

## Chrismon Packet

What is a Chrismon? Chrismons are early Christian symbols used to represent aspects of Christ's character. The name Chrismon comes from a combination of **CHRIST** and **MONOGRAM**. Some of the traditional symbols of Christianity are monograms composed of various combinations of letters in "Christ," or other titles for Jesus. They are sometimes called Christograms. These monograms and other symbols, such as the widely known symbol of the fish, were also used in the early church as secret codes for unground Christian groups. There are over 600 symbols that have been identified as Chrismons over the centuries since Jesus' ascension.

Every year, we offer 7 symbols from which to choose. The symbols have been selected based on the 7 "I am" statements of the Lord Jesus Himself. These are:

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Statement</u>	<u>Scripture Reference</u>
Bread	"I am the Bread of Life."	John 6:35, 48
Star	"I am the Light of the world."	John 8:12, 9:5
Gate/Door	"I am the Gate/Door."	John 10:7, 9
Shepherd's Staff	"I am the Good Shepherd."	John 10:11-14
Cross	"I am the Resurrection and the Life."	John 11:25
Triquetra (trinity symbol)	"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."	John 14:6
Vine	"I am the True Vine."	John 15:1, 5

Here's what to do:

- Take a packet with you TODAY.
- Read through the packet and reflect on this question:  
Based on His statements about Himself, which of these has Jesus been to you this past year? You may want to study all of the statements as a family holiday devotional or an individual devotional.
- Choose a symbol that you feel represents the answer to the above question.
- Bring your ornament to church next Sunday evening ready to hang on the Chrismon tree.

Whether you decorate one ornament as an individual or for the whole family, or one for every member of the family, we'd like every person at Calvary to participate in this celebration of Jesus!

## **BREAD of LIFE - Jesus, our Source and Sustenance**

John 6:35, 48-51

***“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst...I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I give for the life of the world is My flesh.’”***

The smell of baking bread is one of the best aromas around. It offers a homey, sense of comfort. Bread is one of the oldest and most prolific forms of food energy on the globe. Every culture has some form of bread. It is a life-giving and strength sustaining energy source and the most basic food known to man. Bread is such a basic food item that it becomes synonymous for food in general. We even use the phrase “breaking bread together” to indicate the sharing of a meal with someone. Bread also plays an integral part of the Jewish Passover meal. The Jews were to eat unleavened bread during the Passover feast and then for seven days following as a celebration of the exodus from Egypt. Finally, when the Jews were wandering in the desert for 40 years, God rained down “bread from heaven” to sustain the nation (Exodus 16:4).

Jesus makes this statement after a discourse with His disciples, following the feeding of masses of people. Jesus tells His Twelve that the masses may have heard, but most were only interested in the miracle of the food He provided. In other words, a free meal was what they were after. To this Jesus instructs His disciples by stating, John 6:27, “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” [emphasis added]

They then speak of the manna in the wilderness wandering, to which Jesus responds, “I am the bread of life...”

This is a phenomenal statement! First, by equating himself with bread, Jesus is saying he is *essential* for life. Second, the life Jesus is referring to is not physical life, but eternal life. Jesus is trying to get the Jews’ thinking off of the physical realm and into the spiritual realm. He is contrasting what He brings as their Messiah with the bread He miraculously created the day before. That was physical bread that perishes. He is spiritual bread that brings eternal life. Third, and very important, Jesus is making another claim to deity. This statement is the first of the “I AM” statements in John’s gospel. The phrase “I AM” is the covenant name of God (Yahweh, or YHWH), revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The phrase speaks of self-sufficient existence, which is an attribute only God possesses. It is also a phrase the Jews who were listening would have automatically understood as a claim to deity. Praise Jesus, Who being Self-sufficient can be our Source and Sustenance.

## **THE STAR – Jesus, the Light of the World**

**John 8:12, 9:5**

***“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the Light of life...While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.’”***

Science books tell us that our sun is really a star. A star so configured in space and distance from our planet that it illuminates and heats the earth just right for life to be sustained. Without the warmth and light of the sun, life would cease to exist on Earth. As you gaze up into the night sky, you’ll notice many “stars.” Some are truly suns and others are planets. What an Artist our God is! He not only creates on a functional, scientific level, but His creative handiwork is also exquisitely beautiful!

