



SEEING THE GOSPEL

What the Gospel is to the ear, the icon is to the eye
- St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea

A Brief Study of the Theology of Byzantine
Iconography and the Iconography Installed
in the Annunciation Greek Orthodox
Cathedral in Houston, Texas

Fr. Efstratios J. Magoulias

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The Iconography of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral
Houston, Texas | Holy Metropolis of Denver



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CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND: THE ORIGIN AND THEOLOGY OF ICONOGRAPHY

"What the Gospel is to the ear, the icon is to the eye."

- St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, the Heaven-Revealer (+379 AD/CE)

One of the oldest, purest Traditions in the Orthodox Christian Church is the use and theology of iconography. Years after Christ's passion, crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven, St. Luke the Evangelist, with the blessing of the Theotokos, painted many icons of her holding Christ as a child.



Even before the legalization of Christianity in 313 AD/CE by Emperor Constantine, icons have been found and preserved in the secret catacomb churches that predate our cathedrals, churches, and monasteries. Throughout the centuries, what came to be known as Byzantine iconography developed and grew into the traditions that we see and know today.

In 787 AD/CE, at the 7th Ecumenical Council, the use of iconography was not only confirmed, but deemed necessary, because, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Worship in the Church is to God alone; icons show honor and respect to the saint or saints depicted. Since they live in Heaven with God, we ask that they pray with us and for us. As they pray to God for us, we are reminded of the Lord's Prayer, "On Earth as it is in Heaven."

Over the centuries, iconography became synchronized through the expansion and uniformity of the Eastern Roman Empire, what we now call the Byzantine Empire. To this day, we look to the examples of the Monasteries of *Osios Loukas*, in Boeotia, Greece (10th century), *Daphni*, outside Athens, Greece (11th century), and the *Chora* Church, in Constantinople (14th century). More recently, that is, in the early 1700s, it was the work of the monk, Dionysios of Fournà, who was tasked to study and record, into one handbook, the traditions of Byzantine Iconography and Architecture. His text, *Hermeneía tes Zographikés Téchnes* (*Explanation of the Art of Painting*), has been translated and renamed in English as, "The Painter's Manual of Dionysios of Fournà," which serves as the primary source for beginning the study of Byzantine Iconography.

In the Orthodox Christian Church, iconography and architecture are meant to serve as visual aids in contemplation and prayer. In the early Church, most people were illiterate, so iconography served as a method of teaching about the life of Christ and the saints.

Thus, to this day, we see iconography adorning our churches, at prominent places in our homes and businesses, and carried with us in our cars, purses, or wherever we may be.

“What the Gospel is to the ear, the icon is to the eye”. St. Basil the Great’s teaching of iconography shows us their importance in our lives. Iconography tells the story of God’s Love for His creation; it visualizes what we hear in the Old and New Testaments, that God sent His Only-Begotten Son to save us from sin and death in order to unite us to Him. It also presents to us the Church Triumphant, that is, the example of the Saints of the Church who have received their crowns of victory. For this reason, we say iconography is *written*, not painted, because the iconography tells the story about God’s Love for His creation.

Since iconography tells a story, there is a prescribed order that is followed. “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ, the Pantokrator, is placed in the center of the dome or church (if there is no dome) surrounded by angels. From the dome, we descend chronologically:

- 1: Jesus Christ, the Pantokrator
- 2: Angels
- 3: Prophets
- 4: Forefathers of Christ and important figures from the Old Testament
- 5: The Life of Christ
- 6: The Evangelists, Disciples, and Apostles
- 7: The Church Triumphant, that is, the Saints

We have the very rich blessing of not only having Byzantine iconography in our Cathedral, but seeing the development, process, and installation – a history and tradition that started over 2000 years ago with the life and ministry of Christ – that will be part of our history as a community for centuries to come. It is my prayer that this brief document will help the faithful, and all who are seeking the knowledge of the Truth, to better understand the theology of Byzantine Iconography, while visually aiding our understanding of the Holy Scriptures, the Good News of the Holy Gospels, and to answer God’s call to unity with Him.

