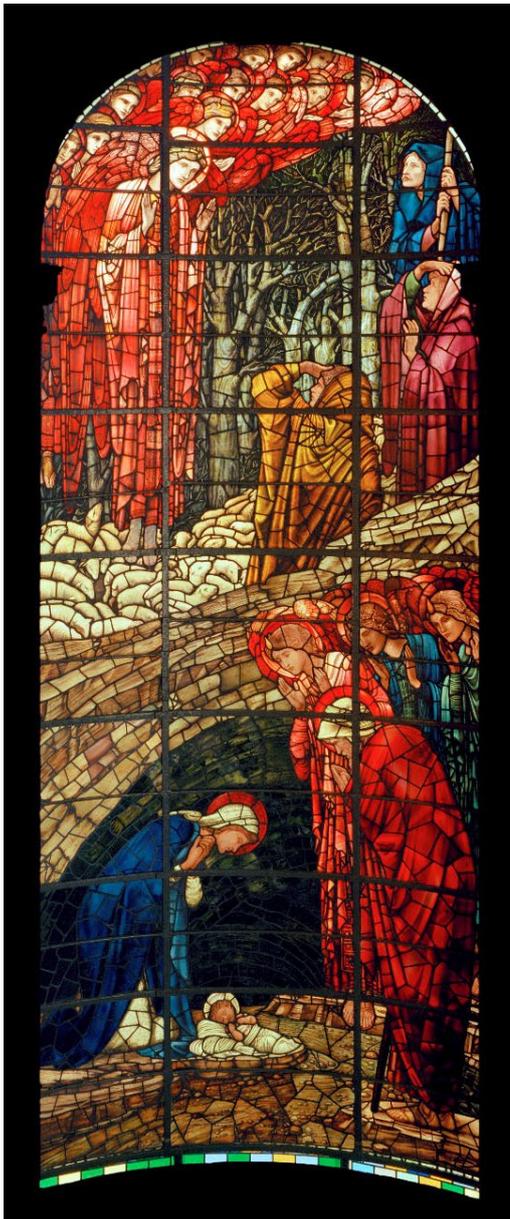


A Christian Interpretation of Birmingham Cathedral's stained-glass windows

The Nativity



Bible reference

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2: 6-7

Perhaps the best-known bible story, the Nativity details Jesus' birth to Mary and Joseph; the beginning of God's incarnation amongst us. The bible records that Jesus was born in a manger, although beyond that is surprisingly sparse on the details surrounding his birth; much of the artistic tradition surrounding the event is a later extrapolation. After his birth, the infant Lord was visited by shepherds and wise men, representing the breadth of humanity; rich and poor, wise, and unlearned, young, and old. Christians have always held the poor, oppressed and downtrodden in special regard, and it is a great paradox of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ, the King of the World, was born in poverty and squalor – a symbol of the transformative power of the Incarnation.

