



THE STONE CHAPEL



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WELCOME TO THE STONE CHAPEL

The Stone Chapel is built as a testimony to church history as well as to the Holy Scriptures of both Jewish and Christian faith. Walking through the chapel and seeing its architecture and art allows one to explore centuries of ideas and understanding of faith and practice.

The chapel is a reproduction of a Byzantine church built in the early sixth century in an area of ancient Cappadocia, now known as Tomarza, Turkey. The Christian faith in this area was Greek in language and practice. Remnants of the Roman Empire were governed by rulership at Constantinople (modern Istanbul), the capital founded by Roman Emperor Constantine. This same Constantine had made the Christian faith the official state religion in the fourth century.



In reproducing the original church structure, every effort was made to reproduce accurately the layout, the size, and even the two-foot thickness of the stone walls. The only changes of note are glass in the window openings, electricity for lighting, heating and air conditioning, and the beautiful images painted on the ceiling by Richard McCluskey of Lubbock, Texas. He spent 18 months painting the story of the Bible in these images.



KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORIGINAL

The Stone Chapel was built in 2008 using photos of the original church ruins taken in 1909, as well as an architecture paper discussing design and construction, published by Harvard in 1971.

In the early twentieth century, British explorer Gertrude Bell took thirty pictures of the ruins of the original structure as it stood in Tomarza, Turkey. Those pictures are now in the custody of Newcastle University, England. By the 1930's, even the ruins of the church were destroyed, the stone being salvaged for other construction.

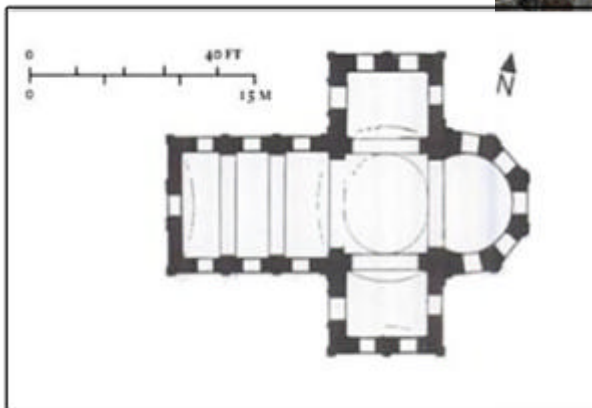


ARCHITECTURE AND LAYOUT

Typical of many Byzantine churches of that area, the original church was laid out in a cruciform.

As the Western Roman Empire crumbled in the fifth century, illiteracy became the norm. The church was desperate to teach matters of doctrine and faith to a people who had neither access to Scriptures nor an ability to read them.

The architectural layout of the worship edifice served as a tool. The church was built in the shape of a cross to teach that the foundation of the church was the cross of Christ.



The church faced east because of an understanding that Christ would return to earth from the east. (***"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."*** Matthew 24:27 ESV)

At the head of the edifice were three windows to represent the Trinity as the head of the church.

The center of the church (the dome) was elevated to signify that the heart of the cross was closest to heaven and the heart of God.



THE DOME

The key to understanding the chapel begins in the center with the dome. The dome reflects a scene of heaven (hence the blue background color) with Christ sitting on his throne. Painted in Byzantine symbolism, Christ sits as a crucified ruler, his feet and hands bearing the scars of his death. Christ is wearing dual-colored robes to reflect his dual nature, the blue color of heaven representing his divinity and the red color of blood his humanity. Christ also wears the gold sash, a remnant of the Roman Empire, to signify his role as ruler. Christ's right hand holds up three fingers, an ancient symbol of the Trinity, the teaching that God in three persons is still one, just as the hand showing three fingers is still one hand.

Christ holds an open book which in Greek reads, "I am the way," words recorded in John 14:6. (***"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'**"* John 14:6



ESV) Below the throne of Christ is the Greek word *Pantokrator* (Almighty). It is the word used by Christ when speaking to John in Revelation. ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*** (Revelation 1:8 ESV).



THE CROSS

The cross in the center of the dome symbolizes the central role the sacrifice of Christ has in the existence and life of the church both now and through eternity. It recognizes the teaching that the sacrifice of Christ was the substitutional sacrifice on behalf of others.

