



The centre three panels of the East window

The stable is represented by wooden slats and woven hazel screens with a thatched canopy. Above Mary there are five Angels. Two of these Angels hold a banner on which is inscribed “Gloria in excelsis Deo, in terra pax” (Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth).

We have not spoken previously of the amazing designs which surround the main panels of the windows of the Church, but they are certainly worth looking at. Here amongst the architectural stonework, depicted above and below the main scene, we can see if we look carefully, no less than 25 Angels of different sizes, dressed in white, some with partly gilded wings and all with golden halos.

In the panel on the right hand side we see Jesus’ father, Joseph, holding a lantern to illuminate the scene. In front of Joseph are two shepherds both kneeling and one with his hands clasped in prayer. One carries a shepherd’s crook and the other a set of bagpipes. There is some controversy as to where bagpipes originated but they were certainly around in Egypt as long as 400 years BC. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to imagine that they were used in Israel at this time.

In the left hand panel there are three more shepherds, the two in the background are removing their hats in respect. The shepherd in front has a shepherd’s crook and a horn hung at his waist. This “instrument”, known as a “shofar” in Hebrew, was the nearest thing to a trumpet at the time. Made of ram’s horn and with an integral mouthpiece, it had no mechanical means of altering the pitch. The trumpet is often referred to in the Bible and it is this type of horn that is being referred to, not the modern day valved instrument.

As we head towards Christmas it is appropriate to look at the largest window in St Mary’s Church, Dedham. The East window, behind the altar, depicts the Nativity. This is one of the windows from C. E. Kempe’s studio and is in the typical renaissance revival style he used.

In the central of five panels we see the Virgin Mary with elaborate gold halo and clad in luxurious satins and embroidered silk. She is holding the Baby Jesus also with gold halo and partly swaddled in a beautiful wrap.

The Nativity

There are no donkeys or cows and the stable is spotlessly clean as are the shepherds. Our image of this scene is moulded by the school Nativity play, all kinds of animals have been introduced and the Magi also appear on the scene.

However, although the shepherds came on the night Jesus was born the “three wise men” did not visit Jesus until later though exactly when is a matter of some debate. Traditionally 13 days after the birth, now the Feast of Epiphany (6th January), but possibly as long as two years later.



The far left panel of the East window, St. Alban

The two outer panels depict Saints. In the one on the left a banner proclaims “S'tus Albanus proto martyr”: St Alban the first martyr. We have already seen that St Stephen was the first Christian martyr, but this title of St Alban refers to the fact that he was the first British Christian martyr. He has a sword in his right hand signifying that he was beheaded, when a persecution of Christians took place around 3rd century AD.

In the far right panel we see S'tus Augustinus: Saint Augustine of Canterbury (453 – 604 AD). In 597 AD he was sent to England, which was then still a mainly pagan country, by Pope Gregory 1st as the leader of a group of missionaries. King Aethelberht of Kent welcomed them and accommodated them in Canterbury. Augustine converted thousands who were baptised on Christmas day and subsequently the King was also converted. Augustine was made the first Archbishop of Canterbury and is depicted here with a bishop's mitre as well as a halo. He is signing a blessing with his right hand, and in his left hand he carries a long staff in the form of a cross, from which hangs a pennant embroidered with the crucifixion.

Higher still in the window angels carry a banner proclaiming “Gloria tibi D'ne (for Domine) qui natus est de virgine”: Glory be to you O Lord who art born of a virgin. A very concise description of the scene depicted in this window.



So the glory of God and in loving memory of Elizabeth Jones, this window was erected by her husband the Rev Charles Alfred Jones, Vicar of this parish, and by her brothers and sister in the year of our Lord 1900

The far right panel of East window, St. Augustine

I wish you all a Joyous Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Adrian Beckingsale