning service on November 21, 1962. The relief, sculptured by John Gallucci of Glens Falls is of cast stone a marble substance. This was given in memory of George and Mae Dolan by their daughters Misses Donna and Rose Marie Dolan. The theme is taken from the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus Christ is sitting on a hillside with St. Peter and St. John who are listening to his words. "Blessed are the Peacemakers" is inscribed beneath the relief.

Facing Glen Street is the large stained glass window which is dedicated in memory of Colonel Benjamin O Butler. The inscription reads, "In memory of the fallen NYS volunteer's 93rd regiment in the great rebellion to the zeal of their Colonel Benjamin O Butler who died 11/16/1882." It is a very impressive window, especially when the sun is streaming into the church. This is the oldest window in the church and has a simple geometric design of partly stained and partly painted glass. Entering into the narthex, which was dedicated in memory of Daniel Finch, one can see how very large this stained glass window is.

The Rood Screen, which is English and hand carved, was dedicated to the memory of Herbert Baker Finch by his parents, Jeremiah and Helen Finch. Herbert died at the age of 16 year. This screen was moved from the area between the nave and the chancel in the 1950's; glass panes were inserted and now forms a vestibule and support for the large balcony.

There are four types of stained glass windows in this church, the oldest at the front entrance. The second is the German Dresden School of glass, being pictures painted on glass, (on either side of the altar and three in the center of the nave on the north side of the church). The third type is seen in the window in the north vestibule and in the window over the altar. They belong to the Tiffany school of glass-making, the formula for which has been destroyed.

The fourth type is the new windows created in the 1950's are contemporary and made with genuine stained glass. They are designs rather than pictures. There is almost no painting used except to indicate hands and faces. The concept is to let the glass work with the light from outside. Authorities in stained glass consider our windows to be some of the finest in the United States. They were designed, made and installed by Mr. Robert Lewis of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Mr. Lewis also made the abstract windows in the sacristy. Pictures of these are in the book "Stained Glass" by Robert Sowers. In all, the church has 14 windows by Mr. Lewis.

The dormer windows in the four corners of the nave have the same simple design except for the symbols. These are the symbols of the four Evangelists. On the north side near the narthex is St. Matthew with the sign of the flying man. The one across from it is St. Mark who sign is the lion. The window near the Gospel Lectern is for St. Luke with the symbol of the bull. The window near the pulpit is for St. John with is symbol the eagle.

The windows in the four corners of the nave are symbols of four of the seven sacraments. (Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony, Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist) They follow a pattern of showing in one lancet a New Testament story and in the other lancet the use of the sacrament in this church. The three windows on the south side center follow a scheme which balances Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah with New Testament fulfillments.

Starting at the sacristy, is window # 1 The Sacrament of Holy Orders. On your left Jesus is ordaining the twelve apostles. On the right present-day bishops are consecrating a priest for the office of bishop.

Window #2. On your left is Moses holding the Ten Commandments. On the right is Jesus, the Law-giver of the New Testament. Moses said before he died that God would send another like him in the future to save Israel. At the top is a scale which is the symbol of justice.

Window # 3. The Epistle to Hebrews says that Christ is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (see Psalm 100). On the left is Melchizedek offering a sacrifice on an altar. On the right is the Messiah offering Himself in the bread and wine on an altar. On the bottom left Abraham is giving a tithe of his possessions to Melchizedek. On the right are two disciples offering themselves to Christ. At the top is a symbol of the Eye of God.

Window # 4. We know that Jesus is the Son of David. At the top of this window is the tree of Jesse. On the left is King David. Under him the prophet Samuel is anointing him King of Israel while he is still a shepherd boy. At the bottom is a sword by which David won his kingdom. On the right, Messiah, Son of David, and King of kings is seated in glory – our Judge. Below He is shown as the Good Shepherd and underneath is the rod that blossomed: A symbol of Messiah.

Window # 5. This is a window memorializing the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. At the top is God the Creator of man. On the left is Jesus turning water into wine at the marriage in Cana where He was a guest. On the right is a priest of this parish witnessing a marriage in this church.

Going back up the other side of the nave.

Window # 6. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism. At the top is a dove which symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit. On your left is Jesus being baptized by John in the Jordan River. On the right is a family with a baby and the priest at the font. The lovely splattering of color below suggests the lilies of the field in Palestine.

Window # 7. Here is a picture on your left of a Temple priest. On your right are Mary and Joseph presenting their firstborn child to the Lord God. At the top is an angel with a crown symbolizing the kingship of our Lord. On the bottom left is Moses with the Commandments and a prophet on the right who may be Isaiah.

