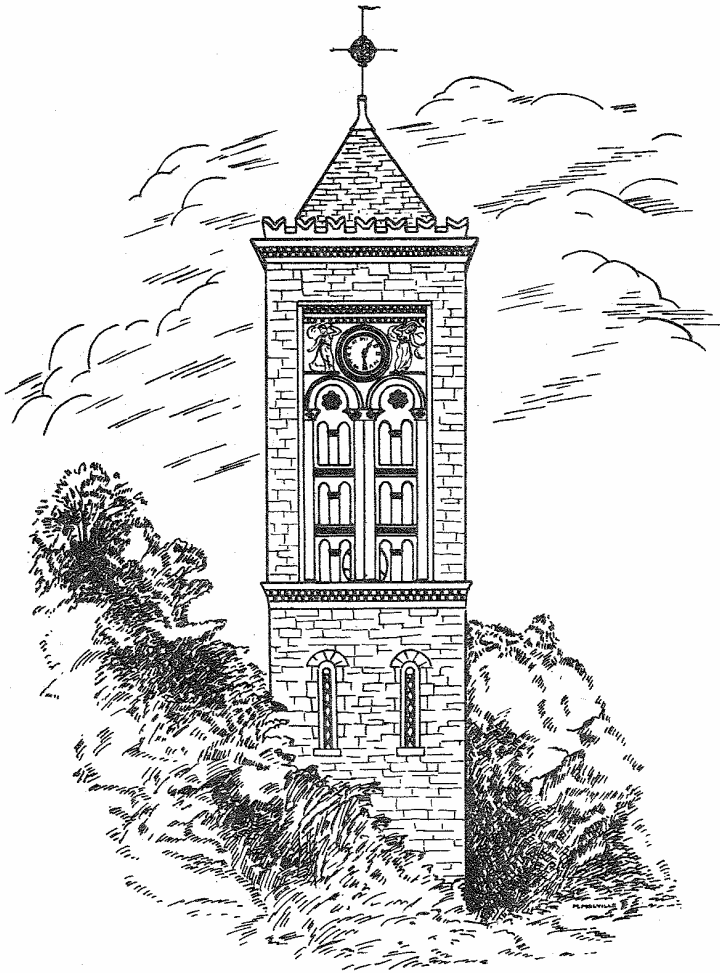


A WALK THROUGH  
THE CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM  
IN  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MORRISTOWN  
ON-THE-GREEN  
MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY





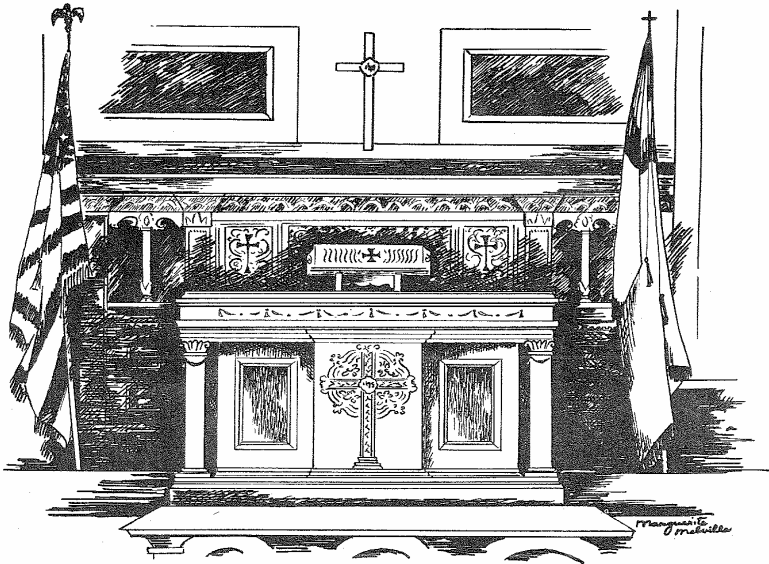
In fond memory of my fine Mother and Dad,  
LYDIA and WALTER A. W. MELVILLE.

