

All Saints' Anglican Church, Windsor On.

Background and Meditation on a Stained Glass Window

On Christmas Eve, 2006, Emma Hudson Curry was baptized in All Saints' Church, Windsor, at the 10.00 a.m. Sunday service. Her father, David Curry, who is a well-known and talented opera singer in the U.K and Europe, now resident in Vancouver, gave a stirring performance of *Every valley shall be exalted*, from Handel's *Messiah*, accompanied by Professor David Palmer on the renowned Karl Wilhelm organ. During the current year, David Curry is performing in roles from operas and operettas by Wagner (in Paris), Offenbach (in London), Sondheim (in Paris), Thomas Ades (live on Radio Netherlands) and Gilbert and Sullivan (in the Tower of London).

The baptism service and performance took place in front of the Curry memorial sanctuary stained-glass window, depicting the Transfiguration and Ascension, which had been donated and installed by John and William George Curry, in conjunction with a new organ, in memory of their mother and Emma's ancestor and namesake, Emma Hudson Curry, seven generations removed, a century previously, in January 1906. The church was closed for several months for extensive renovations and the installation of the windows and organ. John Curry was the manager of the Curry Brothers' Bank in Windsor and the Essex County Bank, and William George Curry owned a lumber and charcoal company and the Curry Brick Company.

Sadly, on February 10, 2000, unknown intruders broke into the church and vandalized and desecrated the windows by throwing a candlestick through two of the panes. The community rallied round, and several fund-raising events were held, including a concert by the Windsor Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Susan Haig, in order to help pay for the restoration. The windows were lovingly restored, and the damage can no longer be detected. A sophisticated security system has now been installed, and the windows are protected from the outside by lexan glass.

Frances Curry, David Curry's great-aunt, the last remaining member of the Curry family who was an active parishioner, was a familiar participant in the 8.00 a.m. services, until she passed away at the age of 89 on May 28 2008.

The Ascension window graces All Saints' chancel inviting us to meditate on the glorious portrayal of our Lord's exaltation. Stained glass windows not only provide beauty for our worship life, they create a means of prayer and meditation. There was a time in church history when most congregants could not read and many could not hear the spoken word since sound systems were merely a function of the priest's voice. Stained glass offered the stories of our faith for all who gathered, literate or not, wealthy enough to sit near the chancel or destined to sit at the back of the nave. Today we often pass by the windows on the way to our pew assured that we will hear the message and confident that the written word will guide us. Too many Anglican eyes are glued to prayer book or another form of print rather than allowed the freedom to settle on the faith-filled message captured in a window. Imagine a renewal of meditation based on the spirituality portrayed in our parish churches - a window of opportunity (pun intended).

Gazing upon the dynamic scene in All Saints' Chancel window, we are drawn into the wonder of God's revelation in Jesus the Christ. Viewing the scene as the Ascension of the Lord (there are eleven male witnesses and one female witness to the exaltation) invites us to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1). Indeed the artist's flourish under the window surprises us with leaf-like cups holding a bounty of olives. Imagine the scent of olives surrounding Jesus' followers on that holy mount as they said farewell. The mixed emotion of letting him go is evident on the twelve faces. Some are upright, arms reaching up. Do they want to hold him back or are they celebrating what has been made known to them? Others are on their knees, hands held in prayer. Do they pray for Jesus or for whatever will be on earth now that he is gone? Many gaze up as the clouds take their Lord into the heavens. One disciple seems to be speaking to another, perhaps this is Peter recalling something Jesus said about this day or is he simply talking, something Peter is inclined to do? Some eyes reflect absolute amazement, others a wise understanding of what is being revealed. The woman holds her hand over her heart. Imagine the mixture of heart-ache and love within her. She and Jesus wear the same red gown, but her outer cloak is of the blue traditionally worn by Mary the Mother.

Jesus has been freed from his earthly body - there are no wounds on his head, hands or feet. Indeed his outstretched hand blesses those gathered - blesses all of us. His red gown is draped with a garment of silk and golden thread similar to that of the angels on either side. One angel's eyes are fixed on Jesus while the other angel looks upon the gathered faithful. Were the twelve who shared this moment as comforted as those who gaze on this coloured glass? We can see our faces in the window images. Young and old, male and female are portrayed. The Spirit of God sustains us. We do not walk alone. Life with Christ continues. The rich scent of the oils of baptism and healing remind us of this promise. God is with us. Holy moments reveal the blessing of the Lord, assure us that the Divine eye still gazes upon us.

The Ascension story allows us to see that the humanity of Jesus is raised up. Through this life in which divine and human meet we are given hope, hope for ourselves, for our next day. Like the twelve on the Mount of Olives, we are also given purpose. God's revelation must be shared, must be proclaimed by the spoken word, print, music or the beauty of stained glass windows! 'Every valley shall be exalted!' Thanks be to God.

Canon Kim Van Allen, Rector
Conrad Reitz, Archivist

Sources of information

REITZ, Joanne and Conrad. *Into the New Millennium: All Saints' Anglican Church, Windsor, On. 1852-2002.*

CURRY, William George III "Historic window at All Saints' Church." **In** *The Architecture of All Saints' Anglican Church* by Elizabeth Burrell. (2006).