The Christmas Tree Chrismons of Zion Lutheran Church

The 25th Anniversary

of the Dedication

of the Chrismons

On the

125th Anniversary of Zion Lutheran Church

Rockford, Illinois

In the beginning….at Zion

Eldora Englof writes, “It all started at a circle meeting in January 1981 when Bea Hakes asked if I would be in charge of making Chrismons for our Christmas tree at church. I thought it over and agreed if someone would be a co-chairperson. I asked Melba Johnson, she said yes, and then the wheels started rolling ordering books and information from the Lutheran Church of the Ascension in Danville, Virginia.”

She continues, “Melba Johnson and I started ordering books, materials, and all information we could in January 1981 and were all set to start work in the fall of 1981 and worked thru winter until summer—started again in fall of ’82 with November deadline—set up our new artificial tree in December of 1982 with Chrismons.”

“Found out 2 ½ to 3 hours long enough to work at one time---were 16 active girls and each one made a cornerstone first and we put their names on each one.”

Cornerstones

Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:20

In the beginning…a history of Chrismons

Chismons are Christian symbols. Their history goes back to the days of the early Christian church.

Early Christians kept the traditional Jewish prohibition of graven images, according to the commandment, "Thou shalt not take unto thee any graven images, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Exodus 20:4.

But as Christianity grew they began to feel a need for art to decorate their places of worship and to identify themselves to each other. They were hesitant but thought a simple symbol like a cross or fish was not likely a graven image. By the time of Constantine, when Christianity was first legally tolerated in the Roman Empire, paintings and mosaics were not unusual. Throughout history, though, religious art was the center of many controversies.

The churches who followed Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) were most conservative in regard to religious art.
John Calvin (1509-1563) was a bit more open to art.
The churches that followed Martin Luther (1483-1546) accepted most uses of Christian art.

Yet, while many art forms were rejected at different times, simple symbols have remained a constant. They unite Christians of almost every time and denomination. Since symbols of Christ bind us together with other Christians as well as pointing to Christ, it is particularly appropriate that we use them on Christmas, the birthday of the One without whom there would be no Christian church at all.

In 1957 in the town of Danville, Virginia, Mrs. Frances Spencer volunteered to decorate the Christmas tree in her church, the Lutheran Church of the Ascension.

Mrs. Spencer's interest in Christmas trees went back to 1940 when a pastor who was visiting her family asked for the gift wrapping they had planned to throw away ---in order to make ornaments for the Christmas tree in his church. The Spencers began making their own tree decorations and Mrs. Spencer began decorating Christmas trees professionally. She wanted to use her talents to beautify the Christmas tree in her church.

She writes, "While searching for a way to honor the Christ, I came across some drawings of designs called Chrisma. "Chrismon" is a combination of parts of two words:

CHRISt and MONogram. A Chrismon is just that: a monogram of Christ."

As the years passed, Mrs. Spencer and others learned of more symbols that could be used in Chrismons. So the idea, which began as one woman's service to her home congregation, has spread across the country.

Back to 1981 and Zion Lutheran Church…

More from the notes of Eldora Englof…..

"As each week went by we got more apt at our work and enjoyed it more and more as well as the fellowship we had working together, helping each other with suggestions when asked, and also criticize one another's work at times, too. It was slow work but we wanted it done right so we worked at our own pace…"

Among those working on the Chrismons were:

Arlene Adden
Frances Anderson
Adelyn Carlson
Lillian Eklund
Eldora Englof
Lillie Fagerstrom
Lucille Hammerstrand
Adelle Johnson
Dorothy Johnson
Edna Johnson
Josephine Johnson
Maralyn Johnson
Marian S. Johnson
Melba Johnson
Milly Johnson
Odelle Leonard
Clarice Nelson
Gladys Nelson (Josie)
Lois Norlund
Doris Pearson
Kay Soderstrom
Kay Steinmetz
Geraldine Swan

Eldora Englof and Kay Soderstrom

Edna Johnson, Josie Nelson, Adelyn Carlson, Melba Johnson, and Jerry Swan working on Chrismons in January 1982
Larson Hall - upstairs