With appreciation to Rev. Robert C. Holland whose idea and  
lectures brought to life the Christian Symbolism of  
The Presbyterian Church on-the-Green.

Text written by Marguerite L. Melville from the lecture notes of  
Rev. Robert C. Holland.

Drawings by Marguerite L. Melville.

The Drawings are mounted in a handsome volume,  
a Memorial to Nicholas J. Trompen,  
Ruling Elder, Faithful Worshipper, Christian Leader.



Published by  
The Presbyterian Church In Morristown

# A WALK THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ON-THE-GREEN

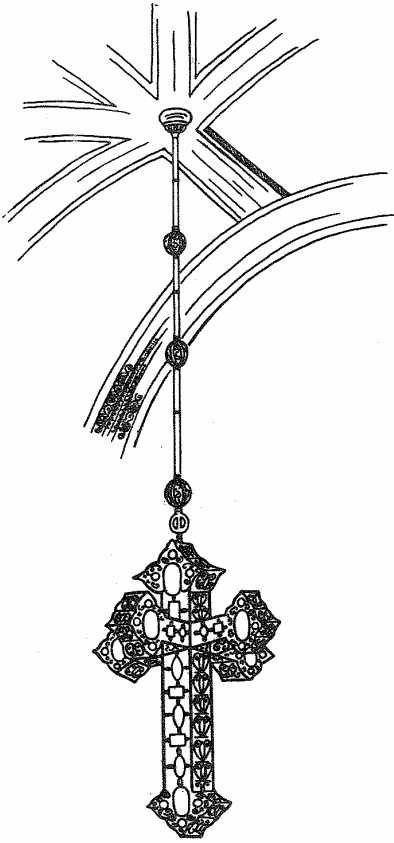
Let us enjoy a visit in The Presbyterian Church On-the-Green by approaching on a path through the Green in Morristown. There before us rises a majestic tower of beige stones crowned with the delicate design of a wrought iron weathercock, a local landmark. The stones were laid in 1890 according to the architect's design based on the Basillica of St. Appollinaire in Classe (St. Paul in Chains) outside Ravenna, Italy. Some affluent members of the congregation sent Mr. Josiah Cleveland Cady (1837-1919), the architect, to Italy for inspiration in designing the church. He designed only two churches and its twin is The First Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Mr. Cady was also the architect of The Metropolitan Opera House in New York City (demolished 1966) and of the American Museum of Natural History as well as various buildings at Yale, Williams, Trinity, and Wesleyan Colleges. It was on the Meeting House Land that the first meeting house was built in 1729, a few feet easterly of where the present edifice stands. In this building there was an Army hospital for the care and comfort of soldiers during the epidemic of smallpox which was so prevalent during the year 1777.

As we look up at the great tower we see two carved angels on either side of the great clock, timeless guardians of human time. The arches and carved openings lend beauty and grace to the structure.

Silhouetted against the sky in the tower is the iron wheel of the ancient bell, a gift of King George II in 1752, which was set in place when the first tower was added in 1764, and today we still hear its vibrant ringing in Morristown. How interesting it is to think back to the time when Morristown was British.

The tower also houses a metal owl, supposedly to scare away pigeons, and of added interest are the names of Scottish and Italian artisans carved in the walls of the tower.

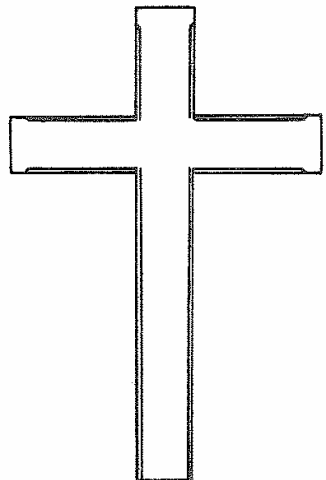
Now we enter the church which was built by Presbyterians who built the church solely to hear preaching. At the time they were not concerned with Christian Symbolism.