Jesus said of Himself, “I am the Light of the world.” John tells us that the kind of light Jesus brought was “life and that life was the light of men.” He goes on to say that “The Light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” Our world can be a dark place. Imagine, if you will, that this life, this planet was it. There was no “Light,” no Jesus, and the best we could hope for is what this world has to offer in the time we’re alive. What a dismal and desperate condition! Praise God for His Son, Jesus, Who has come into the world to be the Light.

When Jesus was born, the heavenly birth announcement God chose to use was a prefiguring of the Light His Son would bring. The Bible records that God used a very special star as a symbol of the arrival of the Messiah. In Luke 2:1-12, we read the story of the Magi. Men “from the east” educated and informed about the prophecy of the Messiah and the reading of the signs of His coming through centuries of teaching and traditions passed down by God’s man Daniel. Daniel was placed in the right time in history. His obedience brought about great glory for all those who had heard and waited. And they had the privilege of seeing a great sign, this star, a sign to herald the birth of a much awaited King. How that star must have shone brightly against the inky black of the night sky. What a beautiful picture we have and a promise we can hold to when our “night” is long. Praise God that our morning star *will* appear and bring with Him, the Light.

## **THE GATE or THE DOOR- Jesus, Our Access to the Kingdom**

**John 10:9**

***“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep...I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.’”***

Anyone who’s ever been to a concert, a movie premiere or a major political event knows that access is everything. There’s a big difference between being a spectator and having the same access as the celebrity, the politician or any other VIP. A “backstage pass” is granted to those who either know someone in an influential position or have been selected, by someone in charge, to be granted access to places and people others have not. Where access has not been granted, lists are checked, tickets are punched and bouncers are in place to keep people at the proper distance. Only those with special permission may move further in.

In this statement, Christ was in essence stating His ability to grant access to His Kingdom. He is not only the door-keeper, the bouncer and the ticket checker, He is the Door itself, or in some translations, the Gate. The idea of the “gate” has significance in a culture of walled cities, such as Jerusalem, that may be lost on 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. But we can relate to access. What we have no right to have access to, namely the Kingdom of God, Jesus has granted us access to through His very sacrifice. Because Jesus has paid our way in, we have a “punched ticket,” our names are in the Book of Life, and we are allowed to approach the Throne of Grace. Think about having access to the One the scripture calls, The Ancient of Days. This same God, who dwells in unapproachable light, will allow us to approach Him in relationship based on what His Son has provided. Praise the Lord Jesus today for providing you access to His Kingdom with His very blood.

## **THE STAFF – Jesus, Our Good Shepherd**

**John 10:11, 14**

***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”***

In the Middle Eastern culture of the first century, the job of a shepherd was not merely a full-time occupation, it was a lifestyle of commitment and self-sacrifice. A good shepherd spent all his time with his flock. He spent his work day watching them, tending them, protecting them. At night, the shepherd's work was not yet done. The shepherd would sleep where the sheep slept, often putting them in a sheep pen at night for protection and making his bed in the doorway of the pen. No sheep would get out and no predators would get in without the shepherd being alerted. Jesus calls Himself the “good shepherd.” This implies there were shepherds who were not good. He may have been referring to the corrupt and evil leaders in Israel who had forgotten their responsibility to put their “sheep” first. The Jewish people were not being cared for, fed or protected, spiritually speaking. Unlike these leaders, Jesus was not interested in power, prestige or spiritual superiority. He was interested in His sheep and He still is. He continues to care for us, provide for us, lead us to pasture in the best grasses, lead us “beside the still waters,” and protect us from predators. Jesus is not only our Shepherd, He is a Good Shepherd, One Who is more than able to keep us in His care.

Psalm 23 is a beautiful illustration of this idea. Without a doubt, Jesus studied the Psalms as a young boy in the synagogue. As a grown man, and rabbi, He knew them by heart. As, the second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Son, He had inspired the writing of them. As God incarnate, He was fleshing them out for us to witness the God-centered life. This “I am” statement cannot be separated from the spirit of Psalm 23. It has profound implications when we consider the way in which He cares for us. The staff represents the care and protection of the shepherd. This instrument was shaped to guide the sheep by a crook gently, but firmly applied to the neck of the sheep. Made of sturdy, thick wood that would make a good weapon to ward off enemies, the staff reminds us that we are loved, provided for and protected by the Good Shepherd at all times. Praise Jesus for being your Good Shepherd.