In Christ’s Love,

† Fr. Efstratios J. Magoulas

CHAPTER 2. THE DOME: CHRIST THE PANTOKRATOR

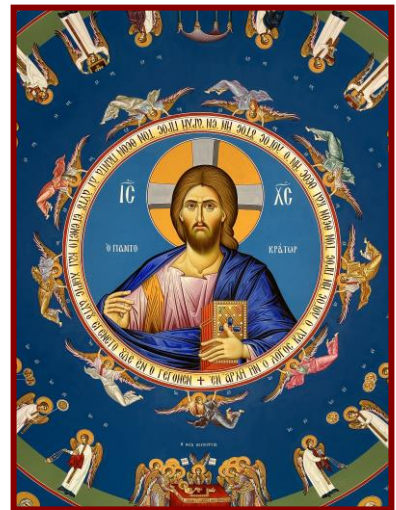
"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

- St. John the Evangelist (John 1:1-3)

The ceiling of the Church is symbolic of heaven, with the dome being the highest point, and the floor of the Nave, Earth. In the dome is the place of the Almighty. Christ is depicted as the "Pantokrator," the "Ruler of All." The dome is designed so that we see Christ, and how He bent the heavens and the laws of nature through His birth by a virgin, and became man. Also, the dome, specifically, the icon of Christ the Pantokrator, can be seen from anywhere in the Cathedral without obstruction. God is always watching over us. God is eternal: He has no beginning and no end. In Byzantine architecture you will find domes and arches, forming circles – no beginning and no end – which demonstrates God's eternity.



The highest point is always reserved for the icon of Christ the Almighty. In our Cathedral, surrounding His bust are the opening verses of the Gospel of John, which is quoted above. Holding Him are nine angels, symbolizing the nine orders of angels (discussed in Chapter 3); and then the Divine Liturgy in Heaven, which shows angels carrying candles, censuring, and encircling the Holy Altar, that is, the Throne of God (discussed in Chapter 4).



In Orthodox Christian Churches, there are actually two icons of Christ the Pantokrator: the icon of Christ in the dome and the icon of Christ on the icon screen to the right of the Beautiful Gate. Besides their size, there is one difference between these two icons that actually connects them. When looking at the icon of Christ on the icon screen, we see Christ with the open Gospel Book, teaching us, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). Turning to the icon of Christ in the dome, this Gospel Book is now closed. This is a not-so-subtle reminder of the *Parousia*, that is, the Second Coming of our Lord. If we think about how we worship as Orthodox Christians, we face East, from where we know Christ will return again in glory (Matthew 24:27). We look to Christ, and we learn from His teachings.

In the funeral service in the Orthodox Church, however, we lay on the *soleas* looking up at the icon of Christ in the dome. The Gospel Book is closed. The book has been written. All that has been done is done, and we face the Almighty Creator and Ruler of All. This reminder of our life and impending, justified judgement is not a threat, but an opportunity to remember the importance of our repentance and remission of sins, so that at the Second and Glorious Coming of our Lord, we will hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).



CHAPTER 3. THE NINE ORDERS OF ANGELS

"There are many spiritual powers, angels, angels of the Churches in Asia, angels appointed to the people. There are angels for little children, angels who see God daily. There are angels assisting before the majesty of the Almighty God, and carrying to God the prayers of the suppliants. These angels are the eyes, or the ears, or the hands, or the feet of God. Let us not have this as an opinion, especially since it is written, 'For they are ministering spirits, sent for service, for the sake of those who will inherit salvation.'"

- St. Hilary of Poitiers (+368 AD/CD)

Angel means, "Messenger," which is the reason they were created by God – to carry out God's message to mankind. Throughout Holy Scripture, angels are constantly present carrying out the Will of God and carrying man's prayers to God.



Throughout Holy Scripture, angels are mentioned more than 250 times! In the Old Testament, we see the angel whom God sent to banish Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the angel who guided Abraham and his people, and the Psalms which tell of the angels' wondrous works. Likewise, in the New Testament, we are familiar with the Archangel Gabriel who revealed to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the Christ, angels at the Nativity of Christ telling the shepherds of the miracle, and the angels who were

waiting at the empty tomb for the Myrrh-Bearing Women – just to name a few examples. From hymnography and iconography, we also recognize the six-winged Seraphim and the many-eyed Cherubim.



Each of the nine orders of angels serves a specific purpose designated by God:

1. The Seraphim (Isaiah 6:12) stand closest of all to the Most Holy Trinity.
2. The Cherubim (Genesis 3:24) also serve around the Holy Trinity.
3. The Thrones (Colossians 1:16) stand mysteriously and incomprehensibly bearing God through the grace given them for their service.
4. The Dominions (Colossians 1:16) instruct earthly authorities and teach us to conquer temptation.
5. The Powers (1 Peter 3:22) fulfill God's will.
6. The Authorities (1 Peter 3:22) have power over the Devil and protect people from demonic temptations.
7. The Principalities (Colossians 1:16) advise Archangels and Angels.

