

## The Great West Window

*Taken from the information panel in the nave and leaflet*

The new Great West Window was dedicated on 7th July 1996, replacing a rather dull plain green and yellow window inserted in the 19th century. Conceived by the Cathedral Architect, Martin Stancliffe, created by Patrick Reyntiens, and made by Keith Barley at Barley Studio in York, the window brings a new sense of the joy of God's light and power to the West end of the Minster nave.

The window is conceived as an Angel window, appropriately representing angels as beings of light. In the seven lower panels, angels seen as unique beings (hence their very individual faces) hold spheres in which are seen the seven Acts of Creation: (from the left) the creation of light; the vault of the heavens; dry land appearing out of the waters; day and night; the birds and the fish; living creatures on the earth; and human beings. Above these angels are smaller pairs of angels who hold books, trumpets, a harp, a pipe organ, and a stringed instrument, and at the top of these panels are yet more angels, three of whom have outstretched wings reflecting the Trinity.

At the bottom of the lower panels are seven predella scenes which show interventions by angels as recorded in the Bible: (from the left) the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the angel on the left wields a flaming sword and Adam and Eve are on the right (Genesis 3); Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32); Tobias, who holds the golden fish (Tobit 6); the Annunciation with the Blessed Virgin on the right and in the centre her emblem of the lily (Matthew 1, Luke 1); angels ministering to Christ in the wilderness after His temptation, the Devil is departing on the right (Matthew 4); the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ appears centre left with behind Him the sleeping disciples, and an angel on the right holds the Cup of Sorrow (Luke 22); Easter Day, an angel appears to the two Marys before the open tomb which can be seen with its stone rolled aside on the right (Matthew 28, Luke 24). Here at the foot of the window is where angels touch the earth.

The rank across the centre of the window comprises three larger and four smaller panels. In the smaller panels are angels who hold spheres of pure energy represented by stars or suns and, while they are placed against an architectural background, flames and fire flicker upwards about them. In the larger panels, the Virgin appears in the centre (the Minster is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary) with a blue nimbus (halo), blue being the colour associated with the Virgin, and she holds seven red flashes clasped to her breast which recall the seven Sorrows of Mary. Two angels at her shoulders frame and support her, and the Spirit of God descends upon her in the form of a cloud, across which appears in Hebrew the nomination of God "I am who I am". Mary is pictured as a young, innocent and artless girl, her dress very simple in contrast to the elaborate swish and movement of the robes of the angels. Although virtually impossible to see from the ground, the panel of the Virgin is surrounded by a green border formed of the ladder of Jacob's dream upon which angels ascend and descend (Genesis 28) and also upon which is inscribed the Magnificat. The larger panel to the left of the Virgin shows an angel who supports Christ on the Cross, which is also a tree of life and a lily reflecting the Annunciation. The panel on the right holds the emblems of the Holy Spirit: the dove descending and the tongues of fire. The three angels in the upper part of these panels

again emphasise the Trinitarian theme. In all the small spandrels in the lower part of the window are to be found the faces of disembodied angels from which emanate flames and light.

The upper third of the window is less clearly representational, with many angels of various types merging into the myriads of the heavenly host. As the window ascends the colour becomes more vivid and the activity more intense with an increasing sense of power and glory. Here are to be found four pairs of angels sounding trumpets, censuring angels, and singing angels in the lowest rank (with, just above, angels whose trumpets reach down into the panels below); then three pairs, at the left with cymbals and trumpet, in the centre swinging their censers high, and on the right singing and trumpeting. The centre pair of angels, and the three pairs above near the top of the window, ride on whirling balls of fire or flaming stars (recalling Ezekiel 1), adding to the elemental excitement as the top of the window is reached. The Eye of God appears in the four sub-apexes at this level of the window. The sense of movement up and down the window is enhanced by white delta wing-forms which in the lower part of the window float upwards while those higher in the window float downwards.

At the very top of the window can be seen the Godhead with, just below, the Hand of God reaching down. To either side are  $\alpha$  (alpha) and  $\omega$  (omega) - the Beginning and the End - and to the left and right of the Hand of God, the Blood of Christ in a red chalice emanating power, and the dove of the Holy Spirit, so that the Trinitarian theme is again expressed in the three overlapping 'windows' of three lights which the tracery forms within the whole window.

The window is firmly rooted in the medieval traditions of stained and painted glass and yet is a contemporary re-working of these traditions. The colour and texture of the glass have been chosen to be similar to that used in the mid-fifteenth century which is the date at which the window was originally inserted. The design of the glass complements the architectural form of the tracery and, interestingly, allows this form to be seen in a way which was never apparent when the glass was simply plain.

The glass is protected by isothermal double glazing. Behind the painted and coloured glass is a window of clear glass, with an identical pattern of leading, which is exposed to the elements outside. The inner painted window is constructed so that it is actually inside the building and air within the building circulates around both its sides, maintaining a stable temperature and preventing condensation. While the very similar patterns of leading of the two windows 'line up' from an ideal point within the nave, from other points there is a slight mismatch which, curiously, rather than marring the effect simply increases the sense of depth in the pattern of the glass. The construction is really only visible from outside the building, and then only on close inspection; there were actually two windows to make, not just one!

The conception and vision of Martin Stancliffe, the creative imagination (and physical labour of the painting) of Patrick Reyntiens, and the technical skill and craft of Keith Barley have created a window which enhances the Minster, stimulates our thoughts and spiritual insight, and expresses the joy and power of Creation to the greater glory of God.