Ascension of Our Lord Catholic Church

1900 Greenwood Drive, LaPlace

This church balances the historic and the modern, the elaborate and the unadorned. Completed in 2001, its basilica-style architecture subtly frames a beautiful collection of French stained glass windows, now over 125 years old.

The growth of Ascension of Our Lord Church mirrors the rapid development of St. John the Baptist Parish. Founded in 1979, the congregation met in temporary quarters such as a high school music room and the school cafeteria until a small church was built in 1989. Within ten years the burgeoning parish hired the New Orleans architectural firm of Blitch Knevel to design todays 1,000-seat sanctuary. The architects described the building as “of a simplified early Christian basilica style, up0dated with a fan-seating plan. . . . The roof trusses of wood clad steel recall the 14th century churches in Italy. . .”

Holy Trinity, in the Bywater section of New Orleans, was once a thriving parish, founded in 1847 by the German Catholic community. By the 1990s, however, its congregation had dwindled to a handful of the faithful. Termites infested the walls, the roof leaked, and the plaster was crumbling. In the spring of 1997, the sanctuary was filled for the last time as friends of the church, many with photos of family weddings and baptisms performed there, witnessed the deconsecration of the church.

The windows were in really bad shape, according to Cynthia Courage, of Attenhofer Stained Glass in Metairie, who helped remove and box them for storage, their future unknown. Ascension of Our Lord Church can thank its priest, Father Benjamin Piovan, for rescuing these treasures for his church, which was then on the architects drawing boards.

The maker of the windows is no mystery, as he signed one set: Charles des Granges, Clermont-Ferrand, France. The date of their creation, however, is based on circumstantial evidence. Although Holy Trinity Church was built in 1853, the evolution of the des Granges firm dates the windows to the 1870s. Since the church underwent extensive renovations in 1873, we assume that the windows date to that date as well. The nonfigurative panels at the bottom are of an American-style glass and probably post-date the French portraits.

The windows form an elegant portrait gallery, with Old Testament figures on the left and Christian saints on the right. The detailing of faces, hands, and fabrics is exquisite. Note, for example, the fish-scale chest armor of Judas Maccabeus or the embroidery in the robe of St. Gregorius.

The only window featuring Christ is in the narthex. Saved from the original Ascension of Our Lord Church, it portrays the name of the church. Of clear and opalescent glass, the more primitive painting and surfaces of this American window contrast noticeably with the masterful painting in the main stained glass.

The Stations of the Cross, high on the walls, once adorned Ss. Peter and Paul Church. Home to English-speaking Catholics in the Bywater section of New Orleans, the imposing Ss. Peter and Paul Church stood only a few blocks from Holy Trinity (for German speakers) and St. Vincent de Paul (for English speakers). The former also closed for lack of parishioners, and is now a boutique hotel with stained glass.

At Ascension of Our Lord Church the heritage of two 19th-century New Orleans churches continues to enrich the lives of South Louisiana Catholics.

**Windows of Ascension of Our Lord Church**

Judas Mac[cabeus] Zacharias St. Athanasius St. Basilius

Storage Room

Jeremiah [Pope] St. Gregorius

Altar

Eliseus St. Benedictus

Elias Btus [Blessed] Thomas

Daniel St. Gregorius N[azianzus]

Ezechiel St. J[ohn] Chrisostomus

David St. Bernardus

Samuel St. Thomas Aq[uinas]

Aaron St. Albertus

Moses Wenzeslaus

Abraham St. Augustinus

Enoch St. Ambrose

Sacristy Cry Room

Isaias St. Jeronimus

Narthex

Ascension of Our Lord

*Visited November 2007*

When citing information from this document, please acknowledge the

Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.

**Identifying the Windows of Ascension of Our Lord Church, La Place**

Based on research by Fr. Benjamin Piovan

**Old Testament**

**Isaiah:** Considered one of the great Hebrew prophets; generally considered the author of the book of Isaiah. Holds a flat writing (?) surface and a stylus or pen (?).

**Enoch:** A descendant of Cain; thought to have enjoyed a very long life. Otherwise, little is known about him.

**Abraham:** Founding patriarch of the Israelites and other groups. He showed his faith in God by his willingness to kill his son Isaac when God so commanded him. Shown here with a dagger.

**Moses:** Led the Israelites from Egypt to Israel and brought the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai to his people. Here he bears a tablet with the Commandments. The horns represent the radiance of his faith.

**Aaron:** Older brother of Moses, who ordained him as a high priest. Shown here in the full regalia of that position, including a breastwork representing the twelve tribes and an incense burner.