Window # 8. At the top is an archangel dressed in priestly garb. On the left is the Archangel Gabriel telling Mary she is to be the Mother of Messiah. Here again we see the lily flowered as on a rod. Above on the right is a dove representing the descent of the Spirit upon Mary at her conception of Jesus. On the bottom left is Zechariah, the priest, offering the sacrifice of incense, and telling him of the coming birth of his son John the Baptist. On the right is Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth greeting Mary before the Nativity.

Window # 9. At the top an angel holds the Old Testament. On the left is Jesus calling James and John to be disciples. On the right you can see their fishing nets in their hands. On the bottom is John the Evangelist and another New Testament writer.

Window # 10. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. At the top is a chalice with baskets of bread and fish. On the left Jesus is feeding the five thousand with the loaves and fishes. On the right our Lord is feeding a present-day family with the Food of eternal life: His Body and Blood.

The Wood Screen on the outside of the window to the chapel was constructed by a local craftsman, John Dunham. It has four symbols of the Resurrection on it, the phoenix, the butterfly, the lily and the pomegranate.

Proceeding to the front of the chancel you see overhead the Christus Rex (Christ the King) and on the left the Gospel pulpit which was given in the memory of Austin Wells Holden MD. On the right is the Lectern given in memory of Elizabeth Buell Holden made of Brass and the symbol of the Gospel of John (the eagle).

Proceeding into the chancel, you have on the left, the Chapel of the Resurrection which is designed around the Ascension of Christ into heaven.

The sliding glass doors where you enter the Chapel are etched on all three lower panels with the apostles looking up at the ascending Christ. Angels border the panels above.

The lower window design is based on the Biblical description found in St. Luke, Chapter 24, verse 51; "and it came to pass while he Blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" Also in Acts, Chapter 1 verse 9, "and when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and the crowd received Him out of their sight".

The upper circular window shows a conception of heaven. It shows the Hands of the Father offering a Celestial Crown or Crown of Life to His Son, all within a radiance. This is surrounded by a rainbow a symbol of Heaven, and on the circumference, the Cherubim, and Seraphim, Symbolic of the Nine Choirs of Angels. This upper window is dedicated in memory of Blanche Guernsey, a long time superintendent of the Sunday school. The carving on the wall is the "Ressurrection" done in Lime Tree Wood in the Austrian Tyrol and is hand carved. It is the kneeling figure of St. Mary Magdalene, the standing figure of Christ and just visible inside the tomb, the seated figure of an angel. The chapel is also home to our Columbarium.

Going up into the sanctuary, you see the window over the altar which is made in the Tiffany style of glass making. Directly below it is the Triptych which was created from 1903-1906 by T.M. Cleland of New York City. It was his first and last altar painting. He was inspired by early Flemish and Italian examples of church decoration. He ordered special colors from Belgium to resemble those used by Van Eyckes and Van der Weyden. He first made a small sketch in color, and then worked for a long time on a full size replica in black and white. Most of the figures he made into small clay models, which he dressed completely and then made various studies of them before the final arrangement which we see before us. We have in the middle, the Holy Family at the birth of Jesus, on the left the shepherds, and on the right the Magi.

There are six very nice little windows of the 1890's on either side of the altar; these belong to the German Dresden School of glass. Beginning at your left facing the altar, you see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane with the apostles asleep. The next one shows the mockery by the soldiers. The third illustrates the Way of Sorrows to the crucifixion. On the other side is the Sacrifice on the Cross, the rising from the dead and the discovery of the empty tomb.

Preceding into the Sacristy the window near the steps to the sanctuary describes the purpose of the room. The place where the priest, acolytes and Lay Eucharist Ministers prepare to lead the congregation in worship. The gray background stands for the unbelieving world. The cross is in the shape of the Tree of Life. The candle flames are all blowing in one direction symbolizing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The two abstract windows on the opposite wall, tell the story of two great acts of loving humility in Holy Week. The one on the left shows Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet and the one on the right shows Christ washing the feet of a disciple on Maundy Thursday. (These two are acclaimed by contemporary artists as the finest in the church)

Returning to the entry way of the church using the left aisle, you see with the votive candles and outstanding Della Robbia of the Holy Mother and Child. This came from the nuns at the convent on Maple Street. They had purchased the home of Mrs. Foulds and found this piece in her cellar. Since they knew she was an Episcopalian, they called the priest of this church and donated it to us. We do not know if this is an original but are aware that is very valuable.

Going through the doors and turning right into the north vestibule is another window made in the Tiffany style of glass making.

At the side of the outside door are the plaques designating that The Church of The Messiah is on both the New York State and the Federal historical registers.

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