

The Cosmological Vision of Holy Mass

*The Theological Significance of
Joseph Macklin's Masterpiece*



**ST. JOHN the
EVANGELIST**

**CATHOLIC
CHURCH**

Est. 1856 | Jackson, MI



Return to the Tradition of Sacred Art

A new mural spans the apse of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Jackson, Michigan. The artist, **Joseph Macklin**, spent nearly twelve months in 2025 completing the 750 square foot apse painting, working from four levels of scaffolding, soaring thirty-two feet above the sanctuary floor. The project followed several years of planning and collaboration between the artist and the parish, which had long desired to restore a fuller expression of sacred art within the church.

St. John Church, built in 1856 and the oldest church building still in use in the Diocese of Lansing, carries a deep heritage. Over time, various renovations had simplified some of its original artistic richness. The parish sought to renew that heritage by commissioning a mural that would visually express the depth and meaning of the Catholic liturgy. The goal was not merely aesthetic restoration, but a return to the tradition of sacred art that lifts the mind and heart toward God. The mural was envisioned as a way to help the faithful enter more deeply into the mysteries celebrated at every Mass.



Glory Unveiled

To accomplish this, the parish centered the mural on two great themes of the faith: the **Wedding Feast of the Lamb** and the **Paschal Mystery**. Together, these themes form a unified vision of what takes place in the **Holy Mass**, where heaven and earth meet and the saving events of Christ's life are made present to the faithful.

Macklin began with the most foundational elements. After months of sketching, planning color palettes, and determining the placement of every figure, the first brushstroke was placed in February 2025.

THE WORK OFTEN REQUIRED EARLY MORNINGS AND LATE NIGHTS. AS HE WORKED, JOSEPH COULD OFTEN FEEL GRACES GIVEN: THERE WERE TIMES WHEN HE WOULD THINK, HOURS OF WORK MUST HAVE PASSED, ONLY TO REALIZE THAT LESS THAN AN HOUR HAD GONE BY. THE LORD MULTIPLIED HIS TIME ON SUCH OCCASIONS!

AT THE VERY TOP OF THE MURAL IS THE HAND OF GOD, SYMBOLIZING THE FATHER'S BLESSING AND PROVIDENCE. FROM THIS APEX, THE COMPOSITION UNFOLDS WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDING AND THE LAMB OF GOD STANDING IN TRIUMPH — COMPLETING THE REPRESENTATION OF THE HOLY TRINITY.



THE TRINITY: FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT



THE FOUR
LIVING
CREATURES:
AN EAGLE -
ST. JOHN
A MAN -
ST. MATTHEW
A LION -
ST. MARK
AN OX -
ST. LUKE

THE SEVEN
SEALS (REV 6)

THE ARCHANGELS:
LEFT: ST. GABRIEL, CENTER: ST. MICHAEL,
RIGHT: ST. RAPHAEL



THE BELOVED FIGURES ARE, LEFT SIDE (L TO R): 1. ST. ISAAC JOGUES, 2. ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, 3. ST. JOHN PAUL THE GREAT, 4. ST. JOSEPHINE BAHKITA, 5. BL. SOLANUS CASEY, 6. ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE, 7. ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE, 8. ST. CARLO ACUTIS, 9. ST. FAUSTINA KOWALSKI, 10. ST. KATERI TEKAKWITHA, 11. SERVANT OF GOD MICHELLE DUPPONG, AND 12. ST. JOAN OF ARC.

Communion of Saints

Surrounding the Trinity is a radiant assembly of 24 saints, the majority of whom were chosen by parishioners during a parish-wide survey. The remaining saints were chosen because of their regional importance, their intercession for the great afflictions of our time, and their representation that the saints come “*..from every nation, race, people, and tongue.*” (Rev 7:9)

Together, these saints form a visible reminder that the saints worship with the Church at every Mass and that we, too, are called to become like them.



