

# Death and Resurrection



Above the sanctuary at Edgbaston Old Church is the great east window, erected in 1859, so packed with detail it takes a while to find a starting point. At the very top of the arch is Christ in Majesty, swathed in the blue garlands of clouds that represent the boundary of heaven, and flanked by more than twenty smaller 'lights'.



Beneath these lights, six large panels form two 'trptychs', portraying the Crucifixion and Resurrection; each with a central image of Christ. The overall design is constructed so that the small lights have a dual function: unifying the east window as a whole, as well as forming individual arches above each of these triptychs.

The Crucifixion triptych portrays aspects of the period immediately following the death of Jesus.



On the right hand side the centurion is exclaiming the words written on the banner below his arm, 'In truth this man was the Son of God'. *Mark 16: 39*. Next to him is a rather shadowy figure, quite hard to pick out. This is Joseph of Arimathaea, 'a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews', who petitions Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus for burial according to traditional Jewish rites. *John 20: 38-42*



In the far left panel is the distraught figure of Mary, mother of Jesus, being comforted by 'the disciple whom he loved'. *John 19:26-27*



The powerful central panel depicts the crucified Jesus, after he 'bowed his head and gave up the ghost'.  
*John 19:30*

The artist has placed one of the women mentioned in *John 19:25* (it would seem to be Mary Magdalene), at the base of the cross. She is bare-headed and her arms gently encircle the nailed feet of Jesus. This is an extraordinary image, perhaps additionally meant to bring to mind the story in *Luke 7: 38* when an unidentified woman (traditionally often associated with Mary Magdalene) washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiped them with her hair and then anointed his feet with ointment.

Looking at the sanctuary window as a whole, it presents a most interesting series of perspectives. The Crucifixion triptych appears almost convex. The figure of Jesus on the cross is placed precisely at the centre of the middle panel of the triptych, closest to us, drawing the eye first.

In contrast, the Resurrection triptych seems almost concave, with the figure of the Risen Christ in the central panel apparently further up and more towards the back. This is a *trompe l'œil*, since in both triptychs the figures of Christ occupy virtually the same amount of space and are almost in alignment.

The faux perspective is achieved in two ways: in the Crucifixion triptych the head and shoulders of the crucified Jesus are bowed in death, exposing the banner of 'INRI' (standing for *Jesus Nazaraeus Rex Judaeorum*) at the top of the cross; in addition, the embrace of the kneeling woman completes the vertical 'line' that fills the central panel. Conversely, in the central Resurrection panel the vertical line is not continuous; the soldiers set as 'a watch' (*Matthew 28:65-66*) are separated from the Risen Christ by the tomb, linking only horizontally with the earthly figures on either side.



According to *Matthew 28: 2-4*, in an earthquake, the angel of the Lord rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, causing the soldiers to 'shake' so that they 'became as dead men'. The artist conflates this story with that in *John 20:12*, where there are two angels; depicting these angels as turning their faces to shield themselves from the radiance of the Risen Christ.

The earthly figures beneath them are all looking towards the empty tomb; their understanding of the magnitude of what has happened still to come.



On the right are the women who 'had brought sweet spices, that they might anoint [Jesus]'. *Mark 16:1*



And on the left are Peter and 'the other disciple whom Jesus loved', who 'did outrun Peter and [who] came to the sepulchre first'. *John 20:2-4*



But the Risen Christ faces forward, looking outwards, his hand raised in blessing, sending to *us* the great message of the Resurrection.