8. The Archangels (1 Thessalonians 4:16) are messengers of great and wondrous things (think of the Archangel Gabriel and the Annunciation of the Theotokos). The Archangels Michael and Gabriel are revealed to us in the New Testament. In the apocryphal books, we also learn of Raphael, Uriel, Salathiel, Jegudiel, Barachiel, and Jeremiel.
9. The Angels (Hebrews 1:4) are the messengers of God and reveal to us the lesser mysteries of God and His intentions, like our Guardian Angel.

Traditionally, surrounding the icon of Christ the Pantokrator, there are four angels carrying Him. However, due to the sheer size of our dome and Pantokrator, we were able to include nine angels to remind us of the nine orders of angels, their role and responsibility in the world, and our communication with God.

CHAPTER 4. THE HEAVENLY DIVINE LITURGY

“O Master, Lord our God, Who have appointed the heavenly orders of hosts and legions of Angels and Archangels for the service of Your glory, grant that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy angels, serving with us and glorifying Your goodness; for to You belong all glory, honor, and worship to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

- Prayer of the Small Entrance in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Encircling the dome, above the windows, we see more angels serving the Divine Liturgy, specifically the Great Entrance. Many saints have shared that in the Divine Liturgy, the angels of God were spiritually and physically present and attending to



the sacrament. St. John Chrysostom reminds us that in the Divine Liturgy, “The common heavenly and earthly feast is being set up; one is the Thanksgiving, one the exultation, one the joyful choir.” The hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of angelic hosts, Heaven and Earth are filled with Your glory,” is what the Prophet Isaiah himself heard when he had a vision of angels surrounding and glorifying God (Isaiah

6:1). And during the entrance of the gifts that have been offered, that is, the Great Entrance, we sing the Cherubic Hymn, “We, who mystically represent the Cherubim, sing the thrice-holy Hymn to the life-giving Trinity. Let us put away all worldly care so that we may receive the King of All.” One of the most recently canonized saints, St. Iakovos Tsalikis (+1992), said on many occasions the angels and saints were participating and communing with him, even instructing him to continue celebrating the Divine Services.

The Divine Liturgy is not simply something we do every Sunday at 9:00 am at 3511 Yoakum Boulevard. The Divine Liturgy transcends time and space. The Divine Liturgy is, at the same time happening on earth, as it is in heaven. It is, “Remembering this command of our Savior, and all that He endured for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting at the Right Hand, the Second and Glorious Coming again” (From the prayer before the Consecration of the Holy Gifts).



The iconography of the angels serving the Divine Services around the dome reminds us of their presence and participation, as well as their prayers and protection, as the

messengers and attendants of God. To quote St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “May we be participants with the heavenly armies in the singing of their hymn*.”

* “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of angelic hosts, Heaven and Earth are filled with Your glory”
(Isaiah 6:1)



CHAPTER 5. THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

"Without the Spirit it is not possible to hold the Word of God, nor can anyone without the Son, draw near to the Father, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit."

- St. Irenaeus of Lyon (+202 AD/CE)

The Holy Prophets of the Old Testament are traditionally found in one of two places in Orthodox Christian Churches: in the base of the dome or around the icon of the Virgin Mary in the apse above the Holy Altar in the icon known as the *Platitera Twn Ouranon*, or "Wider than the Heavens." We have both in our Annunciation Cathedral.



The Holy Prophets of Israel played a unique role in their societies, as well as the life of the Church. The Prophets called people back to worship the One True God when they had strayed from the Old Covenant established between God and Abraham. While every prophet is unique in their upbringing, their profession, their style of prophecy, and their support in Israel, all of the Prophets have in common their willingness to obey the Lord. Through prayer, fasting, and repentance, they were especially receptive of the Holy Spirit, as we hear in the 8th article of the Creed, "...Who spoke through the Prophets."



The placing of the Prophets in the dome further connects us, chronologically and spiritually, to our immortal King and God. Chronologically, they came before the Evangelists, the authors of the Holy Gospels, which is why they are higher than them architecturally. They range from 1500 years before the coming of the Christ, to the last prophet, St. John the Forerunner and Baptist, Jesus' cousin and contemporary, who prepared the people of Israel and preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Spiritually, we are reminded of the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord, in which Moses and Elias (Elijah) were present; Moses represents the law of the Old Testament, or Old Covenant, and Elias (Elijah) represents all of the prophets.

We hear the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). With the prophets around Jesus Christ, the Pantokrator, as well as the young Jesus in the womb of Mary in the apse above the Holy Altar, Jesus' incarnation in the flesh came to fulfill all that was prophesied, taught, and preached by the Prophets. All they spoke was fulfilled

in the life, ministry, miracles, passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ!

