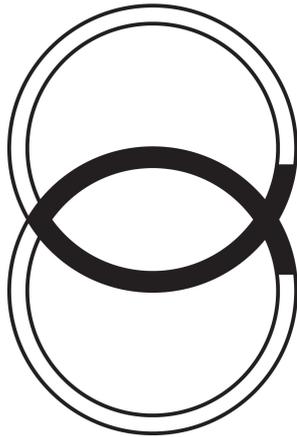




Sign of the Fish

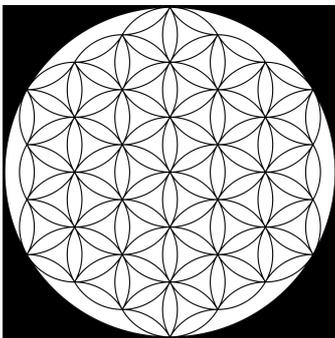
The Sign of the Fish (Ichthys)

The esoteric geometry of the fish shape derives from the “vesica piscis,” literally meaning “bladder of a fish” in Latin. The shape is created by the intersection of two circles with the same radius, intersecting in such a way that the center of each circle lies on the circumference of the other.



The upper circle represents spirit; the lower circle represents matter. The fish shape at the intersection symbolizes the mystical union of the two. The earliest known use of this geometry is in the Osireion, or Temple of Osiris, at Abydos, Egypt, in which a set of multiple intersecting circles—known as the *Flower of Life*—are carved into a granite column. The vesica piscis is one element of this complex geometry.

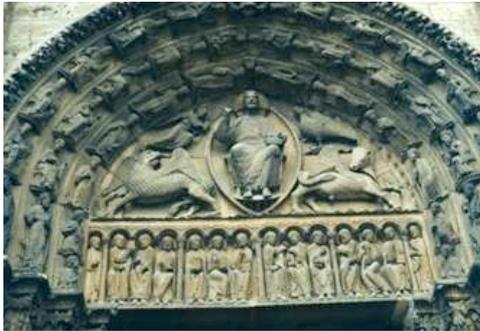
The main temple is dated to circa 1300 BCE but the Osireion section has been dated



to at least 2300 BCE. In Egyptian mythology the god Horus walked on water and was known, among other epithets, as “the fisher.” Centuries before Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 332 BCE, the Greeks had traveled in Egypt and assimilated much of their philosophy. Pythagoras journeyed in Egypt around 550 BCE and it is thought that it was there he learned of the “Flower of Life” geometry from which the vesica piscis derives.

The *Sign of the Fish* was later borrowed from the Greeks by early Christians. It was used as a secret sign representing their purported historical savior, Jesus Christ. The symbol has been found in Roman catacombs as early as the first century CE. It is based on an acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ, Ichthys, which is Greek for fish: "Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ", (Iēsous Christos, Theou Yios, Sōtēr), which translates as "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." The significance was to represent that the Christ worshipped by Christians was the enlightened union of spirit and flesh. The New Testament mythical accounts of Jesus provide several associations with fish; some of Jesus' apostles were fishermen and in the Biblical account Jesus commissioned the apostles with the words “I will make you fishers of men.” Christians in the first

few centuries CE, during their purported persecution by the Roman Empire, used the symbol to mark secret meeting places and also used it to distinguish friend from foe. When a Christian met a stranger in the road the Christian would draw one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both knew they were in good company.



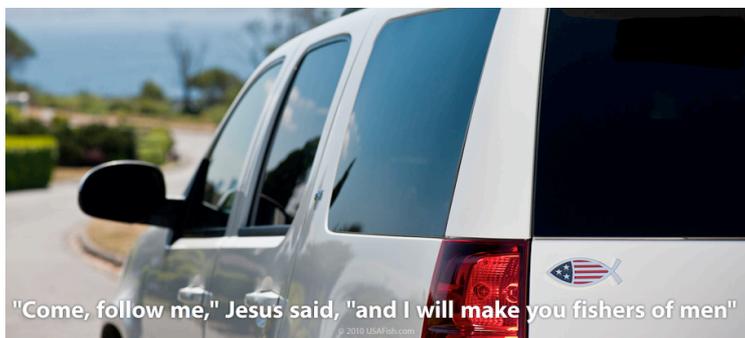
In the Middle Ages the Greco-Egyptian *Sign of the Fish* was incorporated into many churches and cathedrals. The photograph is of the 'Last Judgment' above the West Royal portal of Chartres Cathedral.

Other uses for the *Sign of the Fish* include illuminated manuscripts, such as this beautiful



drawing from the 'Codex Bruchsal', a German book dating to circa 1220 CE, now in the *Badische Landesbibliothek*, Karlsruhe. The image of the Christian savior is surrounded by the vesica piscis with the four beasts of the Apocalypse in each corner. These four images actually have an astrological significance: The beast with the human face correlates with Aquarius (Matthew), the lion with Leo (Mark), the ox with Taurus (Luke) and the eagle with Aquila (John). Jesus' twelve apostles represented the twelve signs of the zodiac.

Present-day badges, bumper-stickers and business-card uses of the fish symbol show that the bearer is a practicing Christian.



In summary, the *Sign of the Fish*, or Ichthys, has had a long and illustrious history, beginning with the ancient Egyptians, before being introduced

to Pythagoras and ultimately adopted by Christianity as the symbol for Jesus Christ.