Clarice Nelson, Lucille Hammerstrand, Kay Soderstrom, Maralyn Johnson in January 1982

Milly Johnson, Melba Johnson, and Edna Johnson

Jerry Swan, Milly Johnson, and Edna Johnson

Clarice Nelson, Eldora Englof, Lillian Eklund,
Marion Johnson, and Lillie Fagerstrom

The last day of working on Chrismons, November 1982

Kay Steinmetz, Marian Johnson,

Lillian Eklund, and Lillie Fagerstrom

Decorating the Chrismon tree for the first time

December 19, 1982

Bert Carlson, Alan Johnson, Dick Peterson

Bert Carlson, Alan Johnson,
Eldora Englof, Melba Johnson, Dick Peterson

Some of the girls who made the Chrismons

Jerry Swan, Eldora Englof, Lillie Fagerstrom, Marion Johnson, Melba Johnson, Maralyn Johnson, Clarice Nelson, Adelle Johnson, Adlyn Carlson, Frances Anderson

Zion's
Chrismon
Tree
Dedicated
December 19, 1982

The tree was given
in memory of
Art Johnson
by his wife Milly

There are three types of Chrismons:

- **Symbols of the Christian Year**
- **Symbols of our Lord and God**
- **Symbols of the Cross**

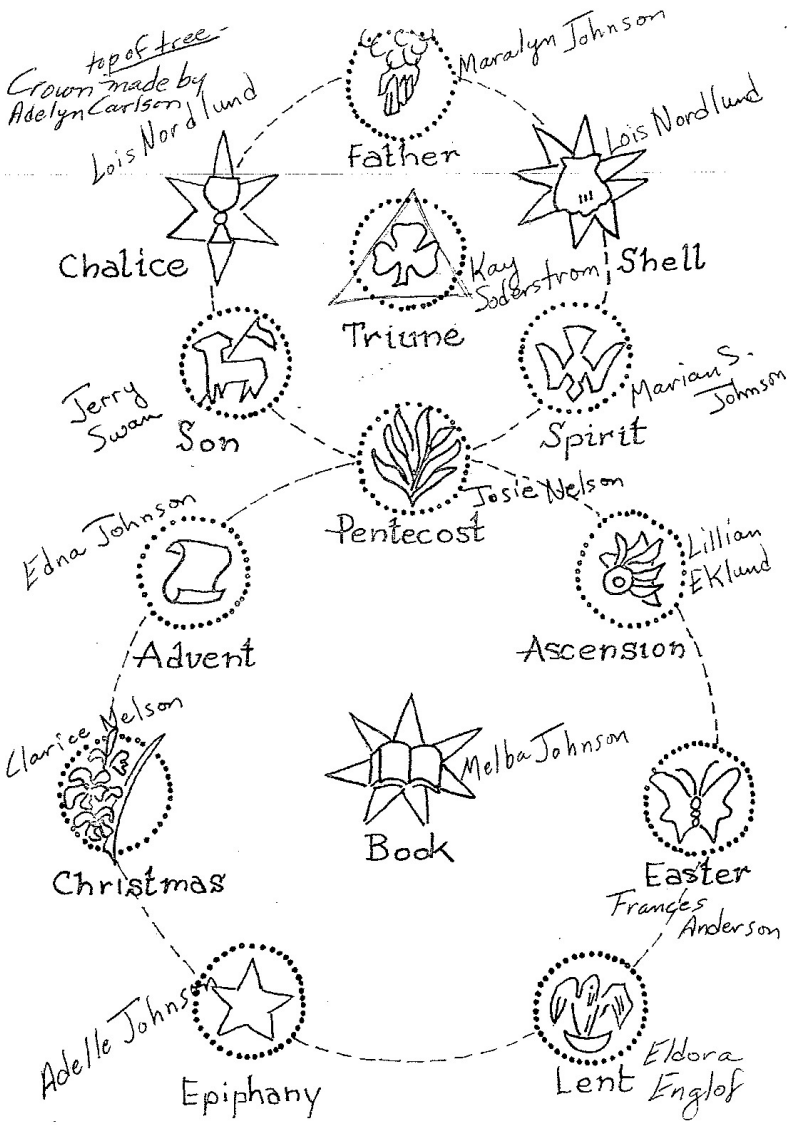
All the Chrismons are in white and gold to symbolize the purity and perfection, the majesty and glory of the Son of God.

