The subjects of the five windows on the north side of the nave in St. Joseph’s Basilica are all taken from the Infancy narrative.

The first window depicts the Betrothal of Mary and Joseph. For centuries artists have placed the betrothal ceremony outside in the vicinity of the Temple. In this window we see Joseph about to place a ring on Mary’s finger while the priest of the Temple officiates.

Mary is dressed all in white, a sign of her purity and virginity. Joseph holds a flower, a reference to the legendary flower that bloomed out of his staff to indicate that he was the one chosen to be the spouse of Mary. In the middle the priest is identified by his liturgical robe as well as the headpiece that artists commonly used to identify the High Priest of the Temple.
The Annunciation

(Luke 1:26-26)
This window, the second of the six windows on the north side of the nave in St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts the Annunciation, a scene beloved by artists. In this version, Mary rises from her prayers in humility at the approach of the angel Gabriel who stands on a cloud.

Mary’s white dress is covered with a cloak of blue, the color of divinity, a sign that she has been chosen by God who appears as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Between Mary and the angel is a flower in bloom, a detail found in practically every version of the Annunciation. Scholars disagree on its significance but it could stand for Jesus, the flower that will bloom from the rod of Jesse.
The Visitation

(Luke 1:39-42)
The scene of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is depicted in the third window on the north side of St. Joseph’s basilica. Artists traditionally depict only the two pregnant women but in a church dedicated to St. Joseph, he accompanies Mary on the visit.

Usually artists depict the two women standing together or even embracing but here Elizabeth is shown kneeling before the younger woman as if to recall her words, “and how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Mary guides the hand of Elizabeth to feel the child in her womb.
The Presentation

(Luke 2: 34-35)

The fourth window from the rear on the north side of St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts the scene of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple according to the law of Moses. In the temple they meet Simeon, a just and devout old man who had long waited to see the Christ.

Simeon has taken the Infant Jesus into his arms and looks up to heaven as if to utter his famous words, “Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord.” St. Joseph, the patron saint of the Basilica, stands prominently in the center but looks at his young wife with concern. Simeon has also said to Mary that “thy own soul a sword shall pierce.” Artists often use a heart to depict a soul, and Mary’s hands are crossed over her heart as she hears the sad prophecy.
The Flight into Egypt

*Matthew 2:13-15*

The fifth window from the rear on the north side of St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts the Flight into Egypt. St. Joseph carries his carpenter’s axe over his shoulder, a sign that he will ply his trade in Egypt to support his family. Mary sits astride the Ass and holds her infant son securely in her arms in the way depicted by artists for centuries.

The Flight into Egypt is the last scene in the infancy narrative in St. Joseph’s Basilica. It shows the Holy Family escaping from the murderous designs of King Herod. When he cannot find the newborn King, Herod will order the massacre of the innocents. The murdered children or Holy Innocents are not shown in this window but scripture tells us that Jesus will return from Egypt and share the same fate.
St. Peter Receives the Keys

(Matthew 16:15-19)

The first window on the south side of the nave in St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts Jesus handing the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter who had just expressed his belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

St. Peter is usually depicted by artists as an older man, balding and with a short, stubby beard. Here he kneels before Jesus with one hand on his heart, the symbol of love, and the other pointing toward the earth to symbolize the authority to bind and loose on earth. Traditionally in art, gold and silver are the colors of the keys that Jesus presents. Almost invariably, the presence of Peter in sacred art signifies the Church.
The second window on the south side of the nave in St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts Jesus healing a blind man. The gospels record a number of cases where Jesus healed a blind man but this particular instance is only found in Mark’s gospel.

Here we see that Jesus has taken the man outside the village of Bethsaida, represented by the buildings in the background. We see Jesus taking the man by the hand while applying the spittle to his eyes with his other hand. Actually, Mark’s gospel records that Jesus had to lay his hands on the man’s eyes a second time in order that he could see all things plainly.
The third window in the nave on the south side of St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha had invited Jesus to dine with them. Mary “seated herself at the Lord’s feet, and listened to his word. But Mary was busy with much serving.”

In our window Mary sits below Jesus with her hands clasped as if in prayer. Jesus offers her a blessing with his upraised hand. Martha stands behind holding a bowl full of food and seems about to ask Jesus to tell Mary to help with the serving.
Jesus Heals the Widow’s Son

(Luke 7: 11-15)

The fourth window in the nave on the south side of St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts another healing miracle. At the gate of a town Jesus encounters a widow whose only son is about to be buried. He has compassion on the woman and restores her son to life.

In our window the funeral procession and entourage has been eliminated and our attention is just drawn to the widow and her young son portrayed here as little more than a boy. As in other windows on this side of the church the artist shows Jesus using his hands to heal and express compassion.
The Resurrected Jesus Meets Mary Magdalen

(John 20: 14-17)

The fifth window from the rear on the south side of St. Joseph’s Basilica depicts the encounter of Mary Magdalen with the resurrected Lord in a garden. Mary is sometimes called the apostle to the Apostles because our Lord told her to tell them what she has seen.