The Prophets depicted in the dome and the prophecies written on the scrolls they hold, starting at the front center, going right:

- The Prophet Solomon [+10th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ]
 - o “The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and there is good and understanding in all who practice it” (Proverbs 1:7)
- The Prophet Elias (Hebrew: Elijah) [+9th Century BC | Feastday: June 14th]
 - o “As the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel lives” (1 Kings 17:1)
- The Prophet Elisseas (Hebrew: Elisha) [+9th Century BC | Feastday: July 20th]
 - o “As the Lord lives and as my soul lives, I will not leave you” (2 Kings 2:2)
- The Prophet Jonah [+8th Century BC | Feastday: September 21st]
 - o “I descended into the earth, the bars of which are everlasting barriers; yet my life ascended from corruption, O Lord, my God” (Jonah 2:7)
- The Prophet Habakkuk [+7th Century BC | Feastday: December 2nd]
 - o “O Lord, I have heard Your speech, and was afraid” (Habakkuk 3:2)
- The Prophet Zephaniah [+7th Century BC | Feastday: December 3rd]
 - o “The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, hastens greatly” (Zephaniah 1:14)
- The Prophet Malachi [+5th Century BC | Feastday: January 3rd]
 - o “Thus says the Lord, from the rising of the sun even until the going down of the same, ‘My Name... [Has been glorified among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering, for My name shall be great among the Gentiles,’ says the Lord Almighty”] (Malachi 1:11)
- The Prophet Daniel [+6th Century BC | Feastday: December 17th]
 - o “The God of Heaven will raise up a kingdom, and it shall never... [Be destroyed]” (Daniel 2:44)
- The Prophet Micah [+7th Century BC | Feastday: August 14th]
 - o “‘In that day,’ says the Lord, ‘I shall gather her who has been broken... [And I will welcome her who has been exiled, even those whom I have rejected]’” (Micah 4:6)
- The Prophet Joel [+4th Century BC | Feastday: October 19th]
 - o “The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice in Jerusalem” (Joel 3:16)
- The Prophet Zacharias [+6th Century BC | Feastday: February 8th & September 5th]
 - o “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will save My people’” (Zechariah 8:7)

- The Prophet Ezekiel [+6th Century BC | Feastday: June 23rd]
 - o “Thus says the Lord, behold, I will search out my sheep” (Ezekiel 34:11)
- The Prophet Jeremiah [+6th Century BC | Feastday: May 1st]
 - o “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Amend your ways and your practices... [And I will cause you to dwell in this place]’” (Jeremiah 7:2)
- The Prophet Moses [+13th Century BC | Feastday: September 4th]
 - o “May the heavens rejoice with Him, may all the angels adore Him” (Deuteronomy 32:43)
- The Prophet Isaiah [+8th Century BC | Feastday: May 9th]
 - o “Hades from below was embittered to meet You” (Isaiah 14:9)
- The Prophet David, the King [+9th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday after Christmas]
 - o “O Lord, how magnificent are your works; in wisdom You have made them all” (Psalm 103:24)

The Prophets depicted around the Virgin Mary in the apse above the Holy Altar, from bottom left, going up and to the right:

- The Prophet Habakkuk* [+7th Century BC | Feastday: December 2nd]
- The Prophet Daniel* [+6th Century BC | Feastday: December 17th]
- The Prophet Gideon [+13th Century BC | Feastday: September 27th]
- The Prophet Aaron [+13th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ]
- The Prophet Jacob [+19th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ]
- The Prophet David, the King* [+9th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday after Christmas]
- The Prophet Solomon* [+10th Century BC | Feastday: Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ]
- The Prophet Isaiah* [+8th Century BC | Feastday: May 9th]
- The Prophet Moses* [+13th Century BC | Feastday: September 4th]
- The Prophet Ezekiel* [+6th Century BC | Feastday: June 23rd]
- The Prophet Jeremiah* [+6th Century BC | Feastday: May 1st]
- The Prophet Zacharias* [+6th Century BC | Feastday: February 8th]

**Denotes included in the dome and above the Holy Altar*

CHAPTER 6. THE BAND OF THE DOME: THE FOREFATHERS OF CHRIST

"Impossible to recount is Christ's descent according to His divinity, but His ancestry according to His human nature can be traced, since He who deigned to become Son of man in order to save mankind was the offspring of men. And it is this genealogy of His that two of the evangelists, Matthew and Luke, recorded."

- St. Gregory Palamas, Homily on the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ

Paraphrasing St. Gregory Palamas' homily on the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ, Matthew records from Abraham to the Virgin Mother of God. Luke begins from the most recent, Joseph the Betrothed, not stopping at Abraham, nor Adam, but stops at the Son of God, "wishing to show that from the beginning man was not just a creation of God, but also a son in the Spirit, which was given to him at the same time as his soul, through God's quickening breath" (St. Gregory Palamas; Gen 2.7).



