

## The Narrative of the Apse of the Sanctuary

In the apse of the sanctuary, the high, rounded ceiling, in the midst of all the color and design of artisan Brett Swiatek, the eye is lifted to the very top. Here is found a representation of God Almighty, Yahweh, the luminous numinous – the indefinable light. From this gold and silver leaf stem bright lights of divine grace and life. These rays of God's love flow through the Spirit of God who is represented by the dove. The dove, and ancient symbol of the gift of the Spirit is highlighted in silver steams. These rays of love flow through the Spirit of God down to the ultimate gift of God – Jesus the Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross reunites us to our God; transforms death to life, and makes dying a passage of trust and love. Jesus is surrounded by angels. These plaster carvings, originally a gift from Frank and Victoria Ryczek, were obtained from St. Stanislaus Church in Perry, NY, and refurbished by Stacey Swiatek. The cross and the angels rest on an oak reredos, an artistic decoration behind the altar, crafted by Henry Swiatek. This oak base acts as a foundation for the stained-glass window depicting St. Michael the Archangel, patron of this church.

Joining St. Michael are two angels – newly painted by Vanessa DiBernardo. To the left of St. Michael is St. Gabriel. This angel, with the representative lily, joins the sanctuary statues of St. Joseph and of Mary, the Mother of God. The angel unites the love of Joseph and Mary. This is a love that is asked of them by God and freely given from their hearts. St. Raphael, on St. Michael's right, with arms outstretched, accepts the love of Jesus crucified and presents this love to God the Most High. St. Raphael unites and transforms the life and love of man as in the marriage of Tobias and Sarah in the Old Testament.

The story continues with the Angel Gabriel. The gaze of this angel of God looks directly at us as if to repeat the scripture which tells us that unless we pick up our own cross and follow the way of the lord, we will not have eternal life. The crosses highlighted in red above the doors represent the crosses we accept with our hearts. As examples we find the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His heart is encircled with thorns and bears the wound of the spear. We also find the heart of Mary. Her heart is encircled with roses and bears her own wound. Both hearts are transformed and are aflame with the love of God.

Our lives are transformed by the Spirit of God. With trust in His word and reliance on His love the crosses of red are now changed into stylized crosses of white gold that surround the window of St. Michael and ascend unto and into the golden presence of God himself. St. Michael is the defender of the People of God and is shown defeating the presence of evil whose wages are death. St. Michael is also said to be the angel that presents the souls of the faithful before the throne of God in the Kingdom of Heaven. After bearing our crosses and accepting salvation offered by our God, St. Michael ushers us into eternal life.

Delights of gold and silver leaf speckle the apse of St. Michael's Church and make it sparkle with new discoveries. The whole setting is beautiful to behold. The story is not complete until you come into the sanctuary and find yourself in the story of the apse of the sanctuary.

On the walls of the transepts, we find our purpose in renewing the church of St. Michael. On the South side we find the letters A and M. On the North, D and G. A.M.D.G. stand for the Latin, Ad Maiorem Gratia Dei. In English, "For the Greater Glory of God."