

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Beauty and Symbolism in First Baptist Church, Pontotoc

Researched and Written by Wayne L. Carter

History and Rediscovery ~ The Story Behind the Stained Glass Windows

Historical

Overview

Visitors entering the sanctuary of First Baptist Church, Pontotoc are immediately drawn to the stained glass windows that line the walls adjacent to the pulpit area. Installed when the present church building was completed in 1914-1915, these windows have framed over a century of worship.

Morning sunlight filtering through their colored panes has illuminated sermons, hymns, prayers, and countless gatherings of the congregation. Though often admired for their beauty, the windows also represent an important part of the church’s heritage.

Crafted by the Jacoby Art Glass Company of St. Louis, they stand today much as they did when the sanctuary was first dedicated, linking the present congregation with the faith and vision of those who built the church more than a hundred years ago.

Historical Note

Jacoby Art Glass Company

The stained glass windows of the sanctuary were produced by the Jacoby Art Glass Company of St. Louis, one of the significant American stained glass studios of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jacoby was a prolific and highly respected producer of ecclesiastical windows throughout the American South and Midwest.



Figure 1 The Good Shepherd Window
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

The origins of the firm reach back to 1869, when glass artist G. A. Spies entered into partnership with businessman H. H. Jacoby in St. Louis. The firm was first known as the *Jacoby-Spies Manufacturing Company*. In 1907, the business was formally incorporated and began expanding its production of church windows throughout the Midwest and South.

During the early twentieth century, Jacoby craftsmen produced stained glass windows for many churches, often in the richly painted “Munich style” then popular in ecclesiastical architecture. Designers created full-size drawings—called *cartoons*—from which artisans cut and painted individual pieces of colored glass. These pieces were then assembled with **lead comes** to form the finished window panels.

By the time the sanctuary of First Baptist Church was constructed in 1914–1915, Jacoby’s studio had already established a reputation for producing durable and artistically detailed church windows. Their work could be found in congregations across the central United States, and traveling representatives often visited growing towns to offer designs suited to new church buildings of the period.

The Jacoby studio continued producing stained glass for many decades, ultimately operating for roughly seventy-five years before closing in 1970. Over that long span, the firm left behind a legacy of church windows that remain an important part of the architectural and spiritual heritage of many American congregations.

Thus, the windows installed in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church in 1914–1915 belong to a broader tradition of American church art created during a period when stained glass was considered both a means of biblical instruction and a way of filling sacred spaces with symbolic light.

Further Research

The Stained Glass Windows

I spent much of 2022 and a part of 2023 researching and writing about the stained glass windows of First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, Mississippi. As best I could determine, no one in our church had compiled anything of significance about the history of the windows. I found no documentation as to how they were selected.

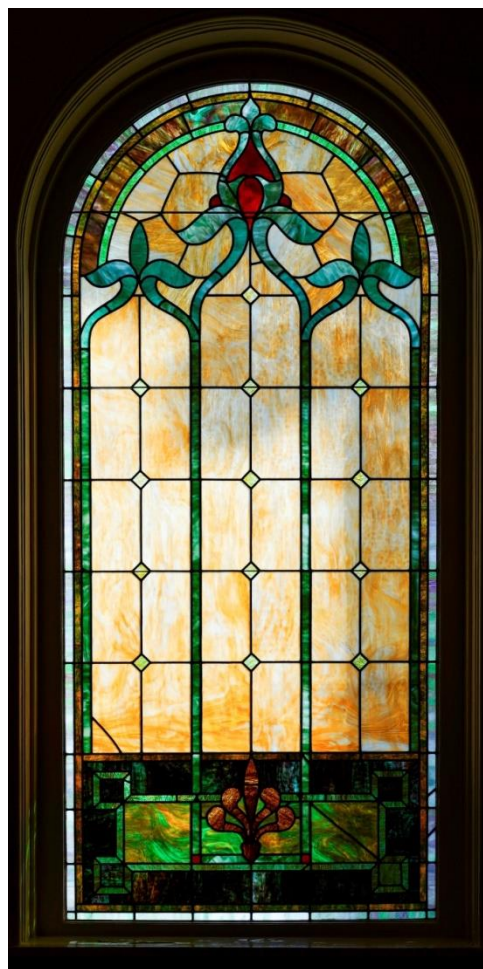


Figure 2 Memorial Window
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Eventually, I would write about each of the sets of the stained glass windows in the building that was erected in 1914-1915. I developed names for the windows that facilitated my efforts to describe them and speak to their history.

Starting with the two Big Windows, I referred to them as Jesus Windows or Christ Windows. Yet, the Jesus Windows had differing artistic representations of Jesus. Thus, each window needed its own name.

I first wrote about The Good Shepherd Window, which depicts Jesus guiding a flock of sheep into a sheepfold. While there is no formal action by the church to adopt the name, The Good Shepherd Window, it's safe to say all who gaze upon this window would agree it accurately describes the scene.

The other Big Window shows Jesus robed in white with outstretched arms in a welcoming position. With there being no official name for this window, I simplified my work by referring to this window as The Other Window. It was hardly a dignified description, but I mentioned that I had heard my sister refer to it as the Come Unto Me Window. I liked her thought, for clearly the scene calls to mind Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 (KJV)

The Little Windows are four smaller or lesser windows that are placed one on either side of each Jesus window. "Little" or "lesser" are not derogatory terms but are words chosen to describe their size relative to the much larger Jesus windows.

As I delved deeper into researching stained glass windows, I learned that these less prominent windows are generally referred to as **Memorial Windows**.

In many churches, Memorial Windows are the windows paid for by a person or family to memorialize a loved one. And, in such cases, an inscription is embedded into a space in the lower panel of the Memorial window stating who is being memorialized.