## **THE CROSS – Jesus, The Resurrection and The Life**

**John 11:25**

***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”***

This statement of Christ was made at the gravesite of a dear personal friend. Lazarus, the brother of sisters Mary and Martha had died just a few days before. Jesus had not been there. He had not stopped Lazarus' death, even though the sisters sent word to Him, begging Him to come and help. The scriptures tell us that the Lord deliberately waited two extra days before setting out for Bethany, Lazarus' home. His reason, as explained to His disciples was so that they “might believe.” In fact, Jesus stated that He was glad He was not there, so that they might believe. What an odd thing to say. Upon His arrival, both sisters steeped in grief, blurt out their frustration with Jesus absence. The scriptures record the following conversation:

Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha said to him, “I know that He will rise again at the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”

Martha was not without faith. She believed the Lord could do anything. Her statement clearly illustrates her belief in the resurrection and in Jesus' power to call upon God. What Jesus showed her was more than that. He wanted to take her faith in God places she had not dreamed of. He showed her that He *is* God. That more than being able to bring resurrection, He, Himself *is* the resurrection and He *is* Life itself. The scripture tells us that Jesus not only wanted to show this to Martha and her sister, but to His disciples as well. Remember that He was *glad* for this opportunity so that they might believe.

The rest of the story is well-known. Jesus does, indeed call Lazarus from the grave, four days after his death. The extra two days ensured that no “trick” could be credited to this event. The scriptures also tell us that “many Jews” also believed because they had seen the resurrection of Lazarus. Another beautiful statement of Christ comes at the end of this account where, after Lazarus emerges from the tomb, bound hand and foot in grave cloths, Jesus gives the command to “Loose him and let him go.” We have a picture of what Jesus' time here on earth has afforded each one who trusts in Him. That is, though we may die, we shall live and we will be loosed and let go. Death cannot hold us. Praise Jesus today for being the Resurrection and the Life.

## **THE TRIQUETRA – Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life**

**John 14:6**

***“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***

The Triquetra (try-qweh-trah) is traditionally used to symbolize the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are pictured here in this intertwined shape, which has no beginning and no end and yet, is still one figure with three distinct branches. Here, it is used to symbolize this three-fold, “I am” statement of Christ. Jesus had just shared with His Twelve that He would be leaving and going to “prepare a place for them” in His Father’s house. Thomas stated that they, the disciples, had no way of knowing where the Father was or how to get where Jesus would be waiting for them. To this, Jesus took opportunity to explain that He is the Way, He is the very Truth of God, and He is the Life. Because they have relationship to Him, they have not only access to the Father, but access to the very Truth of the Father and the very Life of the Father. Without Him, no one would have these things.

As you reflect upon the symbol of the Triquetra and this “I am” statement of Christ, remember to ponder the mystery of the Trinity. A mystery we do not comprehend now, but one that we apprehend, hold on to with all our strength. Our God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, everything we need. He was able to leave the glory of Heaven to become human and not compromise His deity. He is able to abide in the hearts of men and still occupy His throne. Yes, it’s too much to comprehend, but we can renew our resolve to apprehend the truth of Who He is. Praise Jesus today for being our Way, our Truth and our Life.

## **THE VINE - Jesus our Life Source**

**John 15:1, 5**

***“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”***

Fall is often emblemized by falling leaves. We all know what happens to them once they've been detached for a period of time. The life-sustaining nutrients from the branch are cut off once the leaf has dropped. They wither, turn brown and are not good for much except for the compost pile or for burning. Much like these separate leaves, the branches of a vine will not survive apart from the trunk or main branch.

In one of His seven “I am” statements, Jesus likened Himself to a vine. He called us the branches. In the Middle-Eastern culture, the grape vine was an all too familiar analogy. The nation of Israel is likened to a grape vine or a vineyard many times in scripture. In the daily life of a Palestinian Jew, the grape vine was a common, every day plant. It was grown everywhere. It is unlikely that those who followed or heard Jesus' teachings would be confused about what He was saying. They would understand that the trunk, or main vine or “true vine” of a grapevine plant is the source of nutrients, strength and life for the branches of the rest of the plant. Occasionally, the vine dresser would come through to tend the grapevines and cut back branches that were dead or unproductive, so that the rest of the plant would not waste valuable nutrients on unfruitful limbs. The branches, once separated, were cut-off from their source of sustenance. Though they had proven unfruitful before, now they could not and would not ever produce fruit.

Jesus is telling us that we need to remain attached to Him. He is the True Vine, the main branch from which we get our sustenance, our life and our ability to produce fruit. He not only wants to be our True Vine, but He really is interested in us bearing fruit, not only for the Kingdom's expansion, but also for our own soul's reward. He truly is *for us*! Praise Jesus for being our True Vine.