Special Placement of the Chris

8

The Chrismons on the tree form a large double loop and they explain, symbolically, our Lord's Life and the nature of God within the framework of the Christian year.

The upper loop proclaims the Triune of God, one God who showed Himself to man in three ways. The lower loop, read counterclockwise, shows God's most complete revelation of Himself in the Life of the Man Jesus



The Scroll with Prophecy

This symbol of the Christian year represents Advent.
It is the prophecy found in Isaiah 9:6.
"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Made by Edna Johnson

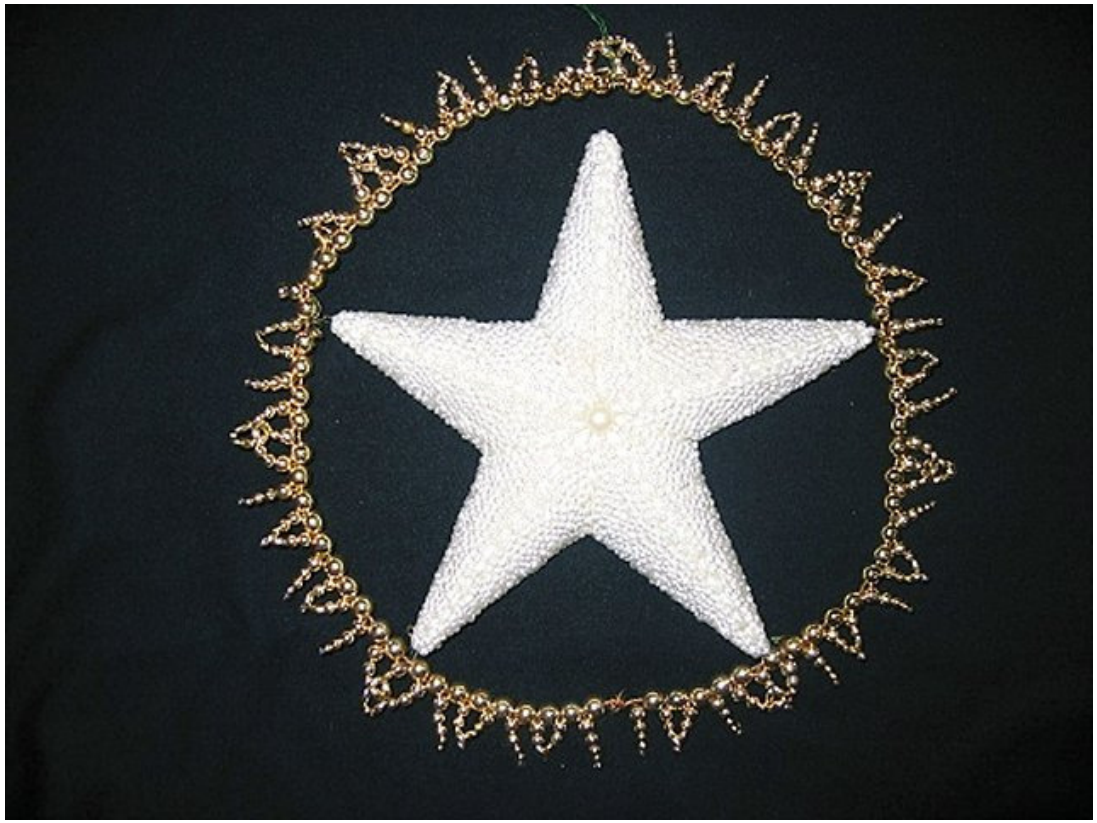
Gladiolus

Christmas, the Incarnation, the Word became flesh.
John 1:1, 1:14, Hebrews 4:12

Made by Clarice Nelson

Five Pointed Star

Epiphany means the appearance or revelation of a god.
The Manifestation to the wise men. "I am…the bright morning star."
Matthew 2, Numbers 24:17



Made by Adelle Johnson

Five Pointed Star and Rose

Epiphany The symbolism of the rose is derived from Isaiah's prophecy of Zion's glory. "The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." It has come to symbolize the Messiah. It is also used for Mary. The combination of the rose and the five point star is the two natures of Christ: He is true God and He is true Man.