**Samuel:** The prophet who anointed David as King of Israel as a replacement of King Saul. (He had also anointed Saul.) Shown here with a book, maybe one of the two Books of Samuel in the Old Testament.

**Ezechiel [Ezekiel]:** A prophet and priest known for his dedication to the temple and the liturgy and for his faith in the majesty of God. He too, carries a writing tablet and instrument.

**Daniel:** A pious and devout young Jew whose sufferingand that of his friendsshowed the power of their faith to protect them from persecutions. Because he was miraculously saved from the lions den, he is depicted here with a lion. But note the face and paws of this lion. Father Benny explains that this lion represents the king of Persia, whom Esther referred to as the lion before she asked him to spare the Jews.

**Elias [Elijah]:** A prophet who led the struggle to preserve the Jewish knowledge and worship. Pictured with a sword, though his weapons were prophecies and miracles rather than military campaigns.

**Eliseus [Elisha]:** The successor to Elijah. His shawl, given by Elijah, empowered him to continue the miracles begun by Elijah.

**Jeremiah:** He lamented loudly the Hebrews sinful ways and prophesied dire events for both the Jews and the Babylonians, though neither group paid him much heed. He is usually portrayed as an introspective person, pleading for his people. Here he holds a scroll that presumably records a prophesy or a lamentation.

**Judas Maccabeus:** Led a revolt against authorities who had forbidden the practice of Judaism; considered one of the greatest Jewish warriors. Shown with sword, shield, and armor.

**Zacharias [Zachariah]:** Jewish priest and father of John the Baptist. When Zacharias challenged the Angel Gabriel, who had brought the news of his impending fatherhood and told him that the boy was to be named John, Zacharias was struck mute. Here, he holds a sign IOANNES, to tell his family how the child should be named. Zacharias then regained his ability to speak.

**Christian-Era Figures**

**St. Jeronimus [Jerome]:** A scholar of the scripture who translated the Vulgate Bible. Usually pictured as a hermit or (as here) with the lion from whose paw he reportedly extracted a thorn. He was posthumously named a cardinal and is shown here in red robe and hat of that rank.

**St. Ambrose:** Bishop of Milan. He opposed the Arian heresy\* and was known for his theological writings. Here he holds a book.

**St. Augustinus [St. Augustine of Hippo]:** He gave up wild living and became a priest and then a bishop, known for his piety and life of poverty. Here, he is shown in prayer. Note his numerous jewels, as befit a king. He was martyred by non-Christians.

**St. Albertus:** This may be St. Albert the Great, a scholar of science, mathematics, and theology. He is shown with a book. The head of his scepter may provide a clue to confirm or challenge this identification.

**St. Thomas Aquinas:** The patron saint of universities and students, he is considered by some to be the greatest theologian ever. He is usually portrayed with the sun medallion on his chest; here it is worn over a humble garb. He holds a book and a quill.

**St. Bernardus:** St. Bernard of Clairvaux was a Cistercian brother who founded monasteries and wrote several books but refused to become a bishop. Wearing a plain robe, he carries a pastoral staff and a scroll.

**St. John Chrisostomus:** Known for his eloquence, he became the Bishop of Constantinople. His clothing is opulent and he carries a crozier topped with a cross, usually the sign of an archbishop.

**St. Gregorius Nazianzus:** Also a bishop of Constantinople. Author of a still-acclaimed treatise on the priesthood, he is shown here carrying a scroll and a scepter with an unidentified finial.

**Blessed Thomas of Florence:** A Franciscan friar, known for his self-discipline and fasting, who founded many convents in southern Italy and spent time making converts in the Orient. Shown with instruments of self-flagellation and the book of the Orders rule.

**St. Benedictus:** Founder of the Benedictine Order, with its motto of Pray and Work. He wears a gray robe and carries a pastoral staff and the book of his Orders rule.

**Pope St. Gregory:** Elected Pope in 586, he was known for his sense of justice, converting England to Catholicism, writing three books, and revising church music. He wears the three-tiered hat of the Pope and carries a scroll.

**St. Basilius:** He was a man of great learning and charity and fought the Arian heresy.\* Wearing an elegant robe, he is shown as a man of great determination.

**St. Athanasius:** This bishop of Alexandria also battled the Arian heresy.\* The artist shows him in expensive garments, with a sorrowful appearance.

\* Arian heresy: The doctrine espoused by Arius in the early 4th century. The orthodox definition of the Trinity holds that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have co-existed forever; in contrast, Arians believed that God created the Son, and together they created the Holy Ghost (many modifications of this interpretation are also called Arianism).