At the band of the base of the dome, we find the forefathers of Christ and important figures from the Old Testament.



In the front-center (East) and back-center (West), respectively, we find the two icons, "Not-Made-By-Hands" of our Lord, from Edessa, the Holy Mandylion (Napkin) and Holy Keramion (Tile). According to tradition, as recorded in the 4th Century by Eusebius of Caesarea, King Abgar V of Edessa wrote to Jesus, asking to be cured of his leprosy and crippling arthritis. The king sent his servant, an artist named Ananias, to deliver the letter and to return with a depiction of Jesus. Ananias delivered the letter to Jesus, but He declined his invitation and promised that an Apostle would come to heal him. Because of the crowds, Ananias withdrew to a hill to study and draw the face of Jesus; however, he was unable to complete his task. Jesus, knowing Ananias' heart and understanding King Abgar's faith, asked for a bowl so He might wash His face. As He dried His face with a linen napkin, the imprint of His features were transferred to the cloth! The Lord addressed Ananias, "Give this to the one who sent you." King Abgar, upon receiving the linen napkin and touching it to his face, was healed of his diseases. He and all his house were baptized and followed Christ. After Pentecost,

the St. Thaddeus the Apostle of the 70 fulfilled the promise made by Jesus and was sent to Edessa to preach and proclaim the Resurrection of Christ.

The Holy Mandylion (Napkin) healed many throughout Edessa. King Abgar ordered the pagan statue at the entry to the city be removed and destroyed, and the icon, "Not-made-By-Hands," the Holy Mandylion, be placed at the gateway with the inscription, "O Christ God, he who puts his hope in You shall never fail." It remained in this place until King Abgar's grandson took the throne. Knowing the pagan ruler wished to destroy it, the Bishop of Edessa took a tile and an oil candle, and covered the Holy Mandylion making it look as if the miracle-working relic was gone.

Nearly 500 years later, during the reign of Justinian, Edessa was attacked by the Persians. The icon, "Not-made-By-Hands," had been long forgotten by the people. The Bishop of Edessa, Evlavirus, received a vision from the Mother of God to retrieve the icon of her Son and our God. Carefully, examining the old gate to the city, they exhumed the tile covering the Holy Mandylion to find the oil candle still burning (500 years later!), the Holy Mandylion perfectly intact, and the countenance of Christ's face imprinted on the tile!

In the 10th Century, the Holy Mandylion and the Holy Keramion (Tile) were transferred to Constantinople, first to *Hagia Sophia*, then to its final resting place in the chapel of the Great Palace dedication to the Theotokos Pharos (lighthouse).

On either side of the Holy Madylion, we see Adam and Eve, then, continues from the right: Adam, Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jude, Joseph, St. John the Forerunner, Manasseh, Job, Aaron, Ohr (Hur), Baruch, Josiah, Melchizedek, Holy Keramion, Samuel, Joshua, Jesse, Simeon, Joseph the Betrothed, Joachim, Anna, the Mother of God, Japheth, Shem, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, and returning to the East, Eve.

At the base of the band of the dome is the Hymn of Consecration of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, which is sung at the consecrations any church: "You have shown the earthly beauty of the holy tabernacle of Your glory to be like unto the splendor of the heavenly firmament, O Lord. Strengthen it to the ages of ages, and accept our prayers which we unceasingly offer therein unto You, through the Theotokos, O You Who are the Life and Resurrection of all."

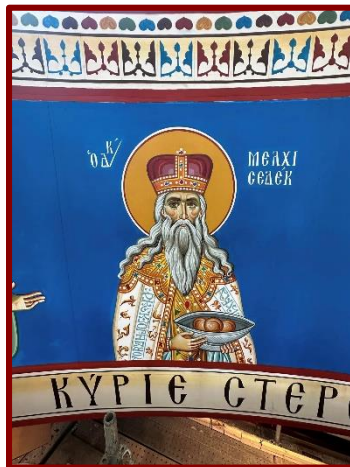
These forefathers and important figures in the genealogy of Christ are commemorated on the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ. The physical connection of the dome to the ceiling of the Cathedral spiritually connects us with the coming of Christ, the Pantokrator, into the world.



