

Christianity – illustrated through the stained glass windows

Christian beliefs centre on the life of Jesus who lived in Palestine about 2000 years ago. His teachings can be summarised as a call for us to love the one God and our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). His parting message to his friends was that they should love others as He had loved them (John 13 verses 34-5). Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the saviour of humanity and these beliefs have played a prominent role in the shaping of Western civilization.

The main sources about Jesus' life are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They describe his ministry as a teacher and healer, working with twelve close friends (known as the disciples) and other followers, including many women, who believed him to be the Messiah or Christ. The leaders of the Jewish faith found his teaching threatening and persuaded the Roman authorities to put him to death. After Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, spread Christianity throughout the Roman world until it was adopted as the state religion by the Empire in 380CE. However most ordinary folk could not read the bible for themselves so stories about Jesus' life were told through paintings and stained glass in churches. In St. Andrew's church, there are two Victorian stained glass windows, one at the East and the other at the West end at the bottom of the tower.

At the top of the **West Window** (see next page) are four figures which depict the four Gospel writers. The six numbered scenes illustrate the birth and early life of Jesus up to the point where he started his ministry. Many scholars believe that stories about the birth of Jesus are legendary but they have important symbolic significance. The six scenes are as follows:

1. The baby Jesus with his mother Mary in the stable (*Luke Chapter 2 Verses 4-7*) showing that Jesus was born into poverty;

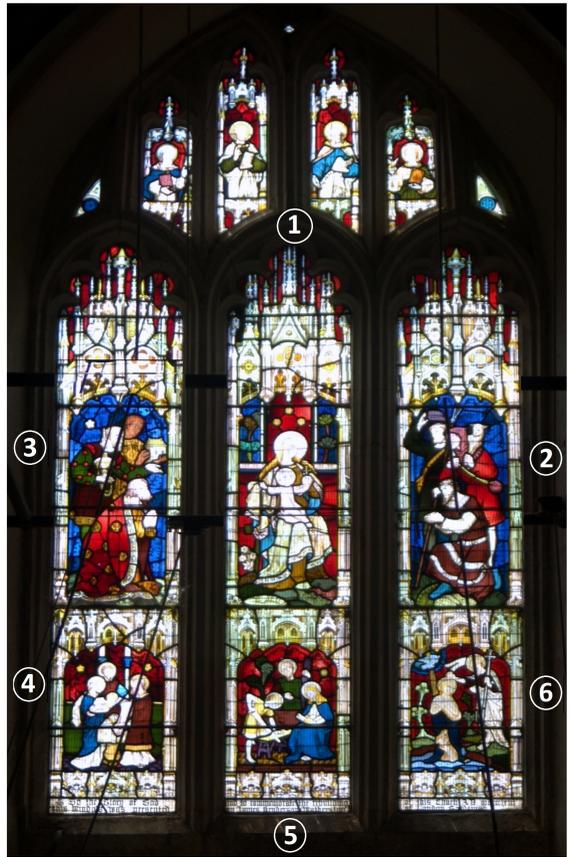
2. The arrival of the shepherds to worship the baby Jesus (*Luke Chapter 2 Verses 8-20*). This story illustrates that Jesus is a saviour for everybody, including those who are downtrodden and considered not good enough like shepherds in 1st century Palestine.

3. The visit of the wise men (often referred to as Kings or Magi) to present gifts to the baby Jesus (*Matthew Chapter 2 Verses 1-2, 11-12*). These learned men were not Jewish implying that Jesus is a saviour for everyone.

4. The presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the Jewish ceremony somewhat like a baptism or naming ceremony today. The third saint is Simeon who first recognised Jesus as the Christ for everybody, not just the Jews (*Luke Chapter 2 Verse 21*).

5. The boyhood of Jesus, apprenticed as a carpenter to his father Joseph (*Luke Chapter 2 Verse 40*).

6. Jesus baptism by John the Baptist at the start of Jesus' ministry. He then began preaching in Galilee and gathering disciples (*Matthew Chapter 3 Verses 13-17*).



At the very top of the **East Window** behind the altar, Jesus is depicted as the Lamb of God, the perfect and ultimate sacrifice for sin, also symbolising gentleness, innocence, and purity. The sacrifice of lambs played an important role in Jewish religious life but seems strange to us today. However the concept of making good or restitution is still one we can easily understand. Immediately below are two angels with instruments worshipping the lamb.

The rest of the window tells the story of St Andrew to whom the Church is dedicated. He originally worked as a fisherman and was the first of the original twelve followers of Christ and the brother of Simon Peter, the most prominent and influential disciple during Jesus' ministry and in the early Church. He is said to have travelled to Greece to preach Christianity, where he was crucified on an X-shaped cross.

St Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland and the X-shaped cross is represented in the diagonal cross, or 'saltire', on Scotland's flag. The association with Scotland is illustrated in our window by the thistles, the flower of Scotland.

Seven scenes from the ministry of Jesus and the life of Andrew are shown in the window (see next page). These include:

1. John the Baptist pointing out Jesus as the Lamb of God (*John Chapter 1: 35-40*);
2. Andrew bringing Simon Peter to follow Christ (*John Chapter 1: Verse 41*);
3. The feeding of the five thousand (*St John Chapter 6 Verses 5-13*);
4. Jesus telling Andrew and Philip of his impending crucifixion and death. The words "Now is my soul troubled" are clearly reflected in Christ's face. (*St John Chapter 12 Verses 20-36*);

5. Andrew spreading the gospel and inviting people to join the Christians;
6. Andrew being flogged prior to his execution;
7. The martyrdom of Andrew traditionally in Patras 70CE; it is said that he continued to preach during his execution, despite being in agony.



These stories illustrate how Jesus worked through the agency of his disciples and used ordinary people and things to create extraordinary things. No one should believe that they are too little or insignificant to serve God.

They also show how Andrew was prepared to make a stand for the truth, even though this would result in torture and death.