

Stained-glass windows tell stories of faith

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FORT WORTH—If every picture tells a story, the stained-glass windows of Broadway Baptist Church tell countless tales of grace, sacrifice and love.

Stained-glass windows hearken back to a time when many worshippers could not read the Bible, but they could look at ornate windows that told the story for them. They knew what the symbols meant and knew what various numbers and colors were to call to mind.

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If they saw four panels, they would look for symbols of the four evangelists—a man for Matthew, a lion for Mark, an ox for Luke and an eagle for John.

With this rich history in mind, Sunday school classes raised money to pay for the stained-glass windows of Broadway more than half a century ago.

Building Chairman Bill Henderson had seen the stained-glass windows at Riverside Church in New York City and brought that vision to the table when plans for the building were discussed.

The view over the baptistery is of the invitation window, where Christ stands with open hands inviting all to come. The upper windows on the south side of the entrance tell the creation story—the creation of light, plants, man and animals are depicted in three windows—and the fall of humanity. The lower windows on the south side tell the stories of stalwarts of the Old Testament—Abraham, Moses and David.

Around a corner are windows depicting women of the Old Testament, with a huge rose window above them, which calls to mind symbols of the major prophets and minor prophets.

Looking to the north side upon entrance, the upper windows depict the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of Jesus, the miracles of Christ and stewardship. The lower windows show Christ knocking at the door, as the Good Shepherd, in the Garden of Gethsemane and at the ascension. Around the corner, the transept windows depict the nativity, Christ's presentation to the shepherds, the holy family at Nazareth, the boyhood Christ in the temple, Christ calling children to himself and calling his disciples.



The “fellowship”
stained-glass
window at
Broadway
Baptist Church
in Fort Worth
calls Christians
together for
encouragement.
(PHTOTOS/David
Clanton)

Above the transept windows is another rose window depicting symbols of the 12 disciples.

When worshippers turn to leave the sanctuary, they face the large stained-glass window that instructs Christ’s disciples to go forth and make disciples.

Each of the richly colored windows is filled with symbols, spinning numerous tales woven into the tapestry of faith.

While people today do not have such a keen insight into the symbols used in the depictions, it in some ways makes the windows more personal in their meaning to each individual, said Claudine Marion, Broadway’s minister of hospitality and the arts.

“We’re very aware that the colors teach, the symbols teach—and that they inspire,” she said. “People remember what they see and take different things from those colors and symbols. Some may say, ‘Oh, the red is the blood, and the blue is the color for righteousness,’ but for someone else it may mean something else totally. Everyone comes in bringing their own story and translates the symbols of the windows using that story.”

The windows also make for a different worship experience, Marion asserted. "When you walk into this building, you are bathed in the light that comes through these windows, and it prepares you to receive the light that God presents to us," she said.

Pastor Brett Younger agreed. "I've worshipped in rooms that had a variety of purposes. That can be a good stewardship of resources, but there is also something indescribably sacred about worshipping in a room that couldn't be anything but a sanctuary. It's clear to worshippers that we have come to give ourselves to God," he said.

The scenes from the past displayed in such a visual manner also help give a clearer vision of what God can do in the present, Younger said.

"When we're surrounded by the stories of the Bible, the heroes and heroines of our faith, it's obvious that we are there to take our place in the story," he said.

One of the chief benefits of the windows is in casting a crystal-clear spotlight on what the focus of worship is supposed to be about, he continued.

"I have been in services where the sermon, the music and the Lord's Supper seems to be the center of worship, but in a sanctuary with stained glass and high ceilings, the sacred nature of the room makes it more likely that the presence of God becomes the center of worship," Younger said.

"Stained glass is marvelously impractical. It costs too much, and you can't see through it. But stained glass surrounds us with the stories of impractical saints who chose to follow Christ, no matter the cost."

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