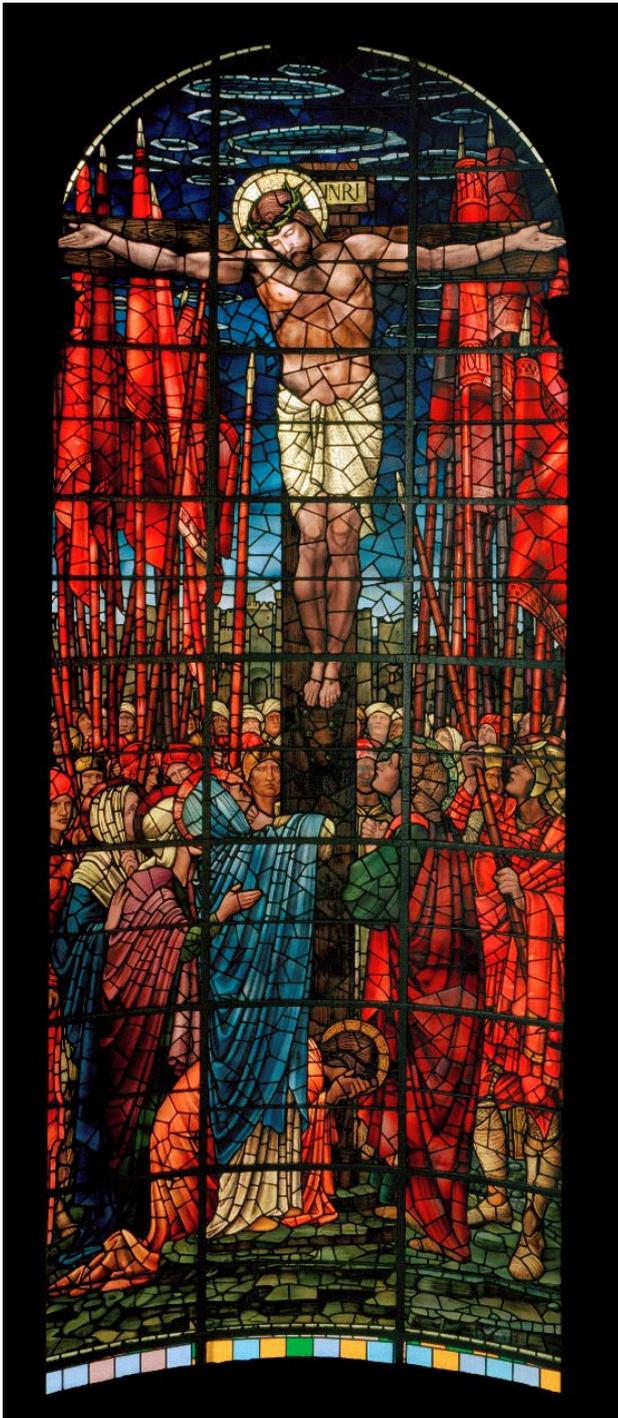


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The Crucifixion



Bible reference

“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.”

Luke 23:33

The cross is a preeminent symbol of the Christian faith because the Crucifixion marks the climax of Jesus' ministry on earth. Although Christians differ in their understanding of the theological implications of Christ's death, the bible makes it very clear that Jesus was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, and did indeed die on the cross, but was raised again from the dead three days later. Christians point to the truth of this event by the fact that he appeared to many thousands of people after his death, many of which were prepared to die than deny that they had seen him alive. It is through this process of death and resurrection that the sinful nature of human beings was made right with God, and human beings promised that, as Christ was risen from the dead, so we may be, if we live lives of faithfulness and good works. In this way, the Crucifixion represents both a symbol of suffering and joy, death and life, darkness and light, a great mystery of God's love for the world.

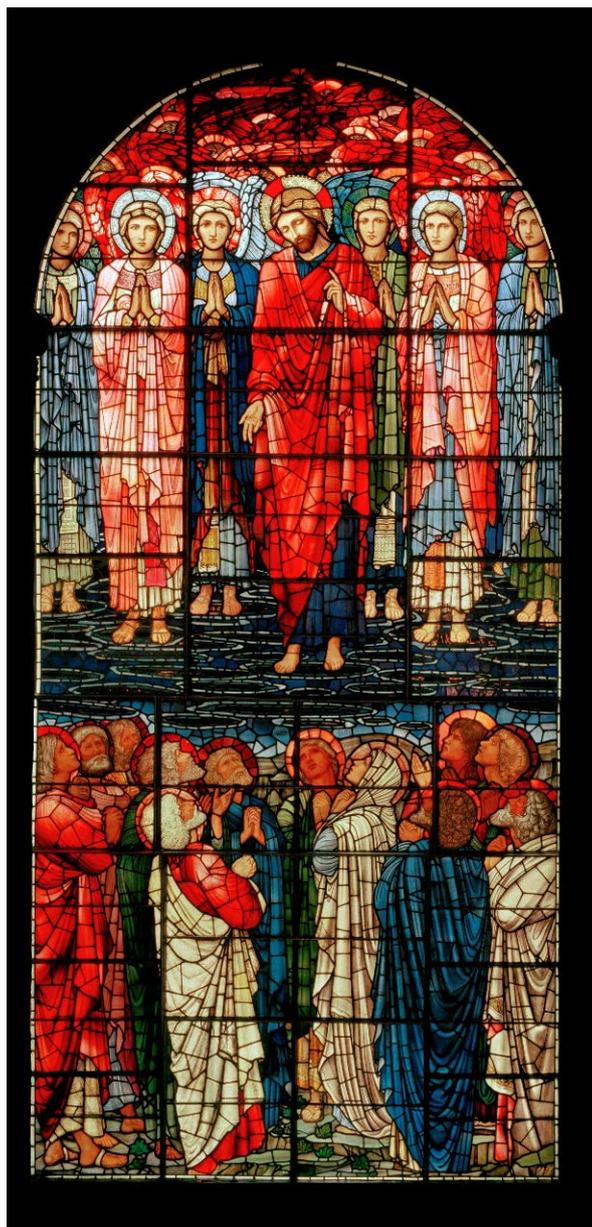


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The Ascension



Bible reference

“After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.”

