



## Introduction

Finding ways to connect with the worldwide family of the Christian Faith has been a growing area of interest both in churches and schools. Such windows into the multi-cultural and international practice of Christianity in today's world are a vital resource to give us a true picture of what it means to be a global Christian in the 21st century. For Christians, this is of course also important evidence of the continuing truth and power of the story of Jesus to influence lives and transform societies.

In [A-cross the World](#), published by Barnabas in 2005, this connection to the big picture was through the symbol of the cross. Differing Christian traditions and various Christian faith communities around the world are united by this one key and central sign of a shared faith. This universal cross has at the same time been interpreted, designed and adapted to express a unique, local expression of that same faith. With each cross comes a particular story of how each community experiences God's love and puts it into action.

## Preparation

Each of the crosses in this new series supplements the 40 crosses that can already be found in the book [A-cross the World](#). With each there is a Bible link with wondering questions, background information about the cross, stories to share and craft ideas to make a version of the cross - providing enough material for a session with children in a church group, in the classroom or at an all-age event. There is also a picture provided for each cross that could be printed or used in a PowerPoint presentation in order to provide a talking point for groups or as a focus for collective worship.

This cross belongs to a series of new crosses and, as with the first collection, the overall aim remains the same, namely:

- to enable children and adults to see the cross through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why this single, historical event continues to exercise such an influence worldwide;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived purposeful lives because of their faith in a Christ, who died and who is risen - symbolised by the cross.

## Development

### Bible link

*After that, I heard the Lord shout, 'Come to Jerusalem, you men chosen to destroy the city. And bring your weapons!' I saw six men come through the north gate of the temple, each one holding a*

*deadly weapon. A seventh man dressed in a linen robe was with them, and he was carrying things to write with. The men went into the temple and stood by the bronze altar. The brightness of God's glory then left its place above the statues of the winged creatures inside the temple and moved to the entrance. The Lord said to the man in the linen robe, 'Walk through the city of Jerusalem and mark the forehead of anyone who is truly upset and sad about the disgusting things that are being done here.'*

### **Ezekiel 9:1-4**

Ezekiel was a prophet, who had a series of mysterious visions while he was in exile in Babylon. Through them, God was showing his people why they had been captured and why Jerusalem had to be destroyed. They had failed to stay faithful to the Lord and had gone after other gods. In this passage the coming destruction of the holy city was imminent but those who had remained faithful are marked by a special sign on their foreheads.

### **Wondering about this Bible story**

- I wonder what it is like to have visions from God. When it happened to Ezekiel, he was completely overwhelmed and couldn't speak for days.
- I wonder how God felt when he decided that he had no choice but to allow the Babylonians to destroy the city of Jerusalem.
- I wonder what the mark was like that the man in the linen robe put on the foreheads of the faithful. Was it perhaps invisible to the naked eye and could be seen only by God, like the sign of the cross, with which believers are marked at their baptism?

### **The story of this cross**

Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the past, some Jewish scholars have attached a theological meaning to this, namely that this letter represents the fulfilment of the revealed word of God.

The letter can be written as an 'x' or a ' ' or a 'T'. The prophet Ezekiel (in chapter 9) uses the imagery of this last letter as a way of urging people to remain faithful to God. They are symbolically sealed as God's chosen people with the mark of a Tau on their foreheads.

Although the last letter of modern Hebrew is no longer cross-shaped as described, the early Christian writers commenting on the Hebrew scriptures used its Greek translation, in which Tau was transcribed as a 'T'. For Christians, this T represented the cross of Christ, who they believed was the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises.

During the Middle Ages the religious community of Anthony the Hermit, with which St Francis was familiar, was very involved in the care of lepers. These men used a Christian cross that was shaped like a T. After his conversion, St Francis worked with these people and he accepted this T as his own crest. For St Francis the T stood for lifelong fidelity to Christ and it was a symbol of his pledge to serve the least and the last, like the lepers, who were the outcasts of his day.



The imagery of the Tau was also picked up by Pope Innocent the Third in 1215, when he exhorted Christians to be those who should be known by the mark of the Tau on their foreheads. He was alluding to Ezekiel's prophecy mentioned earlier. St Francis often told his brother friars that they should stretch out their arms and make the shape of a Tau cross as a way of saying they were committed to being Christ-like people, who would model the compassionate love of God in Christ to their dying day. Followers of St Francis today, both lay and religious, often wear this Tau Cross as an exterior sign of their loyalty to the way of Jesus.

