

St Francis Episcopal Church, San Jose, CA
Morning Prayer, Tuesday, September 14, 2021
Holy Cross Day

When 2 people are reading: READER 1: Plain Text *Reader 2: Italics* **Both: Bold**

You are invited to begin the service by lighting a candle.

People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.¹ *Thomas Merton*

O Divine Voice,
You sing and the universe comes into being;
O Divine Breath,
You breathe and all things spring to life;
O Divine Word,
You call and creation is sustained;
O Divine Flesh,
You are born among us,
and the Creator is clothed in creation;
O Divine Spirit,
You fill all that has been formed;
O Divine Life,
You are the pulse of all that is.

And so, in amazement and awe, in wonder and celebration
we marvel at this mystery:
In you all things live and move and have being,
In all things, you live and move and express your Divine artistry;
And so we join with creation
in the eternal song of worship and wonder.²

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. *1 John 4:16*

¹ https://www.azquotes.com/author/10004-Thomas_Merton

² ~ posted on **Third Space**. <http://third-space.org.uk/>

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind. As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and forever. **Amen.**

Psalm 98

1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

2 *With his right hand and his holy arm has he won for himself the victory.*

3 The Lord has made known his victory; his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.

4 *He remembers his mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel, and all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.*

5 [Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands; lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.

6 *Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the voice of song.*

7 With trumpets and the sound of the horn shout with joy before the King, the Lord.

8 *Let the sea make a noise and all that is in it, the lands and those who dwell therein.*

9 Let the rivers clap their hands, and let the hills ring out with joy before the Lord, when he comes to judge the earth.

10 *In righteousness shall he judge the world and the peoples with equity.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

A reading from the Book of Isaiah

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together!

Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord?

There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me.

Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!

For I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return:

“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; all who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed.

In the Lord all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

**I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away
and the sea was no more.**

**And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down out of heaven from God,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

**And I heard a great voice from the throne saying,
'Behold, my dwelling is with my people.**

**'I will dwell with them and they shall be mine,
and I myself will be with them.**

**'I will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death shall be no more.**

**'Neither shall there be mourning,
nor crying, nor pain any more,
for the former things have passed away.'
And the One who sat upon the throne said,*
'Behold, I make all things new.'**

Revelation 21:1-5

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the
beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

A reading from the Gospel of John

*Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of
this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the
earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the
kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We
have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How
can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this
Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a
little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness
may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not
know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in
the light, so that you may become children of light."*

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty
and the Lamb.**

**And the city has no need of sun or moon
to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light,
and its lamp is the Lamb.**

By its light the nations shall walk, and the rulers of the earth shall bring their glory into it.

Its gates shall never be shut by day, nor shall there be any night; they shall bring into it the glory and honour of the nations.

I saw the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

And either side of the river stood the tree of life, yielding its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be there, and his servants shall worship him; and they shall see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads.

To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might, for ever and ever.

Revelation 21:22-26; 22:1-4; 5:13

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth;**

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

**He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Prayers

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance;
Govern and uphold them, now and always.
Day by day we bless you;
We praise your Name for ever.
Lord, keep us from all sin today;
Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.
Lord, show us your love and mercy;
For we put our trust in you.
In you, Lord, is our hope;
And we shall never hope in vain.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Let us pray for the poor, hungry, and neglected all over the world,
that their cries for daily bread may inspire works of compassion and mercy
among those to whom much has been given.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for schools and centers of learning throughout the world,
for those who lack access to basic education,
and for the light of knowledge to blossom and shine in the lives of all God's people.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for an end to the divisions and inequalities
that scar God's creation,
particularly the barriers to freedom
faced by God's children throughout the world because of gender;
that all who have been formed in God's image
might have equality in pursuit of the blessings of creation.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the health of women, children,
and families around the world,
especially for an end to maternal and child mortality,
that in building healthy families,
all God's people may be empowered to strengthen their communities

and repair the breaches which divide nations and peoples.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for an end to pandemic disease throughout the world,
particularly the scourges of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis;
that plagues of death may no longer fuel poverty, destabilize nations,
and inhibit reconciliation and restoration throughout the world.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for an end to the waste and desecration of God's creation,
for access to the fruits of creation
to be shared equally among all people,
and for communities and nations to find sustenance
in the fruits of the earth and the water God has given us.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all nations and people
who already enjoy the abundance of creation
and the blessings of prosperity,
that their hearts may be lifted up to the needs of the poor and afflicted,
and partnerships between rich and poor for the reconciliation of the world
may flourish and grow.
Lord, in your mercy,
*Hear our prayer.*³

