

THE STORY OF THE CHANCEL WINDOW

Since early in 2008 worshipers at South Plains have been inspired by the lovely stained glass window high in the chancel wall. In the tree that is depicted here we see life, beauty and growth. It reminds us that each of us and our church will grow and flourish if nourished by roots deeply planted in faith.

As we near the time to commemorate the anniversary of the "birth" of our church, organized in October, 1819, we are aware of many reasons for celebration. We remember that continually, through 189 years, faithful servants have diligently tried to maintain this building and the grounds as a sacred place to worship, grow in faith and glorify God. Difficulties did not deter the members, or those who served as pastors, from seeking to preserve its heritage and to fulfill its original mission throughout the years.

This sense of commitment and responsibility continues today. One of the recent issues was the old window in the chancel wall. Efforts to improve or enhance its appearance and function were ineffective, and replacing it with a stained glass window was given consideration. Sylvia Sheffield then recommended that Wayne Cain, a respected local stained glass artist, be consulted about the window.

Becky Kurtz, another member of South Plains, then presented her generous offer to donate a stained glass window to the Session. She agreed that Wayne Cain was the artist of choice, as she, too, admired his work. She had been especially impressed by one piece that included an image of a tree.

A committee was formed, including the two ladies and Larry Day, Chair of the Building and Grounds Committee. They were asked to meet with Mr. Cain to talk about the project. Following their discussion he was offered and agreed to accept the task of creating a special window for South Plains. Becky Kurtz expressed her preference that it should portray a likeness of a tree in its design.

Mr. Cain spent many hours in private meditation in the sanctuary before beginning his work. He felt led to create an impression of the view through the other windows. All of these old windows frame a portion of the church's rural setting among beautiful trees. With these as inspiration, he began to create a similar picture in stained glass.

During the fall of 2007, the committee met often with Mr. Cain. He painstakingly created the shape of a tree with a dark trunk and branches. He formed and attached individual leaves of green, red, yellow and rust to its branches and scattered some over the pale golden background as falling leaves. A frame of dark

amber/brown panes surrounds the scene. Even at night light shines through as moon and stars appear in the sky.

The Gothic style window was installed in early January, 2008, with capable assistance from several church members. During its creation, and even after it was in place, the artist spent time alone in the sanctuary considering and planning. On many days one could find him up a ladder inside or outside, changing and refining until he felt he could declare it finished.

People continually comment about the inspiring message. Some say that they see it as "the tree of life"; others, "I am the vine, you are the branches." One man said, "In the late afternoon sun, I saw it as 'the burning bush'." one said that the variety of leaf colors, fresh green, yellow and weathered-brown, represents our congregation of young, mature and older members.

At the worship service on January 20, 2008, when the lovely window was dedicated, worshipers were given a gift bag containing a glass leaf like those so beautifully placed on and around the tree. Dr. Garth reminded the congregation of several passages of Scripture where trees with special significance are mentioned, including the following:

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." *Revelation 22:1.2 (NIV)*

A plaque, in place just below the window, expresses its dedication:

The Chancel window is given to the glory of God and in honor of those who serve with love and faith in Christ.

Our gratitude to Becky Kurtz for her gift is bountiful and continuous! We are very grateful for the skill, thoughtfulness and diligence of Wayne Cain. The guidance of the committee is also most gratefully acknowledged.