The Tau Cross shape is probably the actual shape of cross on which Jesus was crucified. There would have been one upright post and one cross piece, which is the part Jesus was forced to carry on his way to execution.

The Tau Cross is worn by those who belong to the Franciscan order of monks, following the rule of St Francis.

Today, there are estimated to be over a half-million Franciscans worldwide in the various denominations of the Christian family. Anglican Franciscans are divided among five provinces worldwide. This family currently includes First and Second Order Brothers and Sisters - who live a celibate life in their respective communities - and the Third Order. The Third Order consists of men and women, single or in committed relationships, who, although following ordinary professions, are called to a dedicated life of service to God through prayer, study and work. Like the First Order, Tertiaries make a lifetime commitment to live a Rule of Life in company with the sisters and brothers in their Order.

The three aims of the Third Order are:

- To make the Lord God known and loved everywhere
- To spread the spirit of fellowship
- To live simply.

For more information, visit [this website](#).

St Francis is remembered particularly on 4th October. Here is St Francis' prayer before the crucifix, which is still in use today:

*Most High  
glorious God,  
enlighten the darkness  
of my heart.  
Give me  
right faith,  
sure hope  
and perfect charity.  
Fill me with understanding  
and knowledge*

*that I may fulfil  
your command.*

### **Crafting the cross**

The Tau Cross also looks a bit like a footpath signpost. Develop this idea by using it as a focus for the craft, in which the two arms of the cross at the top are labelled 'the Old' and 'the New'.

As a group, make a large version of the Tau Cross. You could use a tall carpet roll painted appropriately and, through slots cut at the top, slide a long piece of strong card or a piece of light wood to form the cross piece, sticking out equally left and right.

In groups, create symbols in different colours to represent Old and New Testament Bible stories and hang on either sides of the cross - namely, to the left, where the Old Testament prophets are represented, hang images of the different ways in which Jesus was predicted to come. A second set of similar images should then be hung on the opposite side as fulfilment, each of them linked to something that happened at Christmas or in the life of Jesus.

Here are some of the Old Testament images and their New Testament fulfilments:

1. A crown (a new King was prophesied by Micah) - balanced by the crown of thorns which Jesus wore at Easter.
2. A branch (a Righteous Branch was prophesied by Jeremiah) - balanced by the cross which is made from the branch of a tree, on which Jesus was crucified.
3. A baby (a child named Immanuel is prophesied by Isaiah) - balanced by Jesus as the baby in the manger in Bethlehem.
4. A dove (God's special Messiah, who would be the Prince of Peace according to Isaiah) - balanced by the dove which represents the Holy Spirit, who came upon Mary and then later to Jesus at his baptism.
5. A sheep (in the second part of Isaiah the special Messiah is described as a sheep that had to be slaughtered) - balanced by the sheep and shepherds who visited the baby Jesus; Jesus himself was called the Lamb of God by his cousin John and of course Jesus later described himself as the Good Shepherd.
6. A special man (Daniel saw someone like the Son of Man coming from heaven) - balanced by Jesus himself who became human just like us.

This signpost idea for the Tau Cross clearly shows how the path from the Bible past to the future is continuous and how what happens in the New Testament is directly linked to what is described in the Old. Indeed, it is a path that stretches back to the beginning of time and forward to the end of the world.

### **Cross reflection**

Devotion to the five wounds of Christ on the cross was popular all over Europe in the Middle Ages. In the year 1206, St Francis had been moved to change his life when, during a prayer before a



crucifix at San Damiano outside Assisi, he heard the voice of Jesus telling him to mend the chapel where it hung. The following is an English translation of a Latin prayer at this period:

*Behold, O good and most sweet Jesus, I fall upon my knees before Thee, and with most fervent desire beg and beseech Thee that Thou wouldst impress upon my heart a lively sense of faith, hope and charity, true repentance for my sins had a firm resolve to make amends. And with deep affection and grief, I reflect upon Thy five wounds, having before my eyes that which the prophet David spoke about Thee, O good Jesus: 'they have pierced my hands and feet; they have counted all my bones.' Amen.*