For the children who cry in their beds at night and wonder "what have I done?"
For the mothers and fathers who must try to explain the unexplainable, Lord, hear our
prayer.
For all the children who have died before their time, for the soldiers who allow their
uniform to strip them of their humanity, for the healers who are denied the opportunity to
use their gifts, Lord, hear our prayer.
For the redemption of souls of both victim and perpetrator, for those who commit
themselves to the forgiveness of sins, Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.⁴

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. *Amen.*
Let us bless the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

³ ~ from the Episcopal Office of Government Relations, United States. Posted on Church World
Service's **Making Poverty History** page.
<http://hunger.cwsglobal.org/hungerbooklet/prayer.html>

⁴ Author unknown. <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/justice-prayers>

HOLY CROSS DAY

During the reign of Constantine, first Roman Emperor to profess the Christian faith, his mother Helena went to Israel and there undertook to find the places especially significant to Christians. (She was helped in this by the fact that in their destructions around 135, the Romans had built pagan shrines over many of these sites.) Having located, close together, what she believed to be the sites of the Crucifixion and of the Burial (at locations that modern archaeologists think may be correct), she then had built over them the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was dedicated on 14 September 335. It has become a day for recognizing the Cross (in a festal atmosphere that would be inappropriate on Good Friday) as a symbol of triumph, as a sign of Christ's victory over death, and a reminder of His promise, "And when I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)

Tertullian, in his *De Corona* (3:2), written around AD 211, says that Christians seldom do anything significant without making the sign of the cross. Certainly by his time the practice was well established. Justin Martyr, in chapters 55 and 60 of his *First Apology* (Defence of the Christian Faith, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius and therefore written between 148 and 155 AD), refers to the cross as a standard Christian symbol, but not explicitly to tracing the sign of the cross as a devotional gesture. In the ruins of Pompeii (destroyed 79 AD), there is a room with an altar-like structure against one wall, and over the altar the appearance of the plaster shows that a cross-shaped object had been nailed to the wall, and forcibly pulled loose, apparently shortly before the volcano buried the city. It is suggested that this house may have belonged to a Christian family, and that they took the cross and other objects of value to them when they fled the city. This is not the only possible explanation, but I do not know of a likelier one.

The Christian custom of tracing the sign of the cross on persons and things as a sign of blessing is very old. Some think that it goes back to the very origins of Christianity and earlier. In Ezekiel 9, we read that Ezekiel had a vision of the throne-room of God, in which an angel was sent to go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the faithful few who mourned for the sins of the city. Afterwards, other angels were sent through the city to destroy all those who had not the mark. We find similar visionary material in Revelation 7:2-4; 9:4; 14:1, where the mark on the forehead again protects the faithful few in the day of wrath, and it is said to be the name of the Lamb and of His Father. Now, the Hebrew word used for "mark" in Ezekiel is TAU, which is the also the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (the ancestor of the Greek letter TAU and our letter T), and it refers to a mark like an X or a +, two short lines crossing at right angles. When the Essenes (the Dead Sea Scrolls people) received converts into their community, they baptized them and then signed them on their foreheads with a TAU, in token that they were part of the faithful remnant who mourned the sins of Israel, and that they would be spared in the day of God's wrath. It seems probable that John the Baptist and his followers were in some measure influenced by the Essenes, and they had certainly read Ezekiel. Accordingly, the tracing of a TAU on the forehead may have been a part of John's method of baptism, and may have been

