

# The Pastor's Corner

## *Symbol Speaks with Power*

On the tabernacle, a small brass box that contains the Eucharist, we have two silver angel figurines and also grapes and blades of wheat. Just under them, there are three golden letters - IHS. Some people might think that these elements are just decorative and without any special significance. In fact, these elements are placed there for a reason as they have profound meaning.

The very name “tabernacle” comes from the Latin word “tabernaculum” which means the “tent”. When the Hebrews wandered in the desert under the leadership of Moses, they kept the Ark of the Covenant in a special tent. God was “present” in that tent. In the same way, the Eucharistic Jesus is present in the church in the tent – a tabernacle. Since it is the Lord himself present there, then it is no surprise that the tabernacle is ornate and made from solid and beautiful materials. The presence of the angels around the tabernacle is logical as it expresses the celestial adoration of God by angels and archangels. The other elements on the tabernacle - grapes and blades of wheat - underline the “matter” of the Eucharist. The Body of Jesus and His Blood still have the matter of bread and wine, which were made from grapes and wheat. It is important to remember that the Eucharistic Jesus is fully present both in His Body and His Blood, so if only the Blood of Jesus is present, Jesus is fully present and when we receive only His Body or only His Blood, we receive the “entire” Jesus. Sometimes two letters are placed on the tabernacle: A and Ω (alpha and omega). These are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. The presence of these letters has theological meaning - they refer to God. In the book of the Apocalypse of St. John, there is a biblical declaration of Jesus: “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last...*” (Revelation 22: 23). The same symbol is placed on the Easter Candle - the big candle that stands close to the baptismal font.

What about the three letters - IHS - which are under the tabernacle and also could be found in many elements of the church’s decorative and liturgical vestments? IHS are the first three letters of Jesus’ name in Greek. The letter “H” stands and is pronounced “E”, so, IHS is read “JES”, that is the beginning of the word **JESUS**.

One can also find another mysterious symbol in churches: the letter P that is accompanied by X, usually fixed to the lower part of P. It also is a symbol of our Lord. Greek “X” stands for English “Ch” and “P” for English “R”. So, XP, pronounced “Chr”, are the first two Greek letters of the word **Christos** (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ), which means “Christ” in Greek.

These and other symbols and elements present in our faith are amazingly valuable. They, without words, instinctively and quickly direct our attention to the important elements of our faith. They help us to delve more deeply into the mysteries of our faith and contemplate God in His fullness.

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