

THE FOUR EVANGELISTS



WINGED MAN - St. Matthew: because his Gospel traces the human lineage (family, ancestors) of Jesus.



WINGED OX - St. Luke: because he describes the sacrifice of Christ, and in Old Testament times, oxen and sheep were used for sacrifices.



WINGED EAGLE - St. John: because his Gospel takes our thoughts toward heaven as on eagles' wings.



St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, Pennsylvania

Orthodox Church Symbols



Icon on Ceiling of Orthodox Church in Australia

"I am the **light** of the world." (Gospel of John 8:12)

"I am the **vine**, you are the branches." (Gospel of John 15:5)

"This hope we have as an **anchor** of the soul." (Hebrews 6:19)

"I am the living **bread** which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." (Gospel of John 6:51)

"Day of Pentecost ... there appeared to them divided tongues, as of **flame**, and one sat upon each of them." (Acts 2:1-3)

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS OF OUR FAITH

In the first centuries after Christ's Resurrection the Apostles and Disciples preached the Gospel. Many persons were baptized into the Church, but there was great opposition by pagan rulers who put many Christians to death. During that time, it was dangerous for Christians, so they held church services secretly. In order to know who was a Christian friend, they used signs and symbols of their faith. Eventually, persecution became much less, and churches were built.

The Church is both **material and spiritual**. Things in the material world are on earth and include a building and objects used for services. Those things that are of the spirit are revealed to us through symbols.

The word **symbol** comes from the **Greek words "syn" and "balo"** which means to bring two things together and place them side by side.

There is a **difference between a sign and a symbol**. A sign shows something we can see or think about. A symbol shows more.

To understand a **sign is to translate** the meaning of an object to another object, event, thought, or idea.

To understand a **symbol is to participate** in something spiritual. Symbols represent knowledge of God and things eternal.

The Orthodox Church has a history of more than two thousand years and a rich tradition of signs and symbols that still today help people to understand the Faith. Because signs and symbols do not use words, anyone of any language can understand their meaning.

LIGHT - The Church uses candles to symbolize Christ, the Light of the world, as well as the mystical presence of God as the Uncreated Light. Candles are a way of communicating our reverence for the Holy. A candle set before an icon helps us to communicate our prayer to Christ, the Theotokos, or a Saint.

INCENSE - The Orthodox Church follows the Bible in its use of incense. Incense is the symbol of the rising of our prayers to God, to His Saints and Angels, and of the sweet-smelling fragrance of the Kingdom of God.

ALPHA - OMEGA (first and last letters of Greek alphabet) - Jesus Christ, the beginning and the end of all things

CIRCLE - Eternity, the Kingdom of God

CROWN - Christ the King; royal martyrs, "the crown of life"

EYE - the "all-seeing eye of God" - God is omnipresent (everywhere)

FISH - the initial letters in Greek: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior" form the word ICHTHUS, which means "fish"

FLAME - God's energies, God's Uncreated Light, God's presence

OIL - God's healing, blessing, forgiveness; "seal of the Holy Spirit"

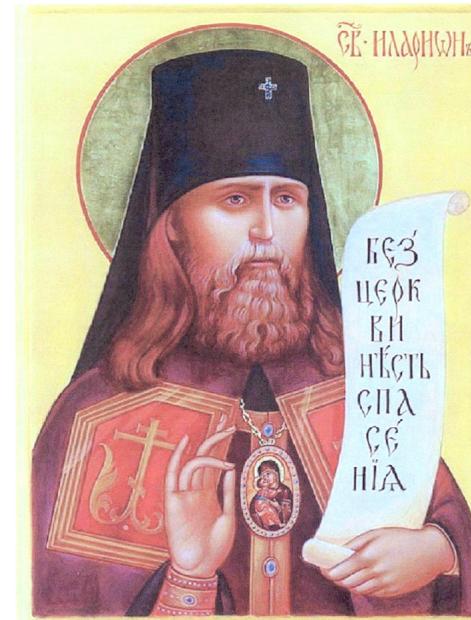
STAFF - Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, God's guidance

SUN - Jesus Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness," the source of Light

TRIANGLE - The Trinity - one God in three persons, undivided

VINE - Jesus Christ the Savior; grapes symbolize Holy Communion

WHEAT/BREAD - Christ the Bread of Life, Eternal Life



ANCHOR - hope, the Church, monasticism (some monks are called "anchorites.") An "anchor cross" is seen on the vestment of Saint Ilarion Troitsky, New Hieromartyr of Russia. He had been a famous teacher in the Moscow Theological Academy. After the Russian revolution, many priests and bishops were thrown into prison. He was forced to walk a long distance in the winter wearing nothing but a shirt. When he arrived at the prison he was very sick. He died in prison in 1929. He never lost hope. He kept his trust in Christ's promise of Eternal Life. Before he died he said, "Now I am completely free."