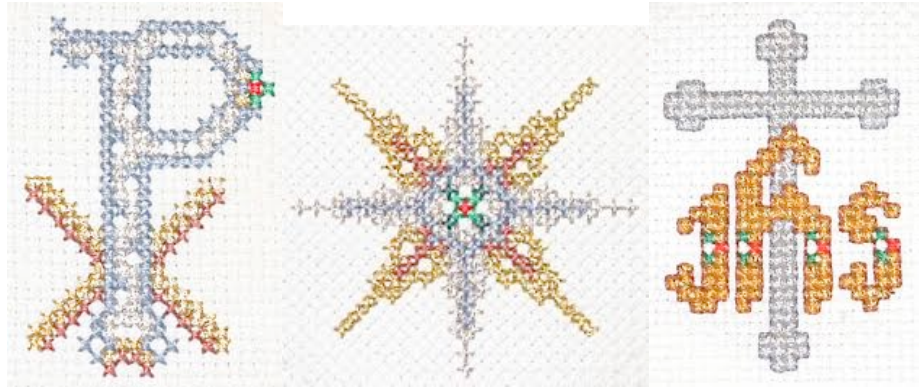


Examples of Chrismons:



For our new members, friends, and guests and a refresher for our congregation, the meaning of the Chrismons.

Chrismons™

By Dennis Bratcher

Chrismons™ are handmade Christmas tree ornaments with various symbols of Christianity. The name Chrismon™ comes from a combination of CHRIS and MONogram. Some of the traditional symbols of Christianity are monograms composed of various combinations of letters of the name Christ or titles for Jesus. They are sometimes called Christograms. An early example is the Chi-Rho monogram, composed of the first two letters in Greek of the word *Christos* (Gk: chi, X = ch; rho, P = r).

These monograms and other symbols, such as the sign of the fish, were in use early in the church as secret symbols of Christianity. However, they became popular in the fourth century AD when the Roman emperor Constantine, after his conversion to Christianity, adapted the Chi-Rho monogram as his military ensign.

Chrismons are a recent innovative way to use these ancient symbols at Christmas. They originated from Mrs. Frances Spencer, who began making Christmas decorations from a variety of materials and leftover Christmas paper and decorations in the late 1940s. Since she had become proficient in ornament making, her church, Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia, asked her to decorate the church's Christmas tree. Rather than making the typical secular styles of ornaments, she decided to use the traditional symbols of Christianity in the main liturgical colors of Christmas, white and gold. In 1957 she coined the term **Chrismons** for her creations and began the Chrismon ministry that is continued today by Ascension Lutheran Church. The practice of using Chrismons has spread and is becoming an increasingly popular way for churches and families to retain a sense of the sacred amid the secularization of this important Christian holiday.

In order to preserve the heritage of Mrs. Spencer's understanding of the nature of Chrismons they should not be bought or sold, so there will not be a rack of Chrismons in a store (although some companies have begun making and selling them). To preserve the spirit of Chrismons they should only be made by hand and given as gifts. Often, a church will have a Chrismon Tree in which members of the congregation make the ornaments for the tree. In some churches, the idea of Chrismons is combined with the Jesse Tree, and becomes a project for the children of the church during the entire season of Advent. The cross-stitch examples pictured here were made by both Catholic and Protestant members of the Hill Air Force Base Chapel, Layton Utah, for the Base Chapel's Christmas tree.

Also, to preserve the tradition of what Chrismons represent, the primary colors should be the liturgical colors of Christmas, white (or silver) and gold (see *The Colors of the Church Year*). Beyond that, they can be made from a variety of materials with a range of traditional Christian symbols limited only by the creativity of the person making them.