First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, Mississippi

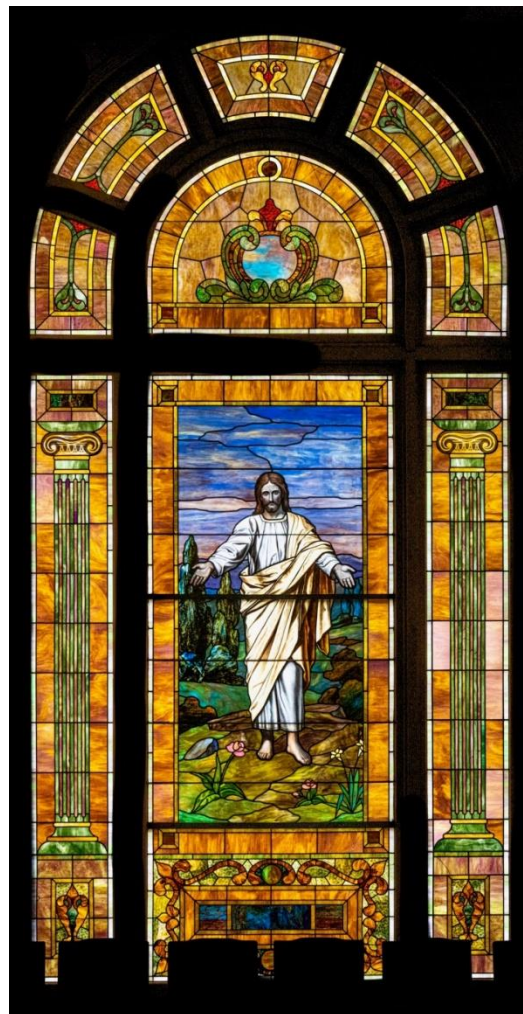


Figure 3 Come Unto Me Window
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Sometimes the inscription includes the name of the person or family funding the Memorial window. At First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, none of the Memorial windows have an inscription.

As for the Round Windows, I discovered they were referred to in the 1914 Building Committee minutes as **bullseye windows**. The committee had voted to request the bullseye windows each have an emblem.

The Round Windows likely served a practical purpose when the church was built by helping ventilate the sanctuary during Mississippi summers. Yet the stained glass within them transformed these

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practical openings into quiet teachers of faith with each emblem reminding worshippers of a central truth of the Christian life.

All during my research on the stained glass windows, I felt frustrated in not being able to identify certain “elements” within them. I was intrigued by what appeared to be a red bud-shaped emblem in the Memorial Windows, as well as in the Roman Arches above the Jesus Windows.

I searched the Internet; I contacted a stained glass manufacturer, and an architect, all to no avail. There were a few more elements that I also wanted to identify, but no one seemed to know what they represented.

By March of 2023, I had finalized the results of my research and made it available in a newsletter format as well as in digital form on the website for First Baptist Church, Pontotoc. I felt a certain sense of accomplishment in contributing a document to the Church’s history. But, my unanswered questions concerning the stained glass windows remained—much like a thorn in the flesh.

In recent years, new research tools and digital resources made it possible to revisit questions that had remained unanswered during my earlier study of the windows. The remainder of this document contains the results of my recent findings.

The Role of Stained Glass

Early 20th Century Churches

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, stained glass became a familiar feature in many Protestant church buildings across the United States. Although often associated with medieval European cathedrals, stained glass was widely adopted by



Figure 4 Window Trio Arch Detail
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Baptist congregations as church construction increased in growing towns and communities.

For churches built between roughly 1890 and the 1920s, stained glass served several purposes. First, it added beauty and dignity to the sanctuary, reflecting the congregation’s desire to create a worship space worthy of the reverence they felt for God. Colored glass softened the natural light entering the building, creating an atmosphere that many worshippers associated with quiet reflection and devotion.

Second, the windows often carried symbolic or biblical imagery. Scenes from the life of Christ, representations of the Cross, the Good Shepherd, or other scriptural themes were intended to reinforce the message of the Gospel. Even when designs were more decorative than narrative, the symbols and colors chosen by the artists were usually meant to convey Christian meaning.

For Baptist congregations in particular, stained glass rarely replaced the central role of preaching and Scripture. Instead, the windows functioned as visual reminders of biblical truth while the pulpit remained the focal point of worship. The glass complemented the proclamation of the Word rather than competing with it.

When the sanctuary of First Baptist Church Pontotoc was completed in 1915, its stained glass windows reflected this broader pattern in American church architecture. Installed as part of the original construction, the windows brought both artistic

beauty and spiritual symbolism to the new building. For more than a century they have continued to illuminate the sanctuary, reminding each generation of the faith and vision of those who first built the church.

The Sanctuary as

Visual Theology

As I continued studying the stained-glass windows of First Baptist Church in Pontotoc, I gradually came to understand that the sanctuary itself is not merely architectural space. In many ways, it is theology expressed in form.

One detail that became increasingly meaningful to me is found in the two windows depicting scenes from the life of Christ. These windows are each framed by a **Roman Arch**, and within each arch rest a circular **medallion**. That design does not appear over the other windows. The distinction seems intentional.

One may rightly question who intentionally decided upon the choice of these stained glass windows and how they are arranged. Jacoby Art Glass of St. Louis had catalogs of images they produced.

It's entirely possible that either of the walls housing the windows that depict Christ were once shown in a catalog. There are no records to reveal who chose the windows.

I believe their placement was not a random thought, but even if it were, all that the eye beholds is grounded in solid theology

The Roman arch has long been associated with strength, permanence, and order. Within the sanctuary it draws the eye upward, lifting attention toward the heavenly realities the windows portray.

Above those arches, the medallion suggests completeness and divine authority — a quiet reminder of the heavenly realm above the earthly ministry of Christ shown in the glass below. Given it sits above Christ as Shepherd, it may be suggesting: Christ as ruler of heaven and earth.

The Good Shepherd image below the Roman arch shows Jesus crowned with thorns — earthly suffering — while above is heavenly authority. In this way, the architecture surrounding the windows reinforces the message within them.

The sanctuary does not merely display images of Christ. It frames them in a way that emphasizes their central importance.

Having worshiped in this sanctuary since 1954, I find it remarkable that I am still discovering things it has been quietly teaching all along.

Over time I began to realize that the room itself participates in the proclamation of the Gospel. The pulpit in our sanctuary is framed between two crowned images of Christ, quietly reminding us that every sermon is preached under His authority.

Light enters through the windows, spreads across the sanctuary, and fills the space where the congregation gathers. It is difficult not to see in that light a reminder of the truth so often preached within those walls.

For many years I worshiped here without fully recognizing how thoughtfully the sanctuary had been designed. Only later did I begin to see that the building itself silently reflects the theology it houses. In that sense, the sanctuary has been teaching us all along.

The Windows and Their Meaning ~ Symbolism in Colored Light

The Oculus Window

Light at the Center

High above the pews of our sanctuary, directly beneath the center of the dome, there is a stained glass window that many worshipers seldom notice. It is not placed along the walls like the other windows in the sanctuary. Instead, it rests overhead, silently watching over the congregation gathered below.

Architecturally, this circular window is known as an **Oculus**, a Latin word meaning “eye.” In classical architecture an Oculus is often placed at the highest point of a dome, allowing light to enter from above. In churches, this design has long carried a quiet symbolism: *the idea that light descends from above upon those gathered in worship.*

In our sanctuary at First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, the Oculus sits at the geometric center of the room. If you were to stand beneath it and look upward—or recline as I did once while lying on my back on the seat of a pew to photograph it—you would be looking at the very point around which the 1914 sanctuary was designed. Everything in the room, from the symmetry of the ceiling panels to the curve of the balcony and the arrangement of the pews, acknowledges this central point.