Pelican-in-her-piety

Lent The Atonement (Sacrifice of Christ for our sins); the Lord's Supper. Psalm 102:6 Matthew 26:27, 28

Made by Eldora Englof

Butterfly

Easter: The Resurrection

Made by Frances Anderson

Chariot of Fire

The Ascension of Elijah (II Kings 2:11 parallels the ascension of our Lord in acts 1: 9-11)

Made by Lillian Eklund

Seven-Tongued Flame

The Holy Spirit on the day of **Pentecost.**
Acts 2:1-4 Seven gifts of the Spirit Isaiah 11:2

Made by Josie Nelson

Shamrock Triune Triangle and the Trefoil

The Trinity Two geometric figures, a trefoil and an equilateral triangle combine to define the Godhead. The triangle, one of the oldest and most common symbols for the Triune, has three distinct parts united into a perfect whole. The trefoil, also of three equal parts, is a modification of three interlaced circles which suggest the eternal nature of the three Persons.

Made by Kay Soderstrom

The Hand

God, the Father

Psalm 98:1, I Peter 5:6

Made by Maralyn Johnson

The Lamb of God

God, the Son, risen Christ

Isaiah 53:7, John 1:29, Revelation 5:12

Made by Jerry Swan

The Descending Dove

God, the Spirit

John 1:32-34

Made by Marian S. Johnson

Chalice on Six-point Star

The Lord's Supper

Mark 14:22, Isaiah 11:2

Made by Lois Nordlund

Shell on Eight Point Star

Holy Baptism

Matthew 28:19

Made by Lois Nordlund

Book on Seven Point Star

The Written Word, the inspired Scripture

Made by Melba Johnson

Crown

Kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords
I Timothy 615, I Corinthians 15:54

