

Devotion to Jesus

The passion of Christ is depicted in a late 15th-century stained glass window in the north-east chapel of the church of St James at St Kew. The story is told in 12 scenes from Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on an ass to his betrayal, death and resurrection (below). Four scenes (right) show how the artist has captured the drama of each episode.

Although we think of the medieval Church as venerating saints, its chief veneration was given to God, especially in the person of Jesus. His image, sitting on a rainbow in judgment, was often painted above the chancel arch in churches. A sculpture of him hanging on the Cross stood on the rood



screen, or was suspended above it, in every parish church. Most solemnly of all, when a priest celebrated mass, the bread and wine used in the celebration were believed to become his real body and blood – holier than anything else in the world.

Devotion to Jesus perhaps became even stronger during the 14th and 15th centuries.

Chapels were dedicated to him as Christ, Jesus, or the Saviour. In Cornwall these included ones at Padstow and Polruan near Fowey. His name, in the Greek form IHS, was often painted on walls, and special masses of the Name of Jesus, sometimes with musical material, were celebrated in his honour in some churches, especially on Fridays.

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Top left: The Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples. Jesus, in red, takes bread and prepares to cut it with a knife. Under his arm, wearing green, is St John the Evangelist, shown as younger than the other disciples.

Top right: The Betrayal. Jesus and his disciples are in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas (in blue) leads soldiers to them and identifies Jesus (in faded red) by kissing him. Peter (in green) tries to resist and draws his sword.

Bottom left: The Trial. The soldier's bring Jesus to Pontius Pilate (sitting on a throne) who reluctantly agrees to his execution, but washes his hands of the matter.

Bottom right: The Flaggellation. Jesus is tied to a pillar and flogged by men with whips, before being taken to execution.

