

## The East Window



The window of three lights was made by David Evans, the Shrewsbury glass stainer, in 1842. It was the gift of the Revd Richard Scott, whose family came from Betton Grange. The central window is referred to as “The Descent from the Cross”. To the left is “The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary” and to the right is “The Presentation of Christ in the Temple”.

The linking of these three incidents from the Gospel seems strange, but may be explained by the window’s origin: it is a reproduction of a Rubens’ triptych (three panelled painting) which is still in Antwerp Cathedral. The triptych was commissioned by the Company of Arquebusiers (Antwerp’s Civil Guard) and was painted between 1612 and 1614.

All three panels depict in one way or another the Patron Saint of Arquebusiers, Christopher, recognised by the fact that he is the Christ bearer. Rubens, however, had to code the work to signify St Christopher, since at that time during the counter-reformation, only scenes actually from the life of Christ could be depicted in the restored Catholic churches, which were then decorated with unusual splendour where the Calvinistic influences had recently been repelled. Hence while at first glance these are indeed scenes from the life of Christ, the fact that in each case Christ is being carried renders the subject as St Christopher.

In each of the three lights Rubens uses red as a colour code. To the left Mary, robed in red, carries the unborn Child; in the centre St John, also in a red robe, grasps the body of Christ as it is lowered from the Cross. Above St John, Joseph of Arimathea with a red cap, holds the linen winding sheet. In the right hand light, Simeon holds Jesus in his arms, rejoicing in his perception that the Babe will be seen as the Christ, the Light of the World. Red, in all three lights, indicates a Christ bearer — Christopher.

We can only guess at the other message in Rubens’ work as depicted by Evans. Our eyes invariably turn to the enigmatic scene in the left hand light under the archway. Looking carefully beyond the arch is a man with a broad brimmed hat and staff on his shoulder, apparently descending some steps; perhaps a pilgrim. In the original picture, he too is dressed in red like the other Christ bearers. In the right fore-ground is the golden head of a cock, symbolic of the cock that crowed, reducing Peter to penitence during the trial of Jesus before the High Priest. Then, in the dimness can be perceived a peacock, a symbol in the ancient world of Resurrection. Lastly there is ivy on the wall, traditionally symbolic of life eternal.

All these ideas, drawn together, help to spell out the message that through penitence you may accept the Risen Christ, to embrace the hope of life eternal. With such a faith, you can step out as a pilgrim, carrying, so to speak Christ - the Christian Gospel - to the world. Lastly, there is the far distant sea and sky, an absolute masterpiece of the glass-stainer’s art. This must be symbolic of the unknown future, life’s journey, set before every Christian.

