

Lent I Evensong 2018

Two of the most beautiful windows in our church are those at the north west corner of the nave. Both were designed by Charles Eamer Kempe, the Victorian designer of many stained-glass windows of good quality. Both these, together with the west tower window also by him, are unusual – all three have a golden quality unlike any other windows I have seen by him. We are even more fortunate at Holy Trinity, with the painting by Kempe of our magnificent medieval roof, together with the angels erected by him to replace the ones presumably hauled down either at the Reformation or during the Commonwealth. In addition, we have him to thank for the south porch, pulpit and fittings of the clergy vestry. How fortunate it was that he fell out with the vicar of Lindfield (where he lived in his beautiful country house, Old Place) and came to worship here instead!

Back to the windows – the western window in the north aisle is a ‘Jesse Tree,’ tracing the ancestry of Jesus (or more strictly of St Joseph) from Jesse, the father of King David. There is a splendid recumbent Jesse together with many of the Biblical characters named in Matthew’s genealogy, until we reach Mary holding the Christ Child at the very top. Jesus is described in a banner within the window as *Stella Splendida et Matutina* – the bright morning star – and both he and his mother are displayed surrounded by rays of glory.

The window next to it was designed as The Redemption window, to lead the person looking at it on an understanding of the journey of faithfulness and obedience described by the Bible. At the bottom we have Adam and Eve. I do have a story – inevitably – about this window. When I came to know Cuckfield Church first in the late 70s and early 80s, one of Eve’s arms had been broken, presumably by a local youth. It was repaired by Ken Barton, a very talented stained-glass artist whom I knew. If you look, you will see that although very well matched in terms of colour, the replaced arm is more muscular than the other. There must be some theological meaning of deep significance that I should be able to draw out of this but can’t immediately think of! Adam looks as if he has a headache – as if Eve has been throwing apples at him! In between is the serpent, coiled around a tree beneath which are creatures amongst the overgrowth including a white peacock representing perhaps the purity of the all-seeing gaze of God. A unicorn can be seen to the rear, and a fable about its relationship to a virgin was adopted by Christians who reinterpreted it as a sign of the purity of Mary and particularly of the Annunciation.

The next level of the window shows us Moses before the burning bush – a great moment in Covenant history – the call to freedom for the Children of Israel on their Exodus from Egypt, a foreshadowing of the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Archangel Michael vanquishes a splendid red dragon in the middle, whilst on the other side is Gideon – perhaps a surprising choice – although I suppose he represents heroes of faith. He is shown standing, whilst behind him we see the miracle of the fleece which he has asked of an angel in order to prove that his angelic visitor is indeed from God.

The allusion (as I mentioned) of the unicorn is made plain by the climax of the window, reached at the top. Here is the Annunciation, with Gabriel greeting the Virgin Mary – ‘Ave Maria’ – Hail Mary, whilst over Mary is the banner: ‘Ecce Ancilla Domine’ – Behold the Handmaid of the Lord. In the middle of this is a vase of madonna lilies with the banner ‘Flos

florum' – flower of flowers – a mediaeval title for Mary. Above is the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit.

What the window seeks to do is explain the journey of faith which we have heard of in our two readings this evening. In Adam and Eve, we have the mother and father of humanity – flawed as humanity is. However, God's love is so great for us, that he wants to draw us to understand that we are called to unity within his love. This is revealed through the obedience of Mary to God's will, and Jesus. Mary is the second Eve and her son the second Adam.

In the extraordinary hymn by Bishop Ken, the 17th century non-juring bishop of Bath and Wells, he gives us a flavour of the theological significance of Mary in this passage through her acceptance of becoming mother of the Saviour:

Her Virgin eyes saw God incarnate born,
when she to Bethlem came that happy morn:
how high her raptures then began to swell,
none but her own omniscient Son can tell.

As Eve, when she her fontal sin reviewed,
wept for herself and all she should include,
blest Mary, with man's Saviour in embrace,
joyed for herself and for all the human race.

Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans that, *'as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all'* This possibility of life for all was made possible by the acceptance of God's call within Mary's life. She is the exemplar of Christian obedience, the one who travelled the whole life of her beloved Son, experiencing both death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you think that in telling you something of a window that I have dodged preaching about original sin, you would be absolutely right!

Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^[a] knowing good and evil.' ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Romans 5: 12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

