

**Dedication Ceremony on February 13, 2025**  
**Remarks and Brief Analysis, *Messiah Reredos***  
**Stacey Moo**

One of the questions I have been hearing a lot about this artwork is: What is a Reredos? A Reredos is a decorative screen behind an altar, often incorporating religious images. This reredos, which we are calling the *Messiah Reredos* both because of the subject matter and to honor the church from which it came, tells the story of the Life of Christ using Christian symbols, and it is meant to be read from the top down.

Some of the symbols and their meanings will probably be familiar to you, but there are others that could use a bit more explanation. We do not have time to go through all of them today, but I do want to focus on a few.

The symbols in the top panel focus on Christ's incarnation and infancy. Two of the most important symbols in the top panel are the nativity star that brought the wise men to Christ at his birth, and the Lily, which has long been a symbol that represents the virginity and purity of Mary, Christ's mother.

The next panel down focuses on Christ's identity. We see a dove, a symbol for the Holy Spirit, which descended on Christ at his baptism as God the Father acknowledges Christ as his son from an opening in heaven. Also depicted are two tablets representing the ten commandments—the Old Testament law that was fulfilled in Christ.

The sideways "X" and "P" are the Chi Rho, a monogram of the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek that came to represent Christ at least as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Chi Rho is depicted on a mound-like shape as a way of representing the Sermon on the Mount, a significant event in Christ's teaching ministry.

The third panel centers on some of the more prominent events in Christ's story: Palm leaves represent Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and the IHC—another monogram for Jesus—and the Chalice represent the Last Supper. Also depicted are the money bag and coins of Judas, the disciple who betrays Christ to the authorities; the unbalanced scale, which in this instance represents the unjust trial of Christ; and the Rooster representing his disciple Peter's betrayal.

The bottom panel focuses on Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. It includes the crown of thorns put on Christ's head, and the nails used to affix him to the cross. The three crosses represent Golgotha, the location where Christ was crucified, and the rent or tear, the tearing of the temple curtain, marking the end of the old covenant with the coming of the new in Christ. Finally, The Phoenix, the largest of the symbols on the reredos, represents Christ Risen.

Otto Stevens, who attended Messiah Lutheran church, put together a pamphlet describing the symbols and their possible meanings. On our art collection website we will be providing access to Stevens' booklet, and a diagram of the Messiah Reredos, drawn by art & design student, Elaina Smith '25. We also have some commemorative bookmarks available today featuring Elaina's sketch, particularly for those who have helped with the gifting, moving and installing of the *Messiah Reredos*.