Domed sanctuaries with central Oculus windows were a common feature in many early twentieth-century American churches. This was particularly true in the South, where architects often used the design to create a sense of openness and symmetry while allowing light to enter from above.

In our sanctuary, the original architectural plan was for a skylight in the dome. However, the 1914

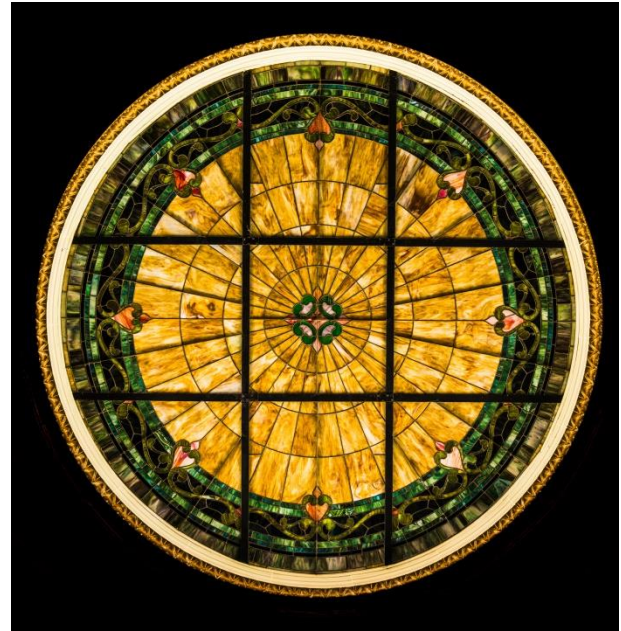


Figure 5 The Oculus Window
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Building Committee, perhaps as a cost-cutting measure, chose to eliminate the planned skylight

Thus, the Oculus was illuminated by an electric light bulb above it.

The window itself is composed of radiating panels of softly colored glass. From the center outward the design spreads like the spokes of a wheel or the rays of sunlight. The glass carries warm tones of amber and cream, colors that allow light to filter gently into the room rather than overpower it. Around the perimeter are stylized green vines and delicate floral forms, symbolic reminders of life and growth. (See Symbolism in Stained glass below)

Four metal bars cross the window, dividing it into quadrants. These supports were added quite a few years ago when the weight of the glass caused the window to begin sagging.

The purpose of the metal bars is structural, but the shape they form — a cross at the center of the sanctuary—is difficult to overlook. What was added

for stability now echoes the central symbol of the Christian faith.

The dome is not devoid of natural light, as some light enters through louvered vents. When natural light passes through the Oculus, it filters into the sanctuary. The effect is subtle—more a quiet presence of light than a dramatic illumination—but it reminds us that the design of the window was meant to open the room upward.

Historically, the Oculus window allowed natural light to filter into the sanctuary below, enhancing both the architectural design and symbolic meaning of the stained glass.

In more recent years, however, the dome above the Oculus has reportedly been covered to address maintenance concerns related to bird activity. This modification likely reduces, or possibly eliminates, the natural light originally intended to pass through the Oculus window.

Unlike the Jesus stained glass windows along adjacent walls that depict specific scenes and symbols, the oculus speaks in a more abstract language. Its message is carried not by figures or images but by light itself.

The other stained glass windows tell stories. The oculus reminds us of something more fundamental—that God’s presence is often described in Scripture through light.

Psalm 36:9 declares, *“For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”*

The circular form of the window also invites reflection. Circles have long symbolized eternity because they have no beginning and no end. In the center of the sanctuary, above the gathered congregation, the oculus gently suggests the eternal nature of the God we worship.

The vine-like patterns surrounding the glass may also bring to mind the words of Jesus in John 15:5: *“I am the vine, ye are the branches.”*

Whether intended by the original designer or not, the imagery harmonizes naturally with the message of Scripture: life flows from Christ to His people just as nourishment flows through the vine to its branches.

The Oculus reminds us of something more than images — it reminds us of light itself.

Many of us have worshiped in this sanctuary for decades. We have sung hymns here, listened to sermons, celebrated weddings, and mourned the passing of loved ones. Through all of those seasons, the oculus has remained overhead sharing its subdued light below.

Most of the time we are focused on what is in front of us—the pulpit, the choir, or the Scriptures being read. Yet the presence of this window reminds us that worship also involves looking upward.

In a sense, the oculus performs a gentle but important task. It centers the room physically, and perhaps it centers our thoughts spiritually as well:

- Beneath it we gather as a congregation.
- Beneath it we sing, pray, and listen.
- Beneath it, for generations, it has marked the center of the sanctuary where our church family gathers to worship.

It is easy to overlook something that has always been there, but once noticed, the Oculus becomes difficult to forget. Like a quiet eye above the sanctuary, it reminds us that the light of God’s presence is not confined to any single moment of worship but continues to shine upon His people across the years.

So the next time you sit in the sanctuary, take a moment to look upward toward the center of the dome. There you will see the oculus watching silently over the place where we gather to worship.

The Theology of *Our Sanctuary Windows*

When our sanctuary windows were purchased from Jacoby Art Glass of St. Louis in 1914, they were not installed merely as decoration. They were arranged with theological intention.

The two narrative windows—*The Good Shepherd* and *Come Unto Me*—occupy the walls that form the 90° corner framing our pulpit and baptistry. Unlike our memorial windows, these two windows are uniquely crowned with a separate Roman Arch panel above the main scene. This architectural distinction is significant.

In church design, arches have long symbolized strength, authority, and triumph. In Roman culture, triumphal arches commemorated victory.

Early Christian art adopted that imagery to signify Christ's sovereignty. By placing a distinct arch above only the Christ-centered windows, the designers created a visual hierarchy within the sanctuary.

The message is subtle but powerful. Each Sunday, as the congregation faces the pulpit, Christ stands visually on either side.

On one wall, He is the Shepherd who cares for His flock. On the other, He is the Savior who invites, "Come unto Me."

Above both scenes rests a symbolic crown of authority.

The pulpit—from which the Word is proclaimed—stands between these crowned images. The baptistry, closely integrated into the same focal area, reinforces the call to response.