The Greek letters *alpha* and *omega* are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. These letters are part of Jesus' claim to be both the beginning and the end of things as quoted in the passage from Revelation. The letters that appear to be IC and XC in English are actually abbreviations of the Greek words "Jesus Christ." The Byzantine Greeks often abbreviated by using the first and last letters of a word, much as English does when shortening "William" to "Wm." The Byzantines wrote the Greek capital *sigma* in the form of a Roman "C."



ISAIAH THE PROPHET

Among the three persons bearing witness to Jesus in the heavenly scene painted in the dome is the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. He bears a scroll with the Hebrew phrase *pnn drk yhwh* (***“Prepare the way of the Lord.”*** Isaiah 40:3 ESV). Isaiah spoke of a time where all would see the glory of the Lord, not simply the nation of Israel. ***“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*** (Isaiah 40:5 ESV). The Jewish followers of Jesus found this prophecy fulfilled starting with John the Baptist.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

***“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;’”*** (Matthew 3:1-3 ESV)

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Opposite Isaiah the Prophet stands John the Baptist. He is painted as the rugged one recorded in the Scripture, ***“Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey”*** (Matthew 3:4 ESV). Even in the womb, John bore witness to the special nature of Christ. Mary, pregnant with Jesus, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. ***“When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby [John] leaped in her womb.”*** (Luke 1:41 ESV). It was John the Baptist who baptized Jesus, over John’s protest, ***“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”*** (Matthew 3:14 ESV).



MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Opposite Jesus, standing between Isaiah and John, is Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Greek below Mary labels her *Miriam Theotokos* (Mary the God-bearer). This title was bestowed upon Mary by the church council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. The church was debating whether the Christ child in Mary’s womb was in fact God or whether Mary simply gave birth to Christ’s human nature, and then he assumed his divine nature independent of his earthly birth. The ecumenical council issued its decree setting out the orthodox position of the incarnation: Mary’s child was fully human as her child, yet fully God as the result of the incarnation. The council’s decision was in line with Paul’s statement about Christ, prior to the incarnation, ***“though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”*** (Philippians 2:6-7 ESV).

The designation of Mary as the bearer of God conveys the recognition not only of the incarnation, but also of the sacrifice and heavenly reign of Christ. Paul points this out: ***“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** (Philippians 2:8-11 ESV).

THE TWELVE WITNESSES

Surrounding the throne in the dome's cylinder are twelve witnesses to Christ, divided into four groups of three. Each center person in the four groups is a writer of one of the four gospels.

MATTHEW

Matthew sits with his book open to the passage, ***“He is not here, for he has risen.”*** (Matthew 28:6 ESV). These words were spoken by the angel at the empty tomb. The resurrection is the core of the

Christian faith. Paul wrote that, ***“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”*** (1 Cor. 15:17 ESV). It is believing that Christ died for the sins of mankind and was raised from the dead, that offers one not only an escape from the consequences of sin through the substitutionary death of Christ, but also the promise of a new life that shares in the resurrection of Christ.



MARK

Church history teaches that Mark received his gospel from the teachings of Peter. This painting of Mark shows this tradition by placing Peter to his right. As in most medieval paintings of Peter, he is shown as one holding keys. This reflects the assurance of Jesus to Peter, ***“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”*** (Matthew 16:19 ESV). Protestants generally understand Jesus to be referencing Peter’s role in preaching the first sermon on Pentecost and “opening the door” to the church (Acts 2). Most Catholics understand Jesus to be giving Peter ultimate church authority in a role that later became known as “pope.”



LUKE

Luke was a physician and missionary who sought to learn from eyewitnesses in order to write an accurate and orderly history of Jesus and the early church. His books are known as “Luke” and “Acts” or “Acts of the Apostles.” Luke goes into more detail in a number of areas than the other gospel writers, especially about the infancy of Jesus. In this painting this is seen as Luke holds his book open to the statement by the angel Gabriel to Mary, ***“This one will be great; and he will be called Son of the Most High.”*** (Luke 1:32 ESV).