As we enter the narthex, the name derived from the Greek word for porch, we are captivated by the exquisite Tiffany cross which hangs over our heads suspended from the high arched ceiling. It is trefoil shaped, each arm ends in three points, a symbol of the Trinity, and it is beautifully jeweled with Tiffany glass. Its illumination enhances the narthex with an opalescent pearl loveliness.

On the window between the sanctuary and the narthex we see a Latin Cross made of quartered oak which was a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Parsons. The oak germinated somewhere in England in 800. It was hewn into beams, put into the roof of Westminster Abbey in the 1300's and removed in the 1960's when the beams no longer were safe.

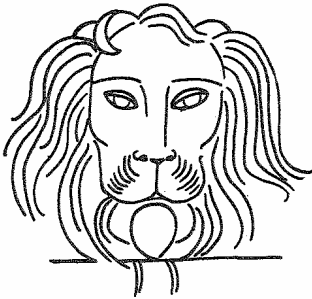
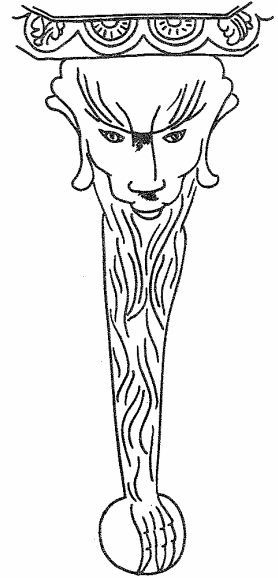
The wood was given to Mr. Parsons' cousin who is in charge of Westminster Abbey. The wood was made into this cross and it is particularly interesting to Presbyterians because the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal governing standard for our Church, was written under this piece of wood in Westminster Abbey in 1643.



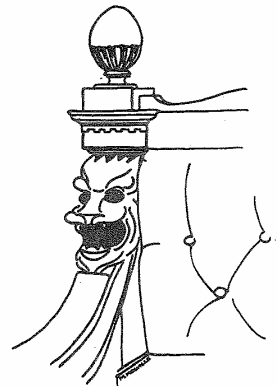


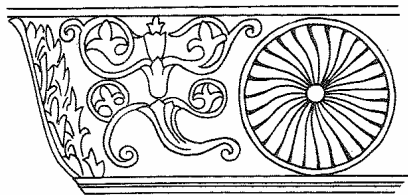
We now look at the wainscoting in the narthex, a five inch border decorated with carved lion faces.

The table nearby reveals a head and paw of a lion on the carved legs of the table. The Lion is the symbol of resurrected Christ (Rev. 5:5). Medieval people believed that the lion slept with his eyes open; Christ was in the grave for three days but was not dead. They also believed that cubs were born dead, but were brought to life by their mother's roar; Christ brought forth after three days in the tomb. The Lion with wings symbolizes St. Mark, but it is not in the interior décor of The Presbyterian Church on-the-Green.



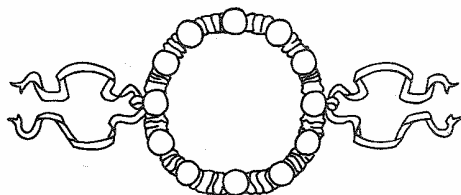
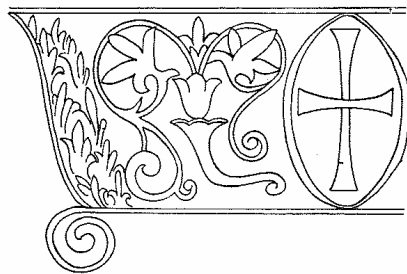
Now we enter the nave or the body of the Church (nave refers to the Latin word for ship). On the capital of several of the granite columns the Lion head appears carved in stone. As we look at the Chancel which closes off the clergy end of the nave for the pulpit and choir stalls (from the Latin word for screen – screens out the congregation from the clergy) a most interesting carving of an open-mouthed lion adorns both arms at the shoulder height wood frame of the side chairs.