The Virgin Mary



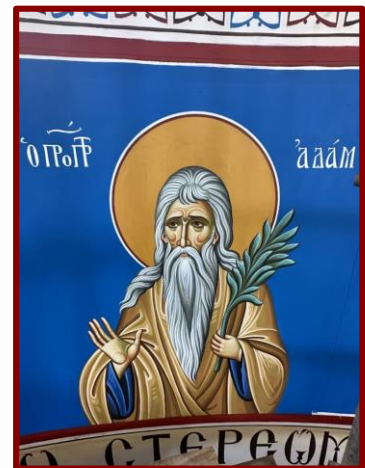
St. John the Forerunner
and Baptist



The Righteous Melchizedek



Eve



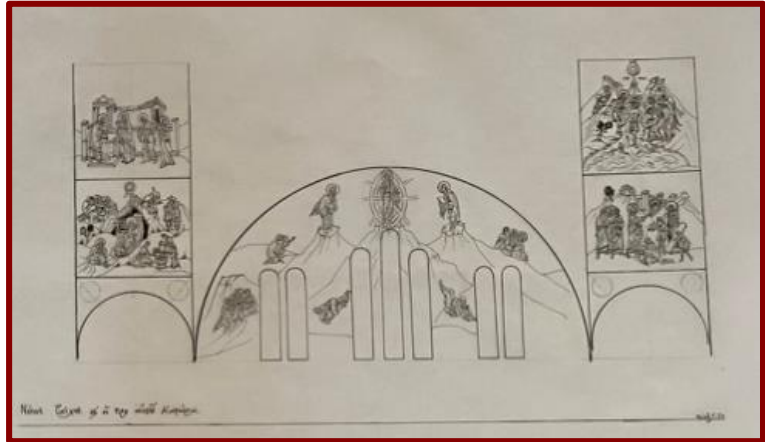
Adam

CHAPTER 7. THE SOUTH WALL: THE NATIVITY AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

"When a ray is projected from the sun, it is a portion of the whole sun; but the sun will be in the ray because it is part of the sun; the substance is not separated, but extended. So from the Spirit comes spirit, and God from God, as light is kindled into light. This ray of God glided down into a virgin's womb and was fashioned as flesh, born of man mixed with God. The flesh was built up by the Spirit, was nourished, grew up, spoke, taught, worked, and was Christ"

- Tertullian (+240 AD/CE)

The incarnation, or Nativity of Christ, in which Jesus, the Son of God, willingly takes on flesh, becomes man for our salvation. God can do anything, but He chooses to send His Only-Begotten Son, to live among us that we may become one with God. The first icon we see at the



bottom left is the icon of the Nativity of Christ, with the shepherds hearing the Angels proclaim the joy and the wise men from the East coming to give Him gifts. According to the custom of the Messianic Law, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple at forty days old to be blessed by the Righteous Symeon. We find this icon right above the Nativity of Christ. Turning to the other half of the archway, we see the icon of Theophany – Jesus being baptized in the Jordan by John, with the voice of God coming from above, saying, “This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Finally, the archway is completed with the icon of Christ raising His friend, Lazaros, who was dead for four days, from the tomb.

On the South wall, we will see the icon of the Transfiguration of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor. Below Him falling to the ground are Peter, James, and John, who could only bear so much of His Divine Glory. On either side of Jesus, we see Moses and Elias (Elijah), who represent the Law and the Prophets.

God willing, during the Summer of 2025, the upper South wall and ceiling of the Cathedral will be installed with: The Nativity of Jesus; His Presentation to the Temple; Theophany; the raising of Lazaros from the dead; and the Transfiguration of our Lord on Mount Tabor.

CHAPTER 8. THE NORTH WALL: THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

"Christ, Who has shown by His words and actions, that He was truly God and the Lord of the universe, said to His disciples as He was about to go up to Jerusalem, 'We are going up to Jerusalem now, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles and the chief priests and scribes to be scourged and mocked and crucified.' These words bore out the predictions of the prophets, who had foretold Christ's death, the sufferings that would precede it, and what would happen to one Who was immortal and incapable of suffering because He was God ..."

- St. Athanasios the Great of Alexandria (+373 AD/CE)

The climax of God's Love for His creation is seen in Jesus' passion and crucifixion. However, the culmination of God's Love is seen in the Resurrection on the third day. In the Orthodox Church, our journey does not stop at Golgotha with the crucifixion. We always look to, preach, and experience the Resurrection of Christ. It is from the Resurrection that we are raised with Christ. As St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died, He died to sin, once for all" (6:10).



At the bottom left, the iconographic story continues from where the South wall left off. We see Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, the event that is commemorated on Palm Sunday. As Jesus rides in, not on a horse or in a chariot as a king, but on the colt of a donkey, the children and faithful proclaim, "Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9). However, in just a few days, their voices quickly turn into the cries of, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (Luke 23:21). Next, we see the Mystical Supper, in which Jesus instructs His Disciples to take and bless the bread and wine, saying, "Take, eat, this is My Body which is broken for you..." and, "Drink from it all of you, this is My Blood of the New Testament, which for you and for many is shed, the remission of sins" (Matthew 26: 26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22: 19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Next we see the icons of the Crucifixion and the laying in the new tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56).