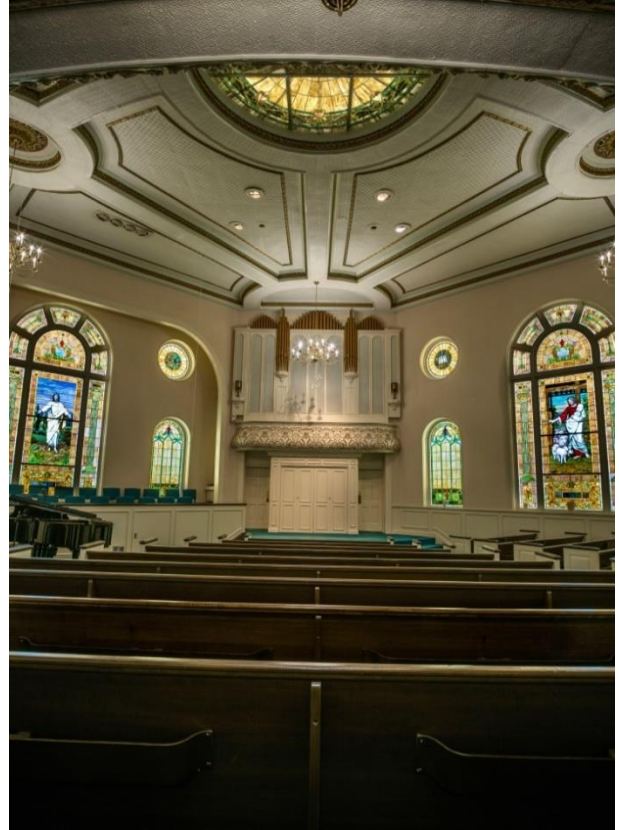


Figure 6 *Baptistry, Pulpit, Jesus Windows*
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Without a spoken word, the sanctuary declares:

- All preaching stands under the authority of Christ.
- All invitation flows from Christ.
- All care and salvation belong to Christ.

The memorial windows beautify the sanctuary. The Christ windows proclaim its foundation.

For over a century, these windows have quietly preached a sermon in colored light. Their arrangement reminds us that our worship space is not accidental. It was composed with intention—Christ at the center, crowned and sovereign.

When we gather each Sunday and look toward the pulpit, we are not merely seeing stained glass. We are witnessing a visual confession of faith installed in 1914-1915 that is still speaking today.

The Jesus Windows

Symbolism Within

Stained glass windows have long served as more than decorative elements in Christian churches. Historically, they were intended to teach, inspire, and remind worshippers of important truths of the Christian faith.

The two stained-glass windows, centered along adjacent walls, depicting Jesus, appear at first glance to be simple devotional images. Yet, upon closer examination, they reveal a number of symbolic elements that many observers may overlook.

One of the windows portrays Jesus standing with His arms extended in a welcoming gesture. This image corresponds closely with Christ's words recorded in Matthew 11:28: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

The posture of Jesus in this window is significant. His open arms are not merely an artistic pose but symbolize invitation, compassion, and acceptance. The figure stands as if welcoming those who enter the sanctuary, visually reinforcing the message that Christ calls all people to come to Him.

Equally meaningful are the floral elements incorporated into the design. Flowers are often used in Christian art to symbolize new life, purity, and spiritual growth. Their placement within the scene may represent the peace and renewal found in Christ's presence. Such imagery reminds the viewer that the Christian life is one of continual growth and transformation.

The sanctuary's other centered stained-glass window portrays Christ as the Good Shepherd,

guiding His flock while carrying a lamb in His arms. The figure of Christ bears the crown of thorns and the marks of crucifixion, suggesting the risen Savior who continues to care for His people. By combining the imagery of sacrifice, resurrection, and pastoral care, the window presents a visual summary of the



Figure 7 Peaceful Landscape
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Gospel message central to Baptist faith.

There is within this second Jesus window another powerful image: Jesus standing beside an open door or gate. The symbolism of the open door has deep biblical roots. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved"* (John 10:9). See Figure 1.

In Christian art, a door left open suggests opportunity, access, and the promise of salvation. In this window, Christ's presence beside the open entrance conveys the message that He alone provides the way into the safety and fellowship of God's kingdom.

Behind the figure of Christ in both windows appears a peaceful countryside landscape. Such backgrounds are not merely decorative scenery. Artists often used pastoral settings to evoke the biblical imagery of Christ as the Good Shepherd and to symbolize the peace and restoration offered through faith. Rolling hills, trees, and open skies subtly reinforce the idea of spiritual refuge and guidance.

The landscapes behind Christ in the two Jesus windows differ slightly. In the Good Shepherd window the background suggests open pastureland and distant hills, evoking the countryside of Galilee and the shepherd imagery of John 10. In contrast, the "Come Unto Me" window includes cultivated flowers and a gentler landscape, suggesting a garden-like setting of peace and rest. Seen together, the two scenes form a quiet visual progression in which Christ first gathers His flock and then invites the weary to find rest in Him.

Taken together, these elements form a quiet but meaningful visual sermon. The welcoming posture of Jesus, the symbols of life and renewal in the flowers, the open door representing salvation, and the calm countryside backdrop all work together to communicate a message of invitation and hope.

For many members of the congregation, these windows have served as a familiar and beloved part of the sanctuary for generations. Yet when viewed with careful attention, they reveal layers of meaning that reflect both biblical truth and the thoughtful artistry of the craftsmen who created them. In this way, the stained-glass windows of First Baptist Church Pontotoc continue to fulfill the purpose for which such works were originally intended—to teach, to inspire, and to quietly proclaim the message of the Gospel.

First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, Mississippi

Understanding the Various

Designs and Motifs

There are within the stained glass windows of our sanctuary, many designs and motifs that had long escaped my ability to interpret. With the assistance of multiple AI (artificial intelligence) sources, I am now able to share what these window elements likely mean.

Stylized *fleur-de-lis*

There are a number of stylized *fleur-de-lis* motifs within our stained glass windows. They can be found in each Memorial Window as well as the Window Trios. A standard fleur-de-lis, with three distinct petals emerging from a single base, is a direct visual representation of the Trinity.

For the most part, the *fleur-de-lis* in our windows



Figure 8 Formal Fleur-de-lis Memorial Window
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

have five petals forming what is known as a **formal fleur-de-lis**. In Christian artwork, the five petals almost always point toward the five Holy Wounds (the hands, the feet, and the side) Christ suffered during the Crucifixion.

In creating the *fleur-de-lis* shape with five points, the artist is merging two powerful theological concepts, namely the Incarnation and the Passion

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symbolizing that the pure, divine Son of God came to earth specifically to suffer for humanity.

To further illustrate how an artist might vary the design of a *fleur-de-lis*, consider the element below one of the fluted Ionic columns in either Jesus window. This shape when compared to a standard *fleur-de-lis* is described as a “decorative derivative.”