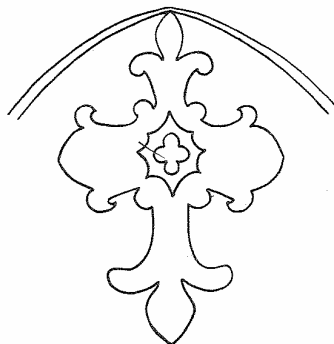
We look up at the top of the columns to see a stone decoration of the carvings of the vine, lily, and a sun (Malachi 4:2 — *”But unto you that fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall.”*)

Another interpretation is the wheel (Ezekiel 1:16 — “A wheel within a wheel”) - a symbol of God. These stone carvings with the vine, lily (Virgin Mary) and the “Visica Icthus” \* design also contain a carved Canterbury Cross with upright arms being twice as long as the side arms. “Visica” is a Latin word meaning bladder or pocket.



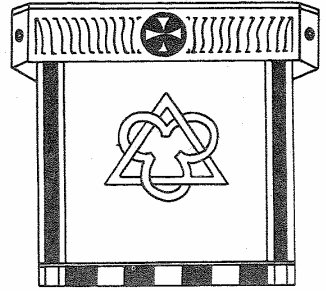
Another capital reveals a circle of twelve connected circles of the twelve disciples tied by loyalty to Christ. This is a rare symbol and it usually has a cross in the center. It appears in the capitals between each stained glass window on both the east and west sides of the nave and twice on either side of the chancel in front of the choir stalls. Since medieval times the rose has been referred to as the Virgin Mary (The word “rosary” comes from this tradition). Biblical references to the rose include “rose of Sharon” (Sons of Solomon), “ the desert shall blossom as the rose” (prophecy of resurrection in Isaiah 35:1).

We see high above the pulpit and the choir loft a large bejeweled cross designed in the wood at the top of the organ pillars. There are no jewels, but the design of the cross represents the vine. This same carving appears in the Latin cross on the front of the pulpit. Jewels were used earlier to represent fruited vines (John 15: 5 - “I am the vine, you are the branches.”)



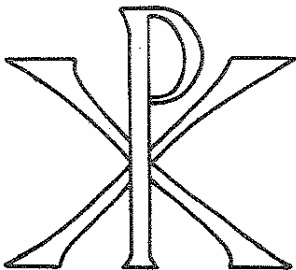
\* (See next page for explanation of “Icthus” under the Pulpit Hanging Chi-Rho monogram.)

There is a brass decoration on the pulpit using the Cross Patee which is only heraldic although there are equal arms, a Greek cross, used in the Eastern Church. It is similar to the Maltese Cross, the difference being that the Maltese Cross, has two points at each end of four arms and is used by the Knights of Malta and the Order of the Eastern Star.

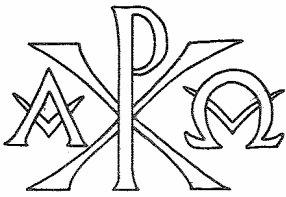


We admire the handsome pulpit of quartered oak wood (a log sawed into quarters, then into boards or veneer to show the grain advantageously), a gift of Mr. Robert Rochelle, and the hanging on the pulpit, one of five designs given by Mrs. Everett C. Balch. The pulpit hangings have various colored borders which are changed according to the season of the church year. Purple is for penitence and preparation in Advent, gold for Christmas or Easter. Easter was originally the Spring festival in honor of Eastr or Ostara, the Teutonic goddess of light and spring. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxons to the Christian festival designed to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In 325 it was decided to hold Easter on the first Sunday following the first full moon, following the Spring Equinox, March 21, when the sun's center crosses the equator and day and night are of equal length. Like many other Christian holidays, when the church became powerful in its early days and Christianity developed as the state religion many pagan habits and customs especially relating to the festival dates were integrated into the calendar. This is true also of Christmas. Green is for Epiphany and Trinity symbolizing the love of God. Purple is for Lent (Old English Spring). Red is for celebration and is used on Reformation and Pentecost (fifty days after Easter, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit).