adopted by the earliest Christians. (We remember that some of the Twelve disciples had previously been disciples of John the Baptist -- see John 1:35-37,40.) Very possibly they began by tracing the TAU without asking what it meant -- it was simply a mark, the mark mentioned by Ezekiel. Later, they may have identified it with the Name of God. The Essenes, in some of their documents, used four dots in place of the four letters of the Name of God, and sometimes arranged them in a square. It would be easy to interpret the four ends of the TAU as representing the four letters of the Name of God. Later, Christians, especially Greek-speaking Christians, might interpret the sign as a CHI, an X-shaped letter, the first letter of the word XPICTOC, or Christos, meaning the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. Again, Christians might understand it to be the sign of the Cross of Christ, and it is this interpretation that has prevailed. Today, in many Christian churches, when someone is baptized, the baptizer afterwards traces the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized person. Often, some of the water that has been used for baptism is saved and placed in small bowls near the entrance to the church. Worshippers entering the church touch the surface of the water and then cross themselves as a way of reaffirming their baptismal covenant. (A few years ago, a Jewish friend asked me, "May I go to the Easter Midnight service with you?" I said: "Certainly, if you like. However, I must warn you that there will be baptisms, and that afterwards the priest will take a bowl of baptismal water and a sprig of hyssop, and walk up and down the aisle sprinkling the congregation with the water, and if a single drop touches you, you will instantly turn into a goy." He answered, "I will bring an umbrella and open it at the appropriate time.") As we have seen, the practice of using the sign of the cross in connection with Baptism may very well go back to the Apostles themselves, and back before them into their Essene and other Jewish roots, having its origin in the vision of Ezekiel. In fact, the concept may go back further than that. We read in Genesis 4 that, when Cain had killed his brother and was sent into exile, God set a mark (TAU) on Cain, so that no one would slay him. Thus, from the start, the Sign of the Cross has been the protection of the penitent and justified sinner.

What is the significance of the sign of the cross? Well, in the first place, we often place our initials or other personal mark on something to show that it belongs to us. The Cross is the personal mark of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we mark it on ourselves as a sign that we belong to Him, just as in the book of Revelation, as noted above, the servants of God are sealed or marked on their foreheads as a sign that they are His.

Again, as one preacher has said, if you were telling someone how to make a cross, you might say (at least to an English speaker), "Draw an I and then cross it out." As we make the sign, we first draw a vertical stroke, as if to say to God, "Lord, here am I." Then we cancel it with a horizontal stroke, as if to say, "Help me, Lord, to abandon my self-centeredness and self-will, and to make you the center of my life instead. Fix all my attention and all my desire on you, Lord, that I may forget my self, cancel my self, abandon myself completely to your love and service."



The Shape of the Cross

Most of us assume that we know what a cross looks like--that it is two beams of wood fastened

together at right angles. However, occasionally we meet someone who claims otherwise. The counter-claim is likely to run like this:

"The churches will tell you that Jesus was put to death on a cross, but that is a lie. He was nailed to a single upright beam, with his hands directly over his head. The cross is a pagan symbol, actually a letter T, or Tau, standing for the god Tammuz, who was worshipped by the Canaanites. When you wear a cross, or make any religious use of a cross, you are really worshipping Tammuz, whether you know it or not; and any church that displays a cross, or sings hymns like "The Old Rugged Cross," or "Beneath the Cross of Jesus", actually has its origins in Tammuz-worship, and is an instrument of the Devil, and if you want to avoid the wrath of God, you had better flee from all such churches and sign up with the only organization in town that teaches Bible truth and is devoted to the pure worship of God and not of idols like Tammuz, and here I am, ready to sign you up."

It is therefore of some interest to know what evidence we have about the shape of the device on which Jesus was nailed up to die. Minucius Felix, a Christian who wrote a work called *Octavius*, probably a little before 200 AD, says (chapter 29) that the shape of the cross is to be found everywhere you look.

Indeed, we see the sign of the cross naturally formed by a ship when it carries a full press of sail, or when it glides over the sea with outspread oars.

Note that a ship with a single vertical mast and a triangular sail is a modern device, used for sailing upwind by repeated tacking. The ancients did not do this. They used a ship with a square sail, and a vertical mast with a horizontal spar across it to hold the top of the sail. Hence a cross shape. Note also, that it is not necessary to agree with Minucius Felix that there is anything significant about the many places that the shape of a cross can be seen. What matters is that he knows that his readers will understand the shape of a cross to be two beams at right angles, not just a vertical beam.

The Greek word for the cross of Jesus, used many times in the New Testament and in early Greek Christian writings, is *stauros*, and the corresponding verb is *staurizo* = "crucify". Now, do any early writers use these words in a way that would make it clear what shape they were talking about?