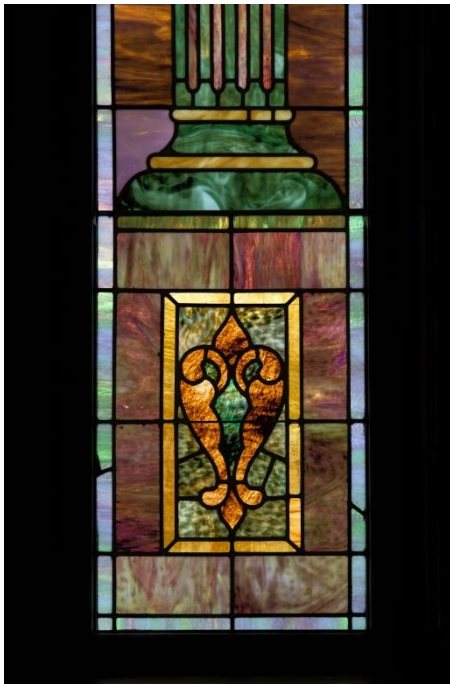


Figure 9 Decorative Derivative Fleur-de-lis
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

This kind of adaptation is often called a foliate motif (leaf-inspired) or a heraldic ornament variation

The windows of the sanctuary are not isolated works, but part of a unified visual language. Motifs such as the *fleur-de-lys*, flowing foliage, and architectural forms, all appear in varying degrees of prominence, creating a harmony that reinforces the spiritual message of the space.

Budding Red Flower

First Baptist Church, Pontotoc dates to the 1913–1915 period, when stained glass was strongly influenced by Late Gothic Revival symbolism and Arts & Crafts movement design. During this era, symbolism became more stylized and geometric.

First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, Mississippi

Thus the budding red flower looks abstract rather than natural, because it's rendered symbolically—not botanically.

The floral image in Figure 10 is best understood as a stylized lily or unfolding flower, commonly used in early-20th-century ecclesiastical stained glass. In church symbolism, this motif typically represents life emerging or promised life.

In Christian stained glass symbolism, red commonly represents sacrifice, Christ's blood, or redemption. Thus the image becomes a layered symbol: life (flower) emerging through sacrifice (red center).

Emerging life after sacrifice parallels resurrection theology.

Notice how the bud points upward and sits at structural intersections in the design. That placement often symbolizes faith rising from earthly foundation toward divine light. It is subtle theology expressed through geometry

The budding red flower is a prominent feature in the four Memorial Windows of the Sanctuary. It is also present in the multiple sets of Window Trios

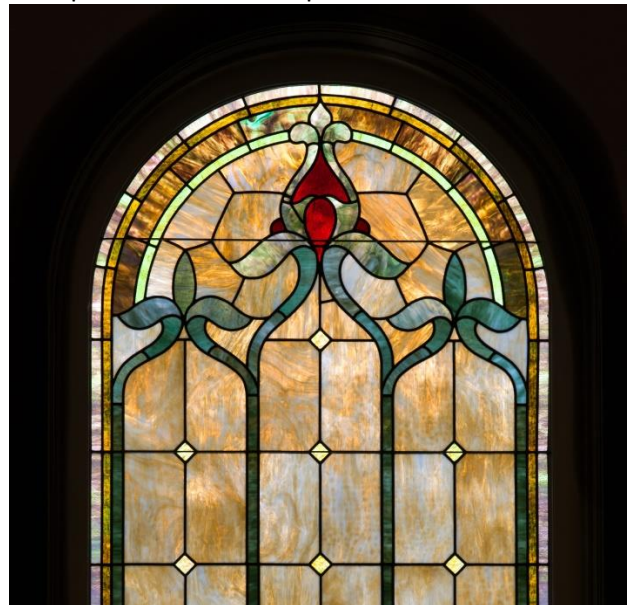


Figure 10 Budding Red Flower Stylized First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

throughout the main building. This repetition suggests something important. The designer was creating a unifying, symbolic motif across the building which suggests an intentional effort to unify the building's decorative and spiritual themes.

The Roman Arch

In addition to symbolizing triumph and authority, the Roman Arch also carries architectural significance rooted in permanence and strength. Roman builders developed the arch as a structural innovation that allowed buildings to span wider spaces while maintaining stability. Because of this, arches became symbols not only of victory but also

In Roman architecture, triumphal arches commemorated victory.

In Christian symbolism, Christ is the triumphant King.

of endurance and lasting strength.

Early Christian architects adopted the Roman Arch deliberately. Churches built with arches visually communicated that the Christian faith itself rested on a strong and enduring foundation. When placed above sacred imagery, the arch functioned almost as a frame of honor, drawing the viewer's attention to what lay beneath.

In the case of our sanctuary windows, the Roman Arches appear only above the two Christ-centered windows. This selective placement reinforces the intentional hierarchy within the sanctuary's design. The memorial windows, though meaningful and beautiful, do not receive this architectural distinction. Only the windows depicting Christ are crowned with arches.

This distinction suggests that the artist and designer intended to elevate the figure of Christ visually above all other elements within the sanctuary. The arch becomes more than decoration; it becomes a symbolic proclamation of Christ's supremacy.

First Baptist Church, Pontotoc, Mississippi



Figure 11 The Roman Arch
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

The arch also carries biblical resonance. Scripture frequently speaks of Christ as the cornerstone or foundation. While a cornerstone anchors a structure, the arch completes it. In this way, the Roman Arch above the Jesus windows may be seen as representing Christ not only as the foundation of faith but also as its fulfillment and triumph.

Seen together, the Roman Arches above the “Come Unto Me” and “Good Shepherd” windows quietly declare a central truth: Christ is both the foundation and the triumphant fulfillment of the church's faith. For more than a century, these arches have framed that message in colored light, gently reinforcing the sovereignty of Christ within the sanctuary.

The Small Circle ~ at the Arch Apex

At the very top of the interior part of the Roman arch is a small dark circle (Figure 12). This shape often symbolizes: the eye of God, or divine oversight. However, this same shape can also function as simply a balancing architectural element, a decorative piece, if you will.

Studios in the late 1800s and early 1900s often used “stock ecclesiastical motifs.” So while the forms were traditional and symbolic, they were sometimes arranged more for visual harmony than for a specific theological program.

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Thus, it may well be decorative — but it is decorative using traditional Christian symbolic language. Yet, given its position within the framework of the arch it often carries symbolic weight.

In other words: It is not random pretty glass. It visually says: Above the Good Shepherd lies the realm of the divine —the eternal, the sovereign, the life-giving —sustained and overseen by God.

Blue Medallion ~ The Orb in the Roman Arch

A large blue medallion (Figure 12) is placed within each Roman Arch above the Jesus Windows. Round or circular forms often symbolize eternity (no beginning and no end) or Heaven. The blue sky-like coloring reinforces a heavenly association.