Acts 1:9

The bible records that 40 days after his resurrection from the dead, Jesus returned to heaven to be with his Father. The disciples who witnessed this event, known as the Ascension, were given a very brief glimpse of heaven, and they were able to see a multitude of angels praising God. The Ascension marks the end of Jesus' incarnation amongst us – although he promised to always be present in his Church through the Holy Spirit, which was to be given to the disciples at Pentecost, 10 days after the Ascension. Jesus also promised that he would one day return to be with us physically once more, and it is for this event that Christians are called to be ever watchful as they seek to prepare for his arrival.

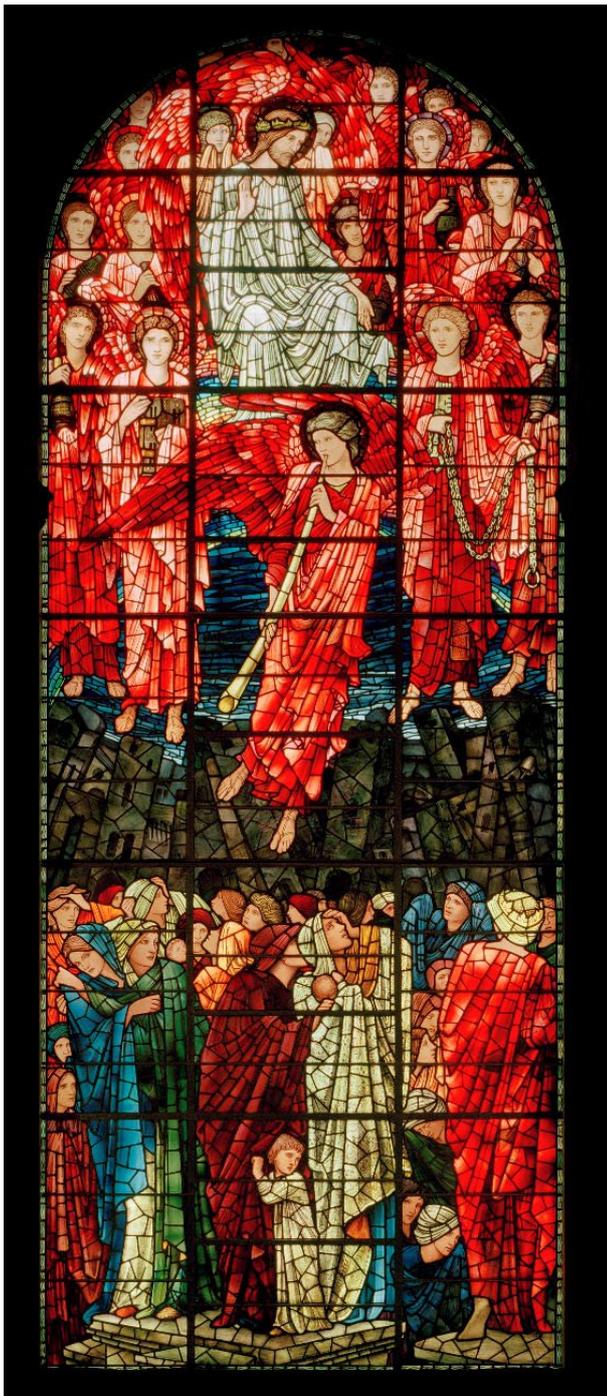


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The Last Judgement



Bible reference

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Matthew 25 : 31-32

The Last Judgement is a rich theme in Christian art and literature. The event is described in vivid allegorical and metaphorical detail in the book of Revelation, the last book of the bible. Christians believe that Jesus will return to earth once more, and judge all people; the lives we've led, the things we've done and the love we've shown to one another. The Church has always held a very broad view on how and when this judgement might happen, but it will, in a sense, mark the end of the world, and so Christians regard the Last Judgement with a mixture of awe, joy, wonder and terror – although Jesus makes it very clear that he looks upon humans with mercy and love above all things. Christ also made it clear that we are not to try to predict when the Last Judgement will take place, but instead be ever watchful for when it does, so that the Church might be prepared for Jesus' second coming.



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