JOHN

The last gospel written, known as “John,” was considered by the early church to have been written by the last living apostle near the end of his life, in the 90’s A.D., about sixty years after the death of Christ. John wrote on levels that spoke to the brightest ideas of both Greek and Hebrew philosophies. The passage in the painting is a prime example. ***“And the Word became flesh.”*** (John 1:14 ESV). The text goes on to add that the Word became flesh ***“and dwelt among us.”*** The “Word” in Greek philosophy was that which held the world together, that which gave context to a world of constant change. In Hebrew thought, the “Word” of God was that through which He spoke creation into



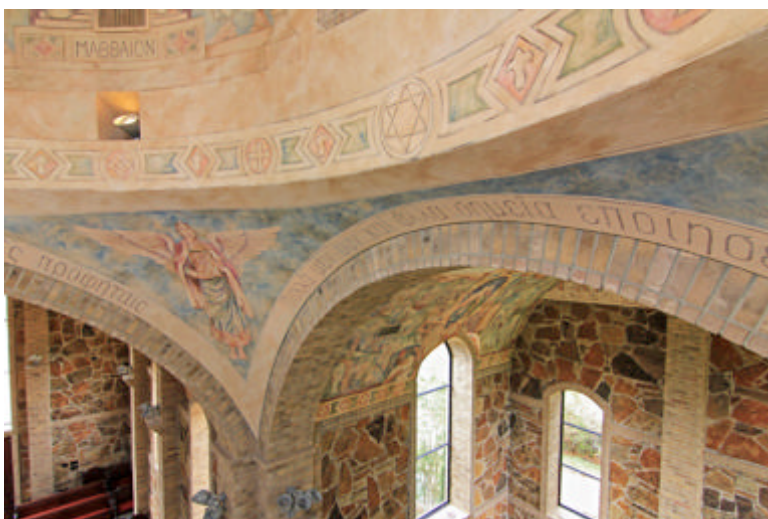
existence. The idea that the “Word” then “dwelt among us” is written in language that references the tabernacle, the place that served as God’s dwelling among the Jews in the exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land. Moses met God at that tabernacle, the people sacrificed there, and atonement was meted out at the tabernacle. John explains that the true meeting place for God and man is in Jesus Christ.



THE LAYOUT OF THE CHAPEL'S WINGS

There are four substantive wing areas of the chapel - the long entry way, the two side arms, and the front easternmost piece. These four areas all meet at the dome's cylinder. Above the archways to the four wings are Greek passages indicating the key to the wing's paintings.

Above the archway of the longest wing that spans from the front door to the dome is a passage from the New Testament book of Hebrews reading, ***"Of old, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets."*** (Hebrews 1:1). The paintings that span from the entryway to this arch represent scenes from the Hebrew Bible (the Christian "Old Testament"). The church considers these passages to point to the coming Messiah.



Above the archway to the head of the church is the next verse in Hebrews, ***"In these last days he spoke to us in a Son, whom he appointed heir of all."*** (Hebrews 1:2). These paintings represent passages in the New Testament that speak about the return of Christ and the end of days.

Over the north wing is a passage from John's gospel that reads, ***"Jesus did many other signs."*** (John 20:30). The arch to the south wing continues John's statement, ***"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."*** (John 20:31). These wings contain paintings of vignettes from the gospel accounts of the life of Christ.



OLD TESTAMENT PAINTINGS

Each of these paintings stands for an important idea or foreshadowing of the purpose and work of Jesus Christ. In this sense, we understand that God has spoken to the fathers (those preceding the church) through the Jewish prophets and Scriptures.

וַיֵּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־
הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם
לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

“And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”

(Genesis 2:7)





וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת, לְכָל-
וּלְאָדָם, לֹא-מָצָא
עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ.

“So the man gave names to all...
But for Adam no suitable helper
was found.”
(Genesis 2:20)

וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַצֶּלַע
אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם, לְאִשָּׁה;

“Then the Lord God made a
woman from the rib he had taken
out of the man.”
(Genesis 2:22)





והנחש, הֵיָה עָרוֹם, מִכָּל חַיָּה

“Now the serpent was more crafty than all the animals.”