On the North wall, we will see the icon of the Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ from the dead. This icon is also called Christ's Descent into Hell. In the icon, Christ is seen raising with Him Adam and Eve. Notice how Jesus is holding their wrists

– He is pulling them out of the tombs and out of the darkness of death, showing His victory back to the very beginning of mankind. His body still bears the marks of the crucifixion, just as when He appeared to Thomas and the Disciples after the Resurrection. Jesus Christ is seen standing on the gates of Hell, crushed below His feet, trampling over the darkness of Hell. In the darkness, we see the keys, locks, and chains, broken and unlocked, symbolizing the liberation He provides to mankind.

To the left of Jesus, we see the Prophets, like David, Solomon, and St. John the Forerunner and Baptist, representing those who died before Jesus' crucifixion, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. On the right of Jesus, we see His Disciples and Apostles gathered together. Below the icon of Christ's Triumph over Hades, we see the rest of the events of the Resurrection. From left to right, we see the Myrrh-bearing Women telling the Disciples the tomb is empty (4th Morning Gospel | Luke 24:1-12), the Myrrh-bearing Women going to the tomb early in the morning with spices to anoint Jesus' Body, the empty tomb with the angel seated inside (2nd Morning Gospel | Mark 16:1-8), and the soldiers who were assigned to keep guard of the tomb (Matthew 27:65-66).

God willing, during the Summer of 2025, the upper North wall and ceiling of the Cathedral will be installed with: Christ's Entrance into Jerusalem, the Mystical Supper, the Crucifixion, Christ being placed in the Tomb, Christ's Descent into Hell and Triumph over death, and the events of the Resurrection.

CHAPTER 9. THE EAST WALL: CHRIST AFTER THE RESURRECTION

"He suffered for the sake of those who suffer... But He rose from the dead. I am the Christ; I have destroyed death... I am your forgiveness. I am the lamb that was immolated for you. I am your ransom, your life, your resurrection..."

- St. Meletios of Sardis in Lydia (+180 AD/CE)

We have said before that the ceiling of the church depicts the life of Christ. Above the Holy Altar, we find the last chapter of Christ's earthly ministry. Facing the Holy Altar, the upper left depicts Thomas placing his hand in Christ's side; opposite on the upper right depicts Christ teaching in the Temple (the Feast of Mid-Pentecost). Directly above the Holy Altar, inside the curved space, we see Christ's Ascension into Heaven (forty days after the Resurrection). Finally, at the top center, we see an icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Holy Pentecost (fifty days after the Resurrection).



Installed in the curved band above the *soleas*, or raised area before the icon screen and Holy Altar, we see four icons depicting three occasions of Christ appearing to His Disciples and Apostles after the Resurrection. Every Sunday, in the service of *Orthros*, prayed before the Divine Liturgy, one of eleven Gospels referring to Christ's appearances to His Disciples and Apostles is read. The hymnography of the *Orthros*, especially the *Doxastikon*, are related to the Gospel read that morning.



At the bottom left, we see Christ appearing to His mother, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene (8th Morning Gospel | John 20: 11-18). At the left center, we see Christ walking with Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, and right center, breaking bread with them (5th Morning Gospel | Luke 24:12-35). At the bottom

right, we see Christ appearing to the Disciples as they are fishing, and Peter throwing himself into the sea (10th Morning Gospel | John 21: 1-14).

At the apex of the curved band, we see the icon of the “Preparation of the Throne,” which depicts a Throne, draped with a blue robe, referring to Jesus taking on flesh and becoming man (as we see in icons of Jesus), the Cross, crown of thorns, spear, sponge, and nails – all referencing Christ’s Passion and Crucifixion. Sitting on the Throne is a dove with a halo, holding a closed Gospel book, representing the presence of the Holy Spirit.



At the bottom of the curved band, on either side, are two medallion icons depicting a total of 4 of the 70 Apostles who were ordained and served as bishops:

On the left: St. Stachys, Bishop of Byzantium; St. Amplias, Bishop of Odyssopolis in Lydda. Both were ordained by the St. Andrew the First-Called Apostle.

On the right: St. Crispus, Bishop of Chalcedon; St. Crisces, Bishop of Carchedon in Galatia. Both were companions with St. Paul the Apostle in his missionary travels.

They join the icons of the 12 and 70 Apostles we see around the pendentives of the dome (discussed in Chapter 11).

