

## The Shield of Sir Gawain

The pentangle that Sir Gawain adopted as his coat of arms on his shield, gold on a red background, can be interpreted several different way, depending on the context.

In the story, Sir Gawain's adoption of the pentangle as his own personal symbol makes the pentangle yet another religious icon adorning a knight's possessions, as Sir Gawain wore the symbol on his person: "On shield and coat in view/ He bore that emblem bright" ("Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Line 636). The five-pointed star dressed the front of his shield and the arm of his coat, and was therefore evident that he held high regard for its symbolism and meaning.



Religiously, the pentacle's five points have been known to represent the five wounds of Christ, symbolize the Star of Bethlehem, the five virtues of knighthood: "generosity, courtesy, chastity, chivalry and piety" ("Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," Line 663).

This pagan, or religious, symbol therefore represents virtues and ideal characteristics of a knight, and its presence on his armor and clothing serves as reminders and assurance of his honor and virtues as a knight.

The pentangle was also known to represent the five joys of Mother Mary: The Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Assumption (Rose 110). As Gawain is a knight of the Church, it is likely that the pentangle represents all of these things; however, foremost are the five joys of Mary, as Sir Gawain is specifically a Knight of the Blessed Virgin. He has her image painted on the inside of his shield so he may look upon it and retain his knightly virtues.

Adapted from: <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/religiousobjects/pentangle>