(Genesis 3:1)

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגֶּן-עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹד אֶת-
הָאֲדָמָה

“So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground.”

(Genesis 3:23)





וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת כָּל־
בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמָּבּוּל

“I establish my covenant with you:
Never again will all life be cut off by
the waters of a flood.”

(Genesis 9:11)

וּמֶלֶכ־צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם
וַיָּזֶן וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ מֵעֶשֶׂר מְאֹד:

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem
brought out bread and wine... Then
Abram gave him a tenth of
everything.”

(Genesis 14:18, 20)





וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמְּרָא
וְהָיָה־כֵּן לְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ

“The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre... ‘Sarah your wife will have a son.’”

(Genesis 18:1, 10)

וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יִחִידְךָ אִשְׁרִי־
אֶהְבֶּתְךָ אֶת־יִצְחָק
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה

“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love... and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.’”

(Genesis 22:2)





וַיַּחְלֶם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אֶרֶצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ
הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים
בּוֹ:

“He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”
(Genesis 28:12)



וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּכֹרֶךְ.
מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אֶחָיו, וַיֹּרֶא,
בְּסִבְלָתָם; וַיֹּרֶא אִישׁ מִצְרִי, מִכָּה
אִישׁ-עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו.
וַיַּךְ, אֶת-הַמִּצְרִי

So the Egyptians worked the sons of Israel ruthlessly.... Moses went out among his brothers and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers... and he killed the Egyptian.”
(Exodus 1:13, 2:11-12)



וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה
מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

“God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’”

(Exodus 3:4)

וְעָבַרְתִּי בָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה וְהָפִיתִי
כָּל־בְּכוֹר

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn.”

(Exodus 12:12)

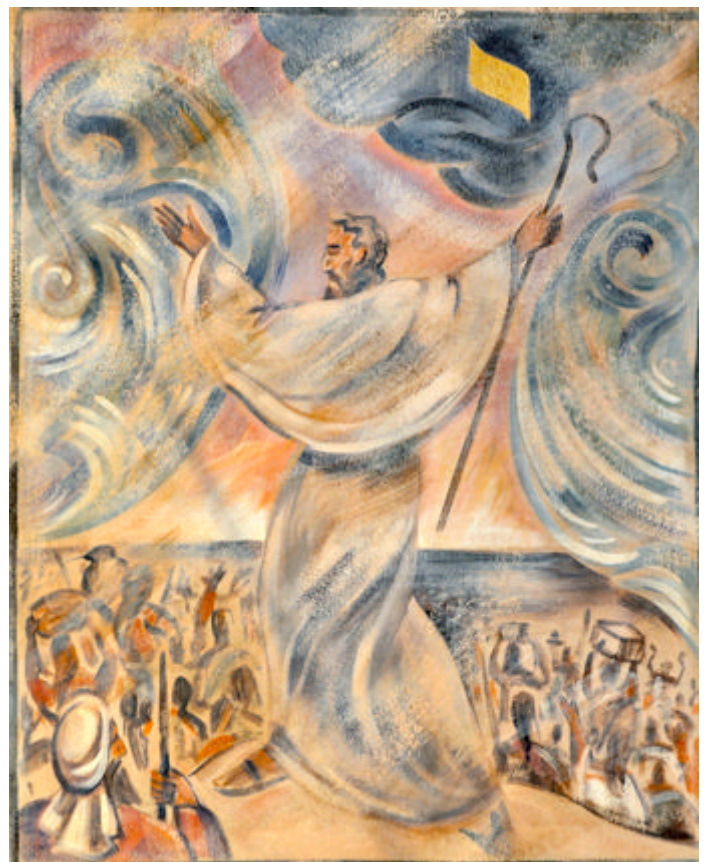




יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנִהְיֵתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלְלֵילָה בְּעַמּוּד
אֵשׁ

“By day in a pillar of cloud to guide
them on their way and by night in a
pillar of fire.”

(Exodus 13:21)



וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם:

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה

“The waters were divided and the
Israelites went through the sea on dry
ground.”

(Exodus 14:21-22)