We should be reminded of the words and teachings of St. Basil the Great, “What the Gospel is to the ear, the icon is to the eye.” Every time we enter into the Cathedral, we are reminded of God’s Love for us, sending His Only-Begotten Son to save us from sin and death. Even in His Ascension, Jesus reminds us, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Matthew 28:20). AMEN!

CHAPTER 10. THE WEST WALL: MIRACLES OF CHRIST

God willing, during the Summer of 2027, the West wall, choir loft, and balcony will be installed with miracles performed by Jesus Christ. The plans for this phase are still being produced.

CHAPTER 11. THE PENDENTIVES: THE EVANGELISTS, DISCIPLES, AND APOSTLES

"There are four Gospels and only four, neither more nor less: four like the points of the compass, four like the chief directions of the wind. The Church, spread all over the world, has in the Gospels four pillars and four winds blowing wherever people live."

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons (+202)

St. Irenaeus continues to write, "These four gospels are in actual fact one single Gospel, a fourfold Gospel inspired by the one Spirit, a Gospel which has four aspects representing the work of the Son of God."

The four pendentives, or corners that connect and support the dome, serve as the place for the recorders of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As the pendentives support the dome, that is, the place for the icon of Christ, the Evangelists support us in our faith with their writings and teachings.



Placed on the front two pendentives are Matthew and John facing the Holy Altar, on the left and right, respectively. Matthew and John were both numbered among the 12 Disciples who followed Christ. Mark and Luke are placed on the back two pendentives, as they were of the 70 Apostles who were sent out to spread the Good News.

There are 52 medallions (circle icons) that outline the pendentives.

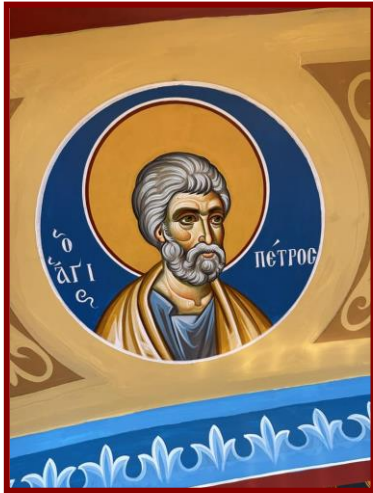
At the top of each archway is a medallion icon of an angel (totaling 4).



Branching down, we find the 12 Disciples and Apostles: Peter, Andrew, James & John (the Evangelist and Theologian) the sons of Zebedee, Phillip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew (the Evangelist), James the son of Alphaeus, Jude (Thaddeus) the brother of James, Simon & Matthias (Totaling 16).

The remaining medallions include 36 of the 70 Apostles: Paul, Mark the Evangelist, Luke the Evangelist, James the Brother of God, Agabos, Ananias, Andronicos, Apelles, Aristarchos, Aristobulos, Artemas, Arxippos, Barnabas, Caios, Hermes, Zenas, Jason, Carpos, Cephas, Cleopas, Linos, Mark, Nicanor, Onesimos, Parmenas, Prochoros, Rufos, Silas, Silouanos, Stephen the first deacon and Protomartyr, Sosipater, Timon, Titos, Trophimos, Tychicos, and Philemon (Totaling 52).

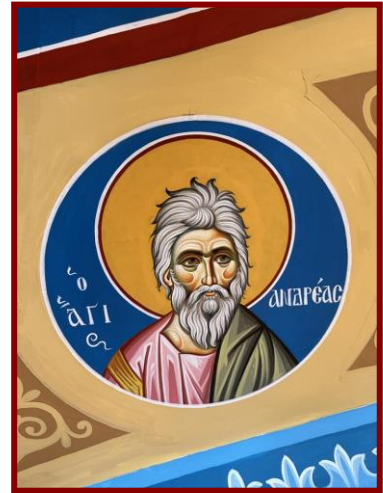
At the bottom of each pendentive are four more medallions, each with a Seraphim and a cross with the inscription: "IC XC NIKA" - Jesus Christ Triumphs.



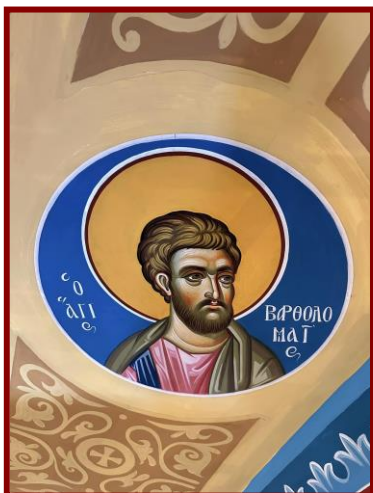
St. Peter the Disciple