Sometimes roundels represent: the world, creation, or the “orb” of divine sovereignty. Given the blue medallion sits above Christ in both Jesus Windows, it may serve to symbolize Christ as ruler of Heaven and Earth.

In Medieval times, an orb or sphere, to which a cross was mounted, would be presented to a

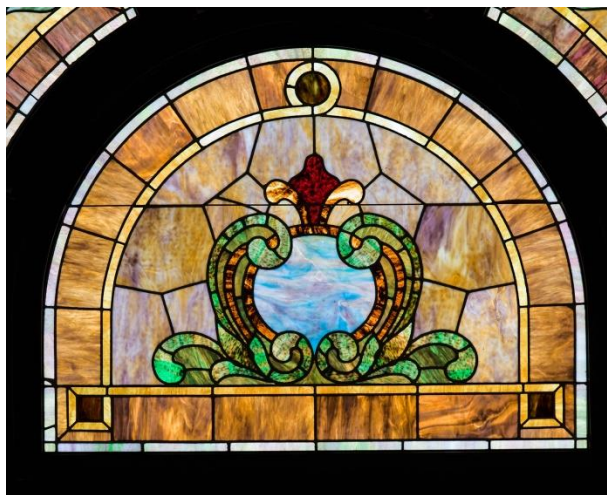


Figure 12 Blue Medallion in Roman Arch
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

monarch or sovereign to show that he ruled on behalf of God

Around the blue medallion, the green scrollwork depicting a leafy, curling form resembles stylized **acanthus** leaves, which are common in ecclesiastical art. Acanthus traditionally symbolizes resurrection, enduring life, or triumph over hardship, while the color green reinforces life and renewal.

Crown Symbol Within The Roman Arches

The red ornament or crest in the arch (Figure 12) is present in both Jesus windows and functions as a crowning finial in the decorative program of the window. In stained glass design around 1900–1920, this element typically symbolized one or more of the following:

- A crown — Christ’s kingship
The form resembles a stylized royal crown, reminding viewers that Christ is King of Kings and the risen and reigning Christ. This is especially appropriate in post-Resurrection imagery, which both of our Jesus Windows strongly suggest.
- A *fleur-de-lis* derivative
The shape also echoes a fleur-de-lis, a medieval Christian symbol representing: purity, divine authority, and sometimes the Trinity. Many American stained glass studios adapted the fleur-de-lis into abstract forms like the one seen here.
- A visual “keystone”
Architecturally, this form also acts as the symbolic keystone of the arch, visually completing the Roman Arch above the figure of Christ.

Thus, the message is subtle but powerful, Christ stands beneath the crown — the crowned and triumphant Savior.

Circular Elements ~ In the Foundation of the Jesus Windows

The lower panel of the Good Shepherd window is actually one of the most interesting parts of the design. Many viewers focus on the central figure of Jesus Christ and overlook the decorative panels beneath it, but stained-glass designers almost never filled those areas randomly.

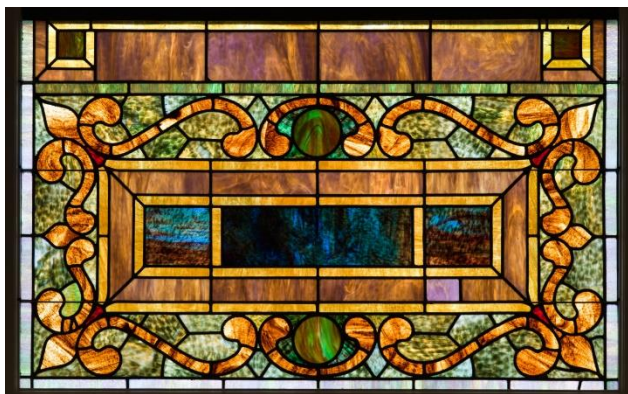


Figure 13 Circular Elements in Lower Panel
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

The ornamental panels beneath Christ in both Jesus Windows act visually like a pedestal or base. Architecturally, stained-glass artists often treated a window the way a classical building was designed.

In our Good Shepherd Window, Christ and the sheep occupy the middle or main panel. The elaborate scrollwork below represents the earthly foundation of the church community, implying Christ is the foundation of the Church.

The curving vine-like shapes in the lower panel are not just decorative curls. They are a common form of acanthus scrollwork, borrowed from classical architecture. In Christian symbolism this type of pattern often represented life, growth, and the *flourishing church*.

The small round medallions in the center of the scrollwork are motifs that many stained-glass studios used as symbolic “jewels.” They often

represented: spiritual treasure, the preciousness of faith, and the beauty of the church community.

Summation: Beneath the Good Shepherd scene, an ornate panel of scrolling ornament forms the visual foundation of the window. Such decorative panels were common in early twentieth-century stained glass and symbolically represented the flourishing life of the church rooted in Christ.

Flowers ~ Near the Feet of Jesus

The lily near Christ’s feet is almost certainly intentional. Lilies traditionally symbolize resurrection, purity, and new life. In resurrection imagery they often appear near Christ’s feet, representing life renewed through Him.

Lilies are most often associated with Christ’s resurrection and with spiritual life emerging from suffering. The lily placed near Christ’s feet subtly suggests that true rest and renewal come through Him.

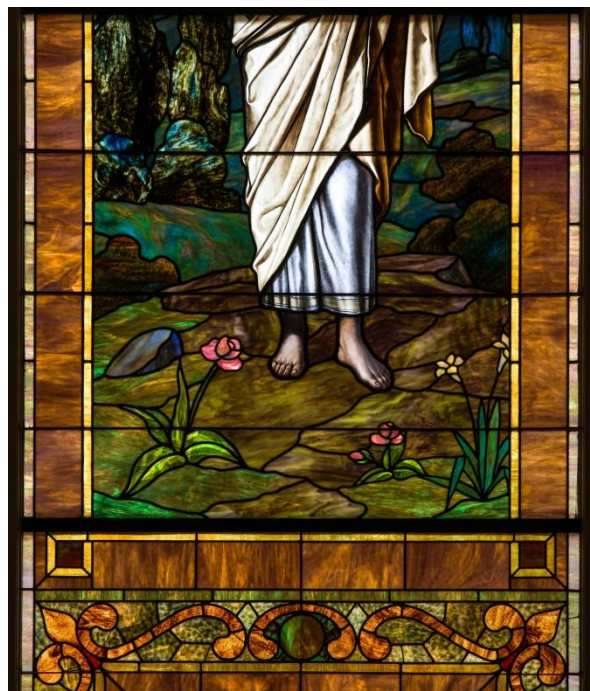


Figure 14 Flowers at the Feet of Jesus
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Stained glass artists particularly liked lilies because they connect visually to Christ's teaching in the Gospel of Matthew 6:28: "*Consider the lilies of the field...*"

This passage speaks about God's care and provision, which fits perfectly with the invitation of the Come Unto Me passage in Matthew.

