

THE CROSS IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR

The front of the cross depicts the crucified Christ with the defeated snake (representing the Devil), which lies at his feet still squirming but already mortally wounded.

In accordance with tradition, Jesus Christ is represented surrounded by instruments of torture: the crown of thorns and the whip; nails, hammer and pliers; the lance which had been driven into Jesus' side; the dice used by the soldiers to divide his garments up amongst themselves.

You can read below the story of Jesus' crucifixion in which these elements appear.

The chalice on the left side reminds us of the Last Supper which Jesus shared with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. Nowadays the "Communion", consisting of a host (a piece of bread) and wine from the chalice, is celebrated by the Christian community to commemorate the Last Supper.

Above Jesus' head, you can read the inscription "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum" (often abbreviated as INRI on crucifixes). This means "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews" and had been written on the cross on which he was crucified. Some additional words on the cross describe Jesus/God: Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace - as well as "Kyrie eleison" the response of the parishioners meaning "Lord have mercy".

The other side of the cross is full of jumbled up, scattered words: murder, lie, slander, envy, wrath, hate, jealousy, stubbornness, faithlessness, revenge, cold-heartedness and many more. These are some of the negative characteristics and sins of mankind for which Jesus died. He bore our guilt and paid for our sins to reconcile us with God.

Please take a moment to think about which personal trait you might be struggling with and place it in the hands of the crucified One.

Jesus sentenced to be crucified – a passage of the Bible from the Gospel according to St. John
(verses 1-6; 16-19; 23-24; 28-30 – translation New International Version)

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" [...]

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews. [...] When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." [...]

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

THE CROSS AT THE ENTRANCE

There is an anecdote attached to the figure of Christ on this cross. Georg Kaessler (1948-1958), who was the dean during the post-war period and thus responsible for the reconstruction of the church, happened to visit a carpenter in a very small town in north-east Bavaria and discovered a figure of Christ lying there in a corner amongst some other pieces of timber.

The carpenter explained to him that this cross used to be situated on the edge of a pathway, exposed to the elements and therefore in dire need of restoration.

Kaessler asked him if he could buy the Christ figure for Aschaffenburg as soon as the carpenter had found time to restore it. The latter agreed and the dean was soon able to pick it up. When Kaessler enquired after the cost, the carpenter replied: "It's free. The Lord is not for sale."

The cross first stood for some time in the dean's accommodation before finding its destination in the rebuilt church and becoming the dominating feature therein. At that time, the altar was situated right at the back of the church (cf. the image in the historical section on the flyer) so that the eyes of the parishioners walking along the central aisle between the rows of benches were drawn automatically to Christ behind the altar.

The "Christuskirche" was renovated in 1972/73. The architect Reinhard Riemerschmid wanted to replace the anonymous long nave with a more communicative seating arrangement and took the bold step of rotating the benches by 90 degrees and placing the altar on the long west side of the building. Just as daring was the new place for the cross: It was brought down from its elevated position at the back of the church and placed in the middle of the nave, directly in front of the parishioners, in keeping with the biblical Verse: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." The feet of the crucified One were now at eye level, making him more accessible.

During the second renovation of the church in 1999/2000, the chancel was enlarged and refurbished. The small cross which used to stand on the altar was converted into a high cross standing in the front of the altar and the larger cross with Christ's figure on it was placed at the entrance along with the old font.