Made by Adelyn Carlson

Serpent on a Tau Cross

Prefiguration of the sacrifice on the cross

John 3:14

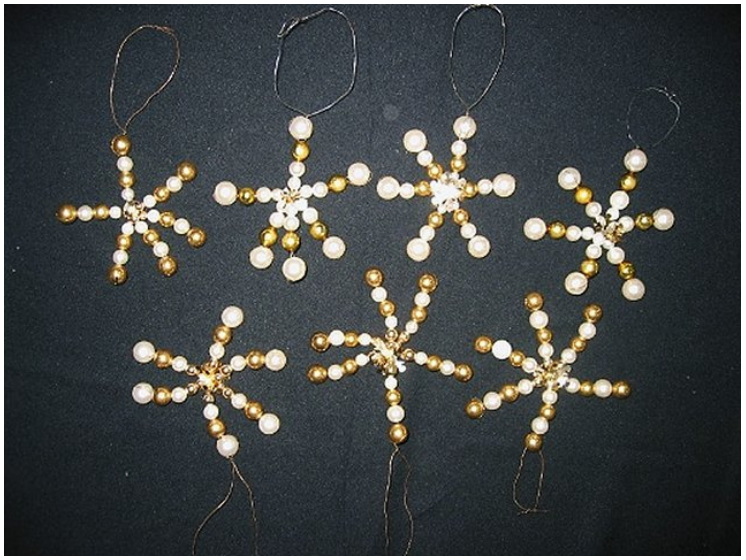
IXOYC

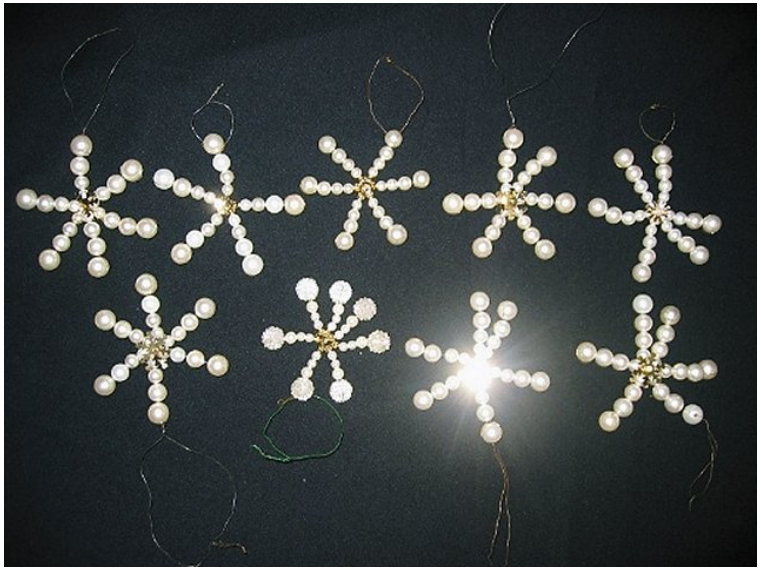
The Greek word for fish. Early Christians used the fish as an easily made and recognized sign. It is an affirmation of faith in Christ.

Symbols for our Lord and God

Three Fish Entwined

Three fish remind us that three Persons participate in our salvation:
The Father loves and gives; the Son is the means;
and the Spirit calls and enables us to respond.





Iota Chi
6 Point Beaded Stars

The Iota (I) is the first letter of our Lord's given name Jesus in Greek.
This name means, "The promised one."
The Chi (X) is the first letter of His Greek title Christ. It is the symbolic interweaving of initials called a star.

8 Pointed Stars

When formed by crosses set at angles,
stars suggest the close relationship between
birth and death or our Lord.

Cornerstones

Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone

Ephesians 2:20

Orbs

The orb, or sphere, is a symbol of **the world**. In Christian use, it shows Christ's sovereignty over the world. It has been used as a symbol of god the Father, Creator of the world. With a cross, the orb symbolizes the triumph of our Savior or of His Gospel over the world. With a serpent, it signifies sin encircling the earth. John 3:16

Circle with monograms, crosses and other symbols

The circle symbolizes eternity and, by extension, god, the only eternal One.

Sun of Righteousness

Our Lord as prophesized in Malachi 4:2

But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings.

The Cross

Pearl Cross with Alpha & Omega

Divinity: God is before and after all things.

IHS on a Greek Cross

The Sacrifice that our Savior made for our salvation.
The first three letters of JESus in Greek.

Celtic Cross

The Celtic cross is a Latin cross with a circle around the center. It was found at the point where Irish missionaries first worked in Scotland. The circle is a symbol of eternity.

Cross and Chi

The Greek Chi (X), the first letter of Christ, combines with the cross. The Christ and the cross—can we ever separate them? Only when we understand both the Christ and the cross can we begin to see the measure of God's love.

CHI-RHO with Alpha & Omega

Chi, the first letters of Christ in the Greek alphabet or for the Latin, Christ the King. This monogram is one of the most ancient of Christian symbols. When the word *Chrismon* was first used, it referred specifically to the Chi-Rho, which was recognized everywhere as Christ's monogram.

Greek Cross

crowned with NIKA

It has all four arms of equal length. NIKA is the Greek word for conquer or victor. It symbolizes our Lord's glorious victory over sin and death.

Jerusalem Cross

A symbol of the crusades, this cross was on the shields of the crusader kings of Jerusalem. Some say that the five crosses symbolize the five wounds of our Lord. Others say the four Tau crosses which make the center cross represent the Old Testament prophecies of a Savior. The small crosses represent those who take up a cross , follow Him, and proclaim and live the Gospel to the four corners of the world. It is the history of Christianity prophecy, fulfillment, and acceptance throughout the world.

Chrismons Basic Series
by Frances Kipps Spencer

was the source of information about these Chrismons

In closing, the Reverend James H. Utt at Ascension Lutheran Church, Danville, Virginia writes in this 1972 publication:

“Chrismons speak of our Lord Jesus Christ… May you find the peace of God and joy in His Word as you work with these reminders of His love for all mankind.”

“May God bless you in your desire to keep our Lord at the center of your Christmas celebration.”

Prepared by the Rachel Circle
to honor the Women who created
the Chrismons for Zion Lutheran Church
Rockford, Illinois
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