The second flower (likely a wild rose or anemone form) may represent human life, earthly beauty, or the created world. Placed together, the two flowers create a quiet symbolic message "Christ brings new life to the world."

Sheep/ Lost sheep

In the Good Shepherd window, sheep are not to be viewed merely as props. Their presence is also symbolic. The flock can be seen as symbolizing the congregation being led by Christ.

The lamb being carried is another key symbol. In Christian art it often represents, the believer who has wandered, the one who is vulnerable, or the redeemed soul brought back to safety. In stained glass this usually echoes the parable of the lost sheep (Figure 15).

The Good Shepherd window contains several details that are easy to miss at first glance but were almost certainly intentional in the design. Early twentieth-century studios such as the Jacoby Art Glass Company often embedded small symbolic clues within otherwise natural scenes.

The lamb Christ carries is not merely decorative. In Christian symbolism, a lamb carried by the shepherd represents the lost sheep that has been found. Thus, the window combines two shepherd images: The Good Shepherd (John 10) and The Lost Sheep restored (Luke 15)

Crown of Thorns ~ Scar on Left Foot

Neither the crown of thorns nor the scar on Jesus' foot is readily apparent on first glance, but the casual observer will soon notice the thorny crown



Figure 15 Jesus with Lambs
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

on Jesus' head. After viewing the full scene portrayed in the Good Shepherd Window, the scar on Jesus' left foot reveals itself. The scar is scarcely noticeable, but once seen one cannot un-see it. (Figure 16)



Figure 16 The Scar on Left Foot
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Not all stained glass windows which depict Christ as The Good Shepherd portray Jesus with a crown of thorns. Our figure of Christ bears both a crown of thorns and the marks of crucifixion, reminding the viewer that the shepherd who leads the flock is also the one who sacrificed himself for it (Figure 15).

Christ's extended hand and his body posture indicating forward movement suggests an active shepherd who calls and leads his people. By combining the imagery of sacrifice, resurrection, and pastoral care, the window presents a visual summary of the Gospel message central to Baptist faith.

Fluted Columns and Capitals ~ Of the Jesus Windows

The Fluted Columns: The vertical columns framing the Good Shepherd scene are fluted, meaning they have vertical grooves running their length (Figure 17.) Fluting comes from classical Greek and Roman Architecture and symbolizes refinement, order, and permanence.

By placing Christ between fluted columns, the designer visually places Him in a temple-like setting. In stained glass, this suggests that Christ stands at

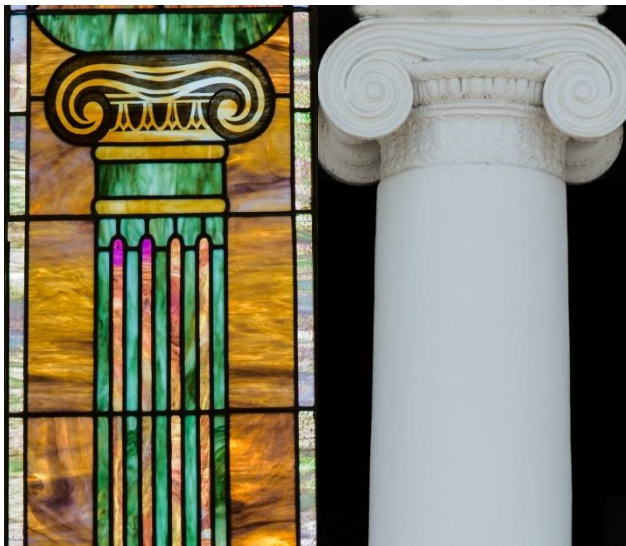


Figure 17 Columns and Capitals
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

the center of the sacred structure.

The Capitals: The exterior columns on the porticos (porches) of our church belong to a classical style called Doric. These columns do not have grooves (flutes). Each column is topped with a decorative capital (Figure 17). The Jesus windows have capitals that mirror those of the porticos.

Architects and stained-glass studios often coordinated designs so the windows would echo architectural elements of the building. Since the sanctuary of First Baptist Church Pontotoc was designed by James E. Greene, the studio may have intentionally matched the column capitals to his classical vocabulary.

The building and its glass are speaking the same design language. When a biblical scene is placed between classical columns and beneath an arch, the artist is essentially presenting it like a sacred

This then creates a visual unity:
Exterior architecture matches –
Interior architecture matches –
Window imagery.

tableau within a temple. The message becomes “Christ is the center of the temple.”

For Protestant congregations, this carried a subtle but powerful meaning: the church building is not holy because of ritual objects but because Christ is present among His people.

The Symbolic Color System

Unlike Catholic stained glass, which often told biblical stories through figures and scenes, Baptist churches generally avoided imagery that felt devotional or icon-like.

Instead, they developed a symbolic color system. Color carried meaning without depicting saints or narratives. This suited Baptist theology perfectly.

The stained glass windows of our church rely primarily on: Amber/Gold, Green, and Red accents. This combination forms a quiet symbolic narrative when read together.

Amber / Gold — Divine Light

The dominant amber tone is the most important color in the scheme. Symbolically, In Christian art, gold or amber represents: divine presence, God's light, wisdom and revelation, and eternity. Unlike the deep medieval blues or purples, amber allows maximum sunlight transmission. This matters architecturally.

Early 20th-century Protestant churches — especially Baptist congregations — preferred interiors filled with warm natural light, emphasizing: scripture, preaching, and clarity rather than mystery. So the amber glass serves both theology and function.

2. Green — Life and Growth

Green appears as secondary framing and background coloration. Symbolically, green traditionally represents: spiritual growth, renewal, hope, and the living church.

This is especially fitting for Baptist theology, which emphasizes the community of believers rather than hierarchy or ritual imagery.

Architecturally, green also softens contrast and connects interior space to the natural world outside. It visually says: *Faith is alive and growing.*

3. Red — Sacrifice and Redemption

Red is used sparingly — mostly in the bud/lily forms previously noted. That restraint is deliberate. With respect to symbolism, red represents: Christ's sacrifice, redemption, and spiritual transformation. Because it appears only in small focal points, red acts like punctuation in a sentence. Your eye is drawn to it immediately.

Our stained-glass windows employ a restrained palette of amber, green, and red, characteristic of early twentieth-century Protestant church design.

Amber glass fills the sanctuary with warm light symbolizing divine presence

Green suggests spiritual growth and renewal. Small red accents, used sparingly within recurring floral motifs, evoke themes of sacrifice and redemption.