At first sight this window seems to depict a meeting of Jesus with his mother but certain details indicate otherwise. The staff that Jesus holds is often used by artists to explain why Mary might have mistaken him for a gardener. Jesus places his right hand on Mary’s outstretched arm to prevent her from touching him, and his left hand is gently placed behind her head.
The great feast of Christmas is given a place of honor in the transept of St. Joseph’s Basilica. It marks the beginning of the life of Jesus on earth while across the way we see the Ascension which marks the end of his earthly mission.

In our window we see the Christ child lying in the manger which resembles an altar complete with the white cloth that always covers the altar. Mary and the shepherds worship the child in the same way that participants in the Mass worship the Eucharistic host. St. Joseph as the patron of the Basilica stands in the center. Above the stable we see the star of Bethlehem.
The Crucifixion

(John 19: 23-27)

When St. Joseph’s Basilica was rebuilt in 1920 the altar would have been against the back wall. Therefore, it was so appropriate to place a window depicting the Sacrifice on Calvary above the altar where that sacrifice was offered during the Consecration of the Mass. When the priest raised the host, eyes could be lifted to Christ on the Cross.

There are three other figures in this window. Mary Magdalen kneels in anguish at the foot of the Cross while Mary and John, the beloved disciple, stand on each side. Perhaps our artist has depicted the moment in John’s gospel when Jesus asks them to extend their caring love to each other.
The Ascension

(Luke 24:30-32)

The windows in the transept of St. Joseph’s Basilica mark the beginning and the end of the life of Jesus on earth. On the one hand, we have the Nativity or birth, and on the other, we have the Ascension, his final moment with his Apostles.

We see Jesus rising into the heavens with his arms outstretched in blessing. In the foreground St. Peter kneels in the center flanked by a young beardless John on the left and his brother James on the right. These three had also been present at the Transfiguration where Jesus had also appeared in glory.
The Good Shepherd

(John 10: 11-16)

If we turn from the altar, we will see two windows, one on each side of the transept. Each window represents a popular devotional image of Jesus. On the left, we see the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, one of the oldest in Christian art. The image of the Good Shepherd is the most common symbolic representation found in the early Christian art found in the Catacombs.

Jesus stands holding a sheep with one hand and a shepherd's staff in the other. Other sheep surround Him.

“I know mine and mine know me.”
Christ Knocking at the Door

(Revelations 3: 19-21)
This second window at the rear of the transept represents “Christ Knocking at the Door”. This window is based on the a painting by William Holman Hunt called “The Light of the World.” It became extremely popular in the years before the Basilica was rebuilt in 1920.

Jesus stands at the door knocking. In his painting William Holman Hunt omitted the doorknob to indicate that the door can only be opened from the inside. We must open our hearts and souls when the Lord knocks.
Christ presents His Sacred Heart to Margaret Mary

(John 15: 9-11)

As we leave St. Joseph’s we can look up and behold high in the choir loft an apparition of Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary. In this window the artist shows the holy nun kneeling before an altar but instead of venerating the Host in the tabernacle she sees Jesus himself. It is a vision because he is standing on a cloud. He points to his heart which is encircled with the Crown of Thorns.

It is the traditional image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Long before Margaret Mary’s visions in the seventeenth century, the church had always equated the love of Jesus with his heart, the symbol of love. Even before St. Joseph’s was rebuilt in 1920, images of the Sacred Heart were required in every church. Coincidentally, Margaret Mary was finally canonized in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV.
The Baptism of Christ

(Matthew 3: 13-17)

Enter the Baptistery

A depiction of the Baptism of Jesus is traditional in baptisteries.

St. Joseph Basilica was rebuilt in the 1920’s when it was customary to place the baptistery near the church entrance. Just as the public life of Jesus began with his Baptism, so too does our Christian life begin at Baptism.

In our window we see Jesus standing in the Jordan while St. John pours water on his head. The Spirit of God, symbolized by the dove, appears above Jesus. John’s staff takes the form of a cross and bears an inscription, “Ecce Agnus Dei,” or “Behold the Lamb of God” whose sacrifice on the Cross will take away the sins of the world.
The Immaculate Conception refers not to the Virgin Birth but to the conception of Mary who through the grace of God was conceived free of the stain of original sin. The window is in the Baptistry because it marks the beginning of Mary's existence.

Artists found it difficult to find a way to depict this sublime spiritual doctrine. How do you depict a soul conceived without original sin? Eventually, they settled on the image presented in the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation: “And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” (Apocalypse 12: 1)

In our window we see Mary surrounded by the golden rays of the sun with the crescent moon at her feet, and the twelve stars in her crown. Little angels and clouds are at her feet to indicate that her Immaculate Conception takes place in Heaven in the mind of God.