

The history of the Christian oil lamps

EPALLADIO CHRISTIAN OIL LAMPS COLLECTION



*Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my paths.
(Psalm 118. 10)*

“The Light of Christ Shines for All”



An oil lamp dating from the 4C after Christ and bearing the inscription, “The Light of Christ Shines For All” was discovered in the past century during archaeological excavations in Palestine. The use of oil lamps dates from ancient times. In front of the statue of Athena in the Parthenon hung a gold oil lamp which was lit continuously in honour of the goddess. During the times of Moses in Judea an oil lamp of pure gold with seven wicks burned in the Tabernacle of Testimonies. Moses ordered the Hebrews to fill the lamp with only the purest of olive oil (Exodus 10.6 20-21).

The use of oil lamps among the Jews and Gentiles persisted, but took on new meaning with the coming of the Christians, when oil lamps were converted for use in churches and for private shrines in Christian homes. The early Christians called the evening vesper “luxnikon,” or the “lamp” service. The current use of candles is the continuation and survival of ancient oil lamps, which had burned before altars and within sacred places for millennia. This is one custom which preserves the profound Christian symbolism based on the light of Christ which enlightens every human being.

In the joyful light of the oil lamp, Christians see the light of Christ as the guide to salvation, the revelation of the mystery of divine life, and the assurance that in the future, the Good will prevail.

Monogram of Christ ,Chi -Rho



Chrismon, Labarum

Chi and Rho are the first two letters (**XP**) of "Christ" in Greek **XPICTOΣ**. (*Christos*). Sometimes it is called the Monogram of Christ or Chrismon or Labarum. While it was used very early by persecuted Christians in the catacombs, when Constantine was struggling to become emperor, he used the symbol at the front of his armies and was victorious.

The Chi-Rho is often shown with the Greek letters **Alpha (A)** and **Omega (Ω)** (lower case **ω** or upper case **Ω**), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

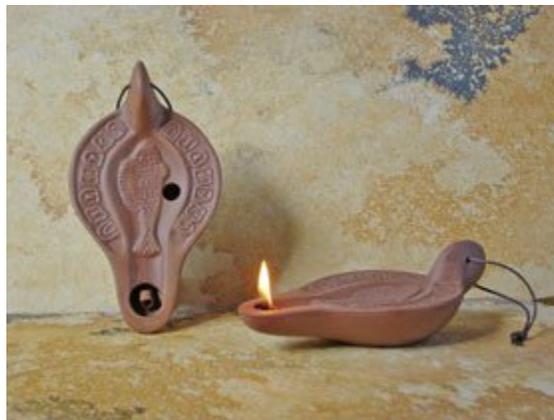
Jesus refers to himself: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Revelation 22:13).





Monogram of Christ, Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican, undated. Notice the Alpha and Omega symbols as part of the Chi-Rho monogram

The History of the Christian Fish Symbol



The fish's first known use as a Christian religious symbol was sometime within the first three centuries AD. Christians began using the Greek word for "fish" as an anagram/acronym for "Jesus Christ God's Son, Savior"

We do not know whether the story above is true but we do know that the fish's first known use as a Christian religious symbol was sometime within the first three centuries AD. Possibly around the 16th century Christians began using the Greek word *ichthys* for "fish". Ichthys is the most commonly used word in the New Testament for fish.

Ichthys consists of five letters from the Greek alphabet: I-ch-th-y-s. When these five letters are used as initials for five words, we obtain this Christian Declaration: **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **Y**ios **S**oter. This is an acrostic for *'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior*

I	Iota	the first letter in the Greek word <u>I</u> esous	Jesus
X	Chi	the first letter in the Greek word <u>C</u> hristos	Christ
Q	Theta	the first letter in the Greek word <u>T</u> heos	Of God
U	Upsilon	the first letter in the Greek word <u>Y</u> ios (Huiois)	Son
S	Sigma	the first letter in the Greek word <u>S</u> oter	Savior

The fish symbol is an ancient one in Christianity, representing both Jesus and his followers. Jesus had told Peter, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). But the fish through an acrostic also became a symbol of Jesus himself. The ICHTHUS symbol helped Christians identify one another as believers.



Two fish and anchor in the catacomb of Domitilla in Rome.
It is the epitaph for one named Antonia. Notice the presence of another important early church symbol -- the anchor -- located between the two fish.

Another symbol used by the early Christians on oil lamps, a common household object at the time, consisting of the Greek cross with abbreviated Greek words for Jesus Christ IC-XP (abbreviations indicated horizontally), and NI-KA meaning "conqueror."



Celebratory Hymns

He was the lamp, burning and shining,
and you were pleased to rejoice for a time in his light.
(John 5. 35)

For you, Lord, are my lamp,
and the Lord will lighten my darkness.
(II Kings 22. 29)

God is light, and darkness in him is none.
(I John 1.5)

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my paths.
(Psalm 118. 105)

...for the darkness is passing away
and the true light is already shining
(I John 2. 8)

Then again Jesus spoke to them saying,
“I am the light of the world
he who follows me will not walk in darkness
but will have the light of life.”
(John 8. 12)

Yet for a short time the light is with you,
walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you
and he who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.
while you have the light, believe in the light so that you may become sons of light. **(John 12. 35)**

Send forth your light and your truth
these guided me and led to your holy mountain
and to your tabernacles.
(Psalm 42. 3)

And the Lord spoke to Moses saying...
“You will make me a sanctuary,
and I will make myself seen among you
and you will make it for me in accordance with all that
I show you on the mountain
the model of the tent and the model of all its furnishings...
and you will make a lamp-stand from pure gold...
and you will make its lamps seven in number
and you will set up the lamps
and they will shine from one face...
and you will make an altar of incense
and when Aaron lights the lamps at evening
he will offer incense on it...
and the cloud covered the tent of witness
and the tent was filled with the glory of the Lord.”
(Exodus 25. 8, 31, 37; 30. 1, 8; 40. 34)

And I saw the holy city Jerusalem new...
and the city had no need of the sun or of the moon
to shine on it.
for the glory of God illuminates it
and its lamp is the Lamb.
(Revelation 21. 2, 23)

For you are all sons of light and sons of day.
(Thessalonians 5. 5)

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