Together the colors create a unified visual theology expressed through light rather than imagery.

Our two main sanctuary windows were designed to work together as a unified composition. The rich greens, ruby reds, and warm amber tones of the Jesus windows establish the color palette for the entire wall.

The adjacent memorial and symbolic windows repeat these same colors in simpler forms, creating visual harmony across the sanctuary and reinforcing the sense that the windows were conceived as a coordinated design rather than individual additions.

Many congregants over generations would describe the atmosphere of our sanctuary as: peaceful, reverent, and/or comfortable for worship. What they were experiencing was architectural guidance, not merely decoration. The building was quietly teaching people how to worship together.

Reflection: Time, Hymns, and Gratitude ~ Our Windows – Silent Witnesses

Time

Hymns and Gratitude

Time alters wood and plaster. It alters acoustics. It alters seating patterns and architectural finishes. It alters us.

When I first entered this Sanctuary as a boy in 1953, I saw it through young eyes. I did not know then how many Sundays would follow, how many sermons would shape me, how many hymns would take root.

I did not know that decades later I would sit in a different pew, sing bass in a choir no longer robed, and reflect on a lifetime spent within these walls.

I did not know that I would one day delve into the symbolism within the stained glass windows to discover meaning long lost to our congregation.

There is something sacred about repetition. The steady rhythm of Sunday mornings when coupled with the familiar rise of songs such as How Great Thou Art, It Is Well With My Soul, and Blessed Assurance continues to inspire us all and to remind us of our past, our present, and of future blessings we will receive.

I sing them differently now. Not because the notes have changed — but because I have.

At thirty-three I sang with conviction.

At eighty-three I sing with perspective.

I have buried friends. I have watched families grow.

I have seen the Sanctuary renovated and reconfigured.

I have witnessed a congregation expand and contract and expand again.

I have known joy and sorrow in equal measure.

Through it all, the central truth has not wavered. The same Christ who saved this twelve-year-old boy in 1954 sustains him as an eighty-three-year-old man today.

When I look around the Sanctuary now, I do not dwell on what is gone. Instead, I am grateful for what remains — and even more grateful for what endures beyond wood and glass.

The stamped metal ceiling may require careful preservation or replacement. The stained glass may again need repair. The sound system may evolve even more. But the faith once delivered to the saints — and faithfully proclaimed here for over a century — remains the true inheritance.

I do not see this building through the eyes of my youth anymore. I see it as a steward.

And I am thankful.

Our Windows

Silent Witnesses

More than a century has passed since the sanctuary of First Baptist Church Pontotoc was completed and its stained-glass windows were first illuminated by the sunlight of north Mississippi.

Through the years these windows have witnessed the unfolding life of the congregation—services of worship, seasons of revival, joyful weddings, solemn funerals, and the baptisms of countless new believers. Among those moments was one deeply personal to the author.

During the invitational hymn at the close of a Sunday Morning Revival Service, I felt the hand of my Sunday School Department Director on my right shoulder. I turned to see the smiling face of Mrs. H.O. George who knew I had earlier in the week spoken to our Pastor, Rev. Tom Douglas, in his office.

Her whispered words, “Are you ready?” were the impetus needed to prompt this young boy of twelve to step into the left center aisle and walk forward to profess Jesus Christ as Lord.

I was soon afterward baptized into the fellowship of the church.

In a sense, the stained glass windows stand not only as works of craftsmanship created by the artisans of the Jacoby Art Glass Company of St. Louis, but also as silent witnesses to the continuing story of faith lived out within these walls.

The light from those windows still falls beautifully across the sanctuary today.

It links present worshippers with the generations who first gathered here in 1915, and it reminds all who enter that the heritage of faith entrusted to the church is meant to be preserved, remembered, and passed on to those who follow.



Figure 18 *Letting Our Light Shine for 111 Years*
First Baptist Church, Pontotoc (1914–1915)

Acknowledgement: All Photos provided courtesy of Dr. Terry Wood, Pontotoc, Mississippi.

The author also expresses appreciation for editorial and layout assistance provided during the preparation of this volume.

Glossary

Of Terms

The following terms are provided to assist the reader in understanding the artistic, architectural, and symbolic elements found within the stained glass windows of the sanctuary.

Acanthus (Scrollwork)

A stylized leaf design symbolizing enduring life, growth, and resurrection. Seen in the lower panels of the Jesus windows.

Amber / Gold Glass

A dominant color in the sanctuary windows, symbolizing divine light, wisdom, and the presence of God. Its use allows warm natural light to fill the sanctuary, reinforcing both theological meaning and architectural function.

Bullseye Window

A term used in the 1914 Building Committee minutes to describe the round windows. These circular openings are enhanced with stained glass and symbolic emblems.

Came (Lead Came)

Strips of lead used to join individual pieces of glass into a complete window panel. Their use allowed both structural support and intricate design patterns.

Cartoon

A full-scale drawing used by stained glass artisans as a template for cutting and assembling glass pieces.

Come Unto Me Window

A descriptive name given to the window portraying Christ with outstretched arms in a welcoming posture, reflecting the invitation found in Matthew 11:28.

Fluted Columns

Vertical columns with carved grooves, derived from classical architecture. In the Jesus windows, they frame Christ in a temple-like setting.

Fleur-de-lis (and Variations)

A stylized floral motif traditionally associated with purity and the Trinity. In these windows, variations with five petals may also symbolize the five wounds of Christ, merging themes of incarnation and sacrifice.

Good Shepherd Window

A window depicting Christ guiding His flock and carrying a lamb, combining imagery from John 10 and the parable of the lost sheep. It emphasizes care, sacrifice, and redemption.

Memorial Windows

Smaller windows traditionally associated with honoring individuals or families. In this sanctuary, they contain symbolic motifs but no inscriptions identifying donors.

Munich Style

A richly painted stained glass style popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, known for detailed figures and layered color effects.

Oculus

A circular window placed high in a structure, often at the center of a dome. In this sanctuary, the oculus symbolizes divine light descending from above and serves as the architectural center of the room.

Opalescent Glass

Glass with milky, swirling color variations that diffuse light softly. Common in American stained glass of the early twentieth century.

Roman Arch

An architectural form symbolizing strength, authority, and triumph. In the sanctuary, Roman arches appear only above the Christ-centered windows, visually emphasizing Christ's sovereignty.

Roundel / Medallion

A circular design element often symbolizing eternity or heaven. The blue medallions above the Jesus windows may suggest divine authority and heavenly rule.

Vine Motif

Flowing, plant-like designs symbolizing life, growth, and connection to Christ, often reflecting John 15:5 ("I am the vine...").