

A detailed mosaic of Christ Pantocrator, the central figure of the image. Christ is seated on a throne, wearing a red robe over a white garment, with a halo featuring a cross. He holds a golden scepter in his right hand and a book in his left. Two angels with large, colorful wings flank him, holding up a circular frame around Christ. The background is a golden mosaic with a pattern of small, stylized stars. The entire scene is set within a larger, ornate frame of golden mosaic with decorative elements.

Westminster Cathedral – Key Stage 4

Design and Decoration

Context

1. Church Design
2. Church Ornaments
3. Byzantine Style
4. Mosaics





Church Design

In every Catholic church the congregation gathers and faces towards the altar for the celebration of Mass, the heart of Christian worship. There is no one architectural style for churches, but all are designed to enable this focus.



Church Ornaments

Aside from the main altar, Catholic churches will normally have other focal points for prayer. Traditionally these include a crucifix (an image of the crucified Christ), a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Our Lady) and Stations of the Cross (Jesus' Journey to his Crucifixion). Representations of other saints and biblical scenes are also common. In the Cathedral many of these are depicted in mosaic on the walls and vaults of the Chapels.



Byzantine Style

There are no stained glass windows in Westminster Cathedral as mosaic and marble are central to the Byzantine style of decoration.

Internal decoration of the Cathedral began at the beginning of the 20th century, as soon as the main fabric of the building was complete. Addition of the marble (the floors, columns and walls) was virtually completed by the late 1960s.

In the early years of decoration much of the marble came from ancient, reopened quarries in Greece and Italy. At present the marbles come from over 120 different countries in all, some having been chosen carefully for each area or chapel that they adorn. For example, most of the marble in St Patrick's Chapel was sourced from quarries in Ireland.



Mosaics

Mosaics are formed by fixing small pieces of marble, terracotta, stone or glass onto a prepared surface. The mosaic decorations in Westminster Cathedral however, are still a work in progress. The earliest mosaics were installed in 1902/3 and the latest in 2019. Even so, areas of bare brick still remain, including the massive dome vaults, which regularly prompt questions and comments from visitors.

Among the saints depicted are the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, St Joan of Arc and England's most recent saint, John Henry Newman.

Tasks

1. Explain two ways in which the design and decoration of catholic churches influence ways in which Catholics worship.

Thank You To The Following For Contributing To This Resource

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