A pagan writer, Lucian of Samosata, probable dates 120-180 AD, wrote a fantasy called *The Trial of the Vowels*, in which the letter Tau is summoned before a panel of judges, the seven vowels, and is accused of being a general mischief-maker. The charges tend to be like this (to invent an example in English):

"Consider the word SUN. How good a thing the sun is! It is the source of light and warmth, and is indispensable for life itself. Along comes the letter T, and changes the word to STUN. What does it mean to stun a man? It means "to knock him out cold--to ice him," or to deprive him of warmth. It means "to punch his lights out," or to deprive him of light. It means "to knock him dead," or to deprive him of consciousness, and potentially of life itself. What a villain the letter T

is, to turn good into evil in this fashion. (Several other examples follow.) And consider that evil thing, the STAUROS, instrument of torment and shame and death. It takes its name from the letter TAU, because it is shaped like a TAU. What an evil device, and what an evil letter it is named for!"

Before I introduce my next writer, a digression is necessary. The Jews (beginning at what time I do not know) often wrote numbers using the letters of their alphabet, which has 22 letters. (Five of these letters developed distinct forms when used at the ends of words, which gives us 27 letters in all.) If we use the first nine letters for the numbers 1 to 9, the next nine for the numbers 10 to 90, and the last nine for the numbers 100 to 900, we can write anything from 1 to 999 in at most three characters. If we put a tick mark beside a letter to multiply its value by 1000, then with repeated tick marks we can write any positive whole number. (Note that not everyone used the five special forms. Without them, you get as far as Tau=400 and then use Tau Qoph = 400+100=500, Tau Resh = 400+200=600, etc.)

The Greeks used a similar system, which you can find in the writings of Archimedes. Their alphabet as we know it today has only 24 letters, but in an earlier version it had 27 letters. To round it out, add an F (or Digamma) after the Epsilon, and a Q (or Qoppa) after the Pi, and a Sampi (don't ask) at the end, and you have 27 letters. Use the first nine for 1 to 9, the middle nine for 10 to 90, the last nine for 100 to 900, tick marks or underlinings for multiplying by 100, and you are in business. If you omit the Hebrew letter Tsaddi, the remaining 21 letters correspond exactly and in the correct order with the first 21 letters of the 27-letter Greek alphabet. (The Greeks got their alphabet from the Pheonicians, whose language and alphabet were very similar to those of the Hebrews.)

With this system in hand, some Jewish students of the Scriptures noted the numerical values of various words or sentences, obtained by adding up the values of the letters, and found symbolic significance in the results. This is called *gematria* (from the Greek word for "geometry", here understood to mean mathematics in general). Obviously, the possibilities are endless. Some Christians made similar use of the numerical values of Greek letters. Thus, since Jesus was crucified on Friday, the sixth day of the week, 6 stands for evil and death, as does its intensive form 666. But Jesus rose two days later, on what may be called the eighth day of the week, and so 8 is the number of resurrection, of renewal, of life restored and triumphant. It is thus no accident that the letters in the name of *Iesous* add up to 888.

Iota = 10
Eta = 8
Sigma = 200
Omicron = 70
Upsilon = 400
Sigma = 200

Total = 888

Now for a particular example. In Genesis 14 we read that an invading army captured Abraham's nephew Lot and some others, and that Abraham took a band of 318 warriors, followed the army

and in a surprise attack rescued the prisoners. Jewish scholars noted that 318 is written Cheth ("ch" as in "Bach," please) Yod Shin. Now Cheth Yod spells "chai," which means "life." Shin is the first letter of "shalom," which means "peace, deliverance, wholeness, well-being." Thus Abraham's group of warriors had 318 men in it, and was a source of life and peace to the prisoners whom they rescued.

Sometime between 70 (when the Temple was destroyed) and 135 (when Jerusalem was sacked again and a pagan shrine built on the site of the Temple), a man called Barnabas, or the pseudo-Barnabas, or Barnabas of Alexandria (not to be confused with the companion of Paul mentioned in the book of Acts), wrote a book called *The Epistle of Barnabas*, in which he points out that 318 written in Greek letters is Tau Iota Eta. Now, Tau clearly represents the cross, and Iota Eta are the first two letters of the Name of Jesus. Hence, the source of the life and peace that Jewish scholars had discovered in Abraham's 318 men is none other than the cross of Jesus.

Now, whether you think that that is a remarkable insight, or think that Barnabas of Alexandria is a complete air-head, is beside the point. The point is that he would not have used this argument if he did not know, and expect his readers to know, that a cross is shaped like a Tau.

Thus, we see that among pagans and Christians alike in the second century of the Christian era, a time when crucifixions were a common method of execution and everyone knew what they looked like, there was a general understanding that if a man had been crucified, it was probably on a vertical and a horizontal beam.

http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Holy_Cross.htm