

The Other Symbols

Monograms

Alpha And Omega: These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signifying that Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all things (Rev. 22:13).

Chi Rho: This is a monogram of the first two letters X and P of the Greek word for Christ.

Chi Rho with Alpha and Omega: This symbol for the Lord comes from the catacombs and indicates that he is the beginning, continuation and end of all things.

Chi Rho with Alpha and Omega in a Circle: The symbol for Christ is within the symbol for eternity (the circle), thus signifying the eternal existence of the Savior.

IHC or IHS: This is more often seen in Protestant churches and is almost as common as the Cross. They are the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus. IHC is more ancient, but IHS is more common.

I X: This symbol for the Lord consists of the initial letters of the Greek words for Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ The Victor: This is a Greek Cross with the abbreviated Greek words for Jesus Christ, the lines above the letters indicating that the words are abbreviated. The letters NIKA are translated victor or conqueror.

I.N.R.I.: These are the initial letters for the Latin inscription on the Cross of the Crucified Christ. Iesus Nazaremus Rex Indaeorum: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (John 19:19).

I.H.B.I [Greek]

[Slavonic]

Sun and Chi Rho: The sun is the source of light and Jesus is referred to as the Light (John 1:4). The sun is combined with the CHI RHO, another symbol for Christ (Mai. 4:2).

The Four Evangelists.

Winged Man St. Matthew: The winged man is his symbol, for he traces the human lineage of Jesus.

Winged Lion St. Mark: The winged lion symbolizes St. Mark because he begins his Gospel by describing St. John the Baptist, the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Winged Ox St. Luke: St. Luke is symbolized by a winged ox because his Gospel describes the sacrifice of Christ.

Winged Eagle St. John: The winged eagle symbolizes him because his Gospel seems to soar on eagles' wings.

The four images portrayed above, find their first expression in the writings of the Prophet Ezekiel, who describes his famous inaugural vision:

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.... As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. Such were their faces.... (Ez. 1:3-6, 10).

Other Symbols.

All-Seeing Eye: The All-Seeing Eye of God looks out from the triangle, which represents the Trinity. This reminds us that God always watches over us in love (Ps. 33:18).

Ark: This is a common symbol of the Church, since, like the Ark of Noah, all can find life in the safety of the Church.

Candle: Candles are used in the Church as symbols of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5).

Censer: This is a symbol of prayer, for as the smoke of incense soars upward, so too prayer ascends to God (Rev. 8:4 and Ps. 141:2).

Chalice and Cross: This represents the cup used at the Last Supper, the Cross standing for the suffering of Christ (Luke 22:42). Sometimes, instead of a Cross, there is placed a square loaf, Christ the Bread of Life. Thus, this symbol can also be seen as symbolizing the Holy Eucharist.

Dove Descending: This symbol, white, with a three-rayed nimbus descending, is the most common representation of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22).

Fish: This is one of the most ancient symbols for Christ. The letters of the Greek word for fish, also signify the first letters of each word of the phrase Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.

Grapes: A bunch of grapes signifies the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. It also is a symbol of Christ the Fruit of Life.

Lamb of God: This symbol emphasizes the sacrificial role of Christ (John 1:29). The lamb carries the banner of victory over sin and death (1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5:13).

Lily: This is a symbol of Easter and immortality. The bulb decays in the ground, yet from it new life is released.

Olive Branch: The olive branch is the symbol for peace, harmony and healing.

Peacock: This is an ancient symbol of the Resurrection. When the peacock sheds his feathers, he grows more brilliant ones than those he lost.

Phoenix: This is a mythical bird which at death bursts into flames and rises from its own ashes. Thus it is a symbol of the Resurrection and life immortal.

Seven-Fold Flame: This is a symbol of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Seven Lamps: This represents the seven lamps burning before the Throne of God (also a seven-branched candlestick) and symbolizes the gift of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:2-3; Rev. 5:12).

Shamrock: This was supposedly used by St. Patrick of Ireland to teach the Trinity. The leaf is one, yet distinct, equal, and of the same substance.

Ship: The Church has been likened to a great ship bearing men through a violent storm to the safety of the Kingdom of Heaven. The main part of the church building is called the Nave, which comes from the Latin word for ship, navis.

Ten Commandments: These are pictured as tablets of stone, with numbers on each, symbolizing the Ten Commandments. Sometimes there are three commandments on the first and seven on the second; sometimes there are four and six; and sometimes there are five on each tablet.

Triquetra: This is an early symbol of the Trinity in which the three equal arcs express eternity in their continuous form, indivisible in their weaving.

Triquetra and Circle: The Triquetra, denoting the Trinity, is combined with the circle of eternity, producing a figure recalling several spiritual truths.

Wheat: Wheat is the symbol of the Bread of Life, based on the Gospel of Mark

Excerpt taken from "These Truths We Hold - The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings". Compiled and Edited by A Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery. Copyright 1986 by the St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 18459.

To order a copy of "These Truths We Hold" visit the [St. Tikhon's Orthodox Seminary Bookstore](#).