ON THE RIGHT SIDE ARE (L TO R): 13. ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA, 14. OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, 15. ST. MOTHER TERESA, 16. ST. JOSEPH, 17. ST. ANNE, 18. ST. PATRICK, 19. ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, 20. ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, 21. ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, 22. BLESSED FR. MICHAEL J. MCGIVNEY, 23. ST. MARK JI TIANXIANG, AND 24. ST. PADRE PIO.





Paschal Mystery Made Present

The lower apse brings the **Paschal Mystery** into the streets of Jackson itself. **Holy Week** unfolds across familiar landmarks: **Palm Sunday** beneath a distinctive tree, the **Last Supper** within an arched building, the **Agony in the Garden**, and the **sorrowful path of Christ** through the city. The **Crucifixion** stands at the center, with Mary and John at the foot of the cross and water flowing from Christ's side, echoing Ezekiel's vision of the life-giving river flowing from the temple. To the right, one finds the **placing of Jesus in the tomb** and the **Resurrection** dawns as Mary Magdalene encounters the Risen Lord.



1. PALM SUNDAY



2. THE LAST SUPPER



3. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN



4. VIA DOLOROSA



5. CRUCIFIXION



6. PLACING IN THE TOMB



7. RESURRECTION



Details to Draw Near

Throughout the mural, Macklin incorporated subtle details — crosses, flames, patterns, and local symbols — meant to be discovered gradually, rewarding both close study and distant contemplation.

The completed work stands as a testament to faith, craftsmanship, and the enduring beauty of sacred art. It invites all who enter St. John Church to lift their hearts toward the mysteries God has prepared for His people and to encounter the Holy Mass with renewed reverence and wonder.

THE SACRAMENTS AND THE SACRED MYSTERIES OF JESUS ARE RELEVANT AND APPLY TO US NOW IN OUR TIME AND PLACE JUST AS MUCH AS THEY APPLY TO THE PEOPLE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL. THAT'S WHY MACKLIN INCORPORATED THE JACKSON COUNTY BUILDING, JACKSON CITY HALL, THE BLAKE BUILDING, AND MANY OTHER JACKSON LOCATIONS, INCLUDING OVER 20 BRIGHT WALLS MURALS.



SEVERAL OF THE CHURCHES OF OUR DIOCESE ARE REPRESENTED WITHIN THE MURAL, WITH ST. JOHN, "THE MOTHER CHURCH OF JACKSON," SHOWN HERE, COMPLETE WITH THE QUAIN TOUCH OF THE OUTDOOR NATIVITY SCENE.



THE WHOLE COSMOS IS REPRESENTED ALONG THE BOTTOM OF THE APSE WITH A BUCK AND A DOE AND SEVERAL OTHER LIVING CREATURES. WATERS FLOW FROM THE CROSS, GIVING LIFE TO ALL LIVING THINGS.



HERE, THE UPPER ROOM IS AGLOW WITH THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT DURING PENTECOST.





The Revealing

The apse painting was first revealed to the public during the Christmas Eve Mass on December 24, 2025. The awe that is noted on the faces of parishioners upon their first viewing is the same awe that the realities of the apse are meant to inspire within us! When we enter into contemplation of what truly happens during Mass, we are overwhelmed by the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness of our Lord!



In adoration of the Lamb of God, holy Mass is the portal by which heaven and earth meet. Together, those two pieces, the Wedding Feast of the Lamb and the Paschal Mystery are entitled **“The Cosmological Vision of Holy Mass,”** because there’s something cosmic here that takes in all of creation.



There’s a timelessness when we walk through the Church doors. And so Joseph Macklin’s sacred art is meant to make us more palpably aware of these supernatural realities to which we are joined when we celebrate Mass.

A HUGE THANK YOU to all our parishioners
and other benefactors who contributed to make this happen!
Your continued support will allow us to move on to Phase 2,
which will give the sanctuary new flooring and create a reredos
to frame a new tabernacle on the high altar and complement
the apse mural!



Photos by Valerie Hendrickson