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Old Dutch Church in Kingston, New York

Blog: Community of Faith | Author: Mark Gunderman | Sunday, Mar. 14 | 1 comment | Email this story



Founded in 1659, Old Dutch Church is often referred to as "Kingston's Cathedral." The foundations were laid on land provided by Peter Stuyvesant. The church survived the Esopus Indian Wars and the Burning of Kingston by the British in 1777 during the early stages of the Revolutionary War. The current church was built in 1852.

First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 272 Wall Street, Kingston, New York (Stockade District)

My wife and I had the opportunity to visit the Old Dutch Church in Kingston, New York. We were so impressed with the beauty and historical significance of the building that we decided to attend the Third Sunday in Lent (March 7) 10:30 AM service the following day. The Reformed Church in America was established on this continent 150 years before the Revolutionary War. The Reformed Church traces its roots back to the Netherlands as the Dutch Reformed Church and established its first congregation in America in New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1628.

The Old Dutch Church celebrates Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month so we were glad to attend that week. We were also fortunate to experience the Hand Bell Choir which played "Amazing Grace" and "In the Cross of Christ I Glory." The Church Choir situated high up in the rear balcony and accompanied by a huge Moeller pipe organ and lone violinist, sang the traditional hymns, "Like a River Glorious", "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" and "Give to the Winds Your Fears." A Norwegian folk tune "My Heart is Longing" and a contemporary song "For Those Tears I Died" were also sung.

The Scripture Lessons were Isaiah 55: 1-9 and 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13. The congregation read the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion) was somewhat different from what I am used to experiencing. The communion host was brought by an attendant to each pew and given to anyone wishing to participate and then the wine (grape juice) was brought down the aisle a short time later.

The service was completed with the Benediction, a final hymn and the Organ Postlude in ancient style. I had the opportunity to speak with the Minister, Reverend Kenneth L. Walsh after the service. I was pleased to know that he manages a street outreach program in the Uptown Section

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of Kingston. Reverend Walsh informed me the Old Dutch Church is a congregation with an historic past who accepts the Bible as the Word of God. The congregation is seriously committed to providing evangelism, social action and fellowship to the indigent population living in the Uptown community. They are involved in supporting Caring Hands Soup Kitchen and each month purchase food vouchers from Hannaford Supermarkets for distribution by Family of Woodstock.

The Old Dutch Church was founded in 1659. The present church structure, built in 1852, is the third to be sited on the same plot of ground inside the Stockade Area of Kingston, as established by Peter Stuyvesant. From the beginning, meticulous baptism and marriage records have been maintained through the present time.

The current church is considered by many architectural authorities to be one of the most gorgeous in the United States. Designed by Minard LeFever, it is built of native bluestone. Reflecting Greek, Italian and Egyptian influences, it is recognized as Renaissance Revival style.

The vaulted ceiling reveals some of Sir Christopher Wren's themes detailed in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. LeFever acknowledged the symbolism of the Christian Church by using 3's, 5's and 7's in his design. The number 3 stands for the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. There are 3 entrances, 3 aisles, 3 sections to the picture window and 3 pulpit chairs. The 5's symbolize the 5 senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. There are 5 windows on each side, 5 balcony arches with 5 columns. The 7 represents the days for creation. There are 2 pairs of 7 branch candle holders.



The Presentation in the Temple stained glass window designed by Louis Tiffany, as related in Luke 2: 28-32 reproduces the splendid symbolism of LeFever's classical architecture. Louis Comfort Tiffany (February 18, 1848 – January 17, 1933) was an American artist and designer who worked in the decorative arts and is best known for his work in stained glass. He is the American artist most associated with the Art Nouveau and Aesthetic movements. He trademarked Favrite (from the old French word for handmade) on November 13, 1894. He later used this word to apply to all of his glass, enamel and pottery.



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The focal point of the interior space is a black-lighted Tiffany stained-glass window installed in the Palladian motif behind the pulpit. The memorial window was designed by the renowned Louis Comfort Tiffany, using his famous favrile glass and installed in 1891. It portrays “The Presentation in the Temple“, as related in Luke 2: 28-32 and reproduces the splendid symbolism of LeFever’s classical architecture. There are 3 windows, 3 panels behind the figures, 3 wreaths denoting eternity. The 3 scallop shells represent both baptism and the symbol for pilgrimage. 5 shells are seen when the 2 in the smaller windows are included and the 5 figures stand on 5 alternating tiles representing day and night. The Chi Rho is a monogram of the Greek word for Christ. The 3 rayed nimbus around the infant’s head signifies Divinity. The alter fires with smoke drifting up to heaven are symbolic for the Word of God and signify witnessing for Christ. A Christmas Rose at the top of the column of smoke is a symbol of the Nativity. An old man holding the infant Jesus is Simon, “a just and devout man”; the old women is Anna, the Prophetess. Joseph and Mary are on each end with Joseph carrying 2 doves in his basket as a Temple offering.

In October 2008, the Old Dutch Church was declared a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior and in 2009 the congregation celebrated its 350th anniversary. I recommend a visit to the Old Dutch Church to anyone who enjoys worshipping with different Christian denominations and seeks to have a better understanding of early American church history. For more information, please contact Marvin Schildhorn at mschildhorn@yahoo.com or info@olddutchchurch.org or visit their web site at <http://www.olddutchchurch.org>.

If anyone is interested in publishing a faith article on this web column, please contact Mark Gunderman at gunderman2001@aol.com.

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