The present hanging on the pulpit is the Trefoil and Triangle which are both symbols of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

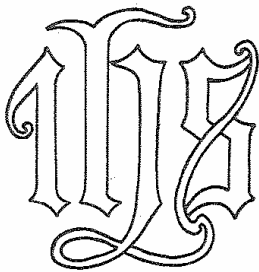
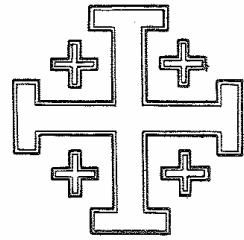


Another pulpit hanging is the Chi-Rho, a monogram composed of two Greek letters (X = Chi, P = Rho) superimposed. These are the first two letters in the Greek word, Christos. This monogram is one of the oldest symbols of the Christian Church. The earliest of all is the FISH symbol which is an acrostic of the Greek words Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour; ICTHUS. It was often used by tracing the outline of a fish in the sand as a secret way of identifying Christians, one to another.



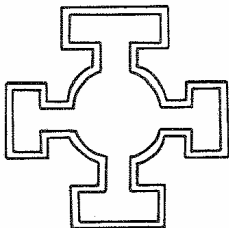
Then there is another hanging, the Chi Rho Cross with Alpha and Omega added which refers to Revelations 1:8 - "I am Alpha and Omega, first and last, beginning and ending."

The Jerusalem Cross is the fourth of the pulpit hangings and it was used by the Crusaders who went out from Europe to capture Jerusalem from the heathen. The five crosses represent the five wounds of Christ: two on the hands, two on the feet, and one on his side.



The fifth hanging is the monogram IHS which has several meanings - first, it is the first three letters of Jesus in Greek; second, in the 14th century - Jesu Hominum Salvator or Jesus, Saviour of Men; third, Constantine saw it in his "IN HOC SIGNUM" vision in 330 A.D.; fourth, "In His Steps," a more modern use adopted by the King's Daughters.

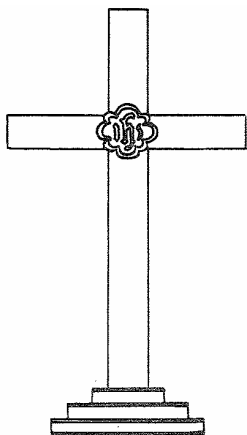
The Latin cross T is the earliest of crosses. It was used in Roman times for the purpose for which it was invented - execution, as the gallows and the guillotine. Christians used cross designs in jewelry. Some say it was T-shaped (for crucifixion) and perhaps the Latin cross was used for Christ's crucifixion but more likely it was T-shaped. A handsome brass Latin cross hangs below the organ pipes at the center of the chancel.



The Baptismal font is also of interest and we find four Tau (T) crosses on an orb which represents the world. (Isaiah 11:12 - "Four corners of earth.")



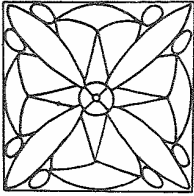
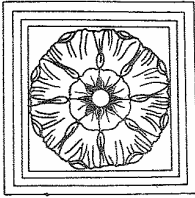
Below the pulpit stands the handsome Communion table beautifully carved on the top with a grape vine pattern, a jeweled cross surrounded by vines and grapes and a carved CUP and VINE (references to the Wine of the Last Supper). Jesus frequently used the symbol of the cup to refer to the hardship of his death.



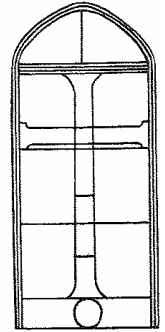
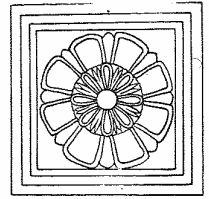
On the Communion table is the brass Calvary Cross mounted on three steps of brass, representing Faith, Hope and Love. This cross and the previously mentioned brass Latin cross in the chancel were the gifts of the William D. Bruen family. The Calvary Cross includes the IHS insignia which is also on the brass crosses in the Church and chapel. This cross stands in front of a carved jeweled cross designed in the wood of the pulpit.



Nearby at the end of the choir pews and on the organ case and above the hanging brass Latin cross we see the motif of the Burning Bush carved in wood, the flame that burns but does not consume (Exodus 3 - God's call of Moses). This symbol is in all Presbyterian official and historical seals and is the most mutually common symbol.



We now pause to enjoy the arches of the ceiling of the nave where a pattern of two different rosette designs is sculptured in a repeat motif covering the complete ceiling. Since medieval times, “rose” has referred to the Virgin Mary (the word “rosary” comes from this tradition). Biblical references to the rose include “rose of Sharon” (Song of Solomon) and “the desert shall blossom as the rose” (prophecy of resurrection in Isaiah 35:1).



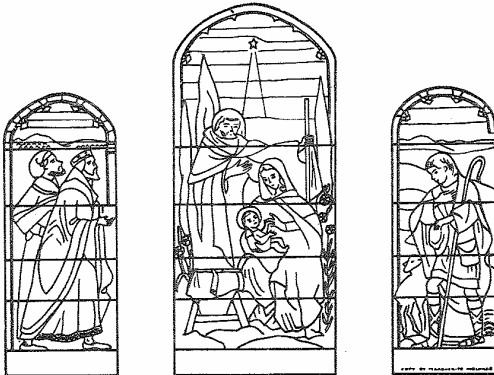
The only other rose design appears in the stained glass windows in the narthex.

High up near the ceiling on both sides of the nave are narrow stained glass windows known as windows in the clerestory. Here we see the Latin Cross over the orb. The orb represents the world or eternity.

Focusing our eyes lower to eye level we have the pleasure of viewing the stained glass windows, each framed by an arch of the nave.

On the east side of the nave there are three stained glass windows made from Tiffany glass (Louis Comfort 1848-1933 - his secret formula died with him), and on the west side are three stained glass windows which were made in Exeter, England.

The Nativity window on the east nearest to the Chancel contains some Tiffany glass which the manufacturer, Payne Studios, found in Kokomo, Indiana. This glass forms the blue sky and the green field in the Nativity

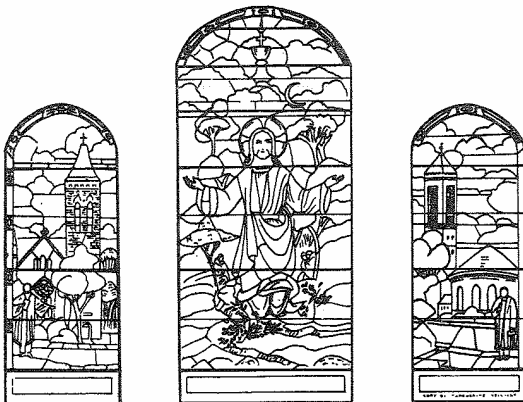


window. The scene shows only two kings which is noteworthy as there is no Biblical reference to three kings and it was more convenient in this scene to have only two for purposes of design. The window was donated by Mrs. William Case in memory of her husband.



Our next beautiful window is the Good Shepherd window, a true Tiffany window, given in memory of Mrs. George F. Stone. It is an oasis of greenery in the midst of the desert, a contemplative and peaceful scene. A medallion at the top of the center panel has the first verse of "My Faith Looks Up To Thee."

The third Tiffany window is The Resurrection window, magnificently opalescent, based on the Biblical passage Matthew 23:6 — "He is not here, He is risen" - with the two Marys at the empty tomb. The palm trees are an excellent and typical example of the Tiffany genius in glass making. The window was given in memory of George F. Stone, a resident of the area when the church was built.



We now walk over to the other side of the nave to view three stained glass windows which were made in Exeter, England. Nearest to the chancel we see the Parish Reunion window. In the 1830's The Presbyterian Church in Morristown was divided over the social issues of the day with the result that one group left The First Presbyterian Church and formed The South Street Church. Through the efforts of the ministers of both churches the two were reunited in 1925.

This window shows Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17:21) praying, "That they all may be one," as a symbol of unity in the center panel. We particularly note the moon and the stars, the cup and disciples asleep (St. Matthew 26:39 — "Let this cup pass...but if not, thy will be done.") Each of the side panels shows one of the Church buildings and its minister. The window was a gift of the Russell B. DeCoster and Edward S. Vogt families.



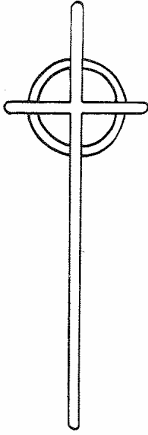
We move on to see the Washington Communion window where George Washington is taking Communion in the church orchard (due to the church being used as a hospital for the sick during an outbreak of smallpox). The previous evening Washington, an Anglican, had had a conversation with Dr. Timothy Johnes regarding the propriety of his taking Communion in a Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Johnes' response was, "This is not a Presbyterian table, but the Lord's table." An interesting point about this window is that the English artist depicted the old church building in stone, rather than wood, because English churches are constructed of stone. The window was a gift of the Russell DeCoster family as a tribute to the ministry of Dr. Thomas S. Mutch.

We now look at the last of the stained glass windows, the Witherspoon window. The center panel shows Rev. John Witherspoon (1722-1794) signing the Declaration of Independence, the only minister to have that privilege. The left-hand panel depicts James Madison, the future President of the United States, as a student under Witherspoon at Princeton. It is said that he credited the Presbyterian Church in general and Witherspoon in particular for his knowledge and understanding of Presbyterian law which influenced him in

the American Constitution. The right-hand panel shows John Witherspoon calling the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in the old Second Church of Philadelphia. This historic event made the American Presbyterian Church independent rather than an arm of the Church of Scotland. The window was the gift of the Otto F. Sieder family in his memory.





We have enjoyed the many treasures of Christian symbolism in the sanctuary and we now walk through the connecting passageway to the chapel which memorializes the former South Street Church. Beautifully engraved on the chapel kneeler which is used by brides and grooms is a gold Celtic cross. The Celts were inhabitants of Scotland in 563 A.D. when Christianity was brought to Scotland by St. Columba from the Island of Iona. Market crosses were commonly used. When wandering priests and monks came to town they stood by the cross in the marketplace and preached. This is the most commonly used cross by Presbyterians.

On either side of the altar in the chapel are marble plaques designed by E. S. Bartholomew, Rome, Italy, the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan W. Roberts in 1877. They were placed in the chapel as a memorial to the South Street Church when it was united in 1926 with The First Presbyterian Church to form The Presbyterian Church in Morristown. The plaque on the left side of the chapel depicts Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah (Ruth 1:1-14). Orpah, Ruth's sister, returned to her own home and people while Ruth went with Naomi. The marble plaque on the right shows Hagar and her son, Ishmael, despairing in their banishment to the desert. Sarah gave her

maid, Hagar, to Abraham. When Hagar expects a child, she taunts Sarah who banishes her. Later Hagar returns with her son, Ishmael. When, in her very old age Sarah bears a son, Isaac, there is a conflict with Ishmael and once again they are driven away.



We hope you have enjoyed your walk through the sanctuary to encounter the Christian Symbolism that lives there and may you return many times to enjoy the worshipfulness and the beauty of The Presbyterian Church on-the-Green in Morristown, New Jersey.





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*Edited 2008, on the occasion of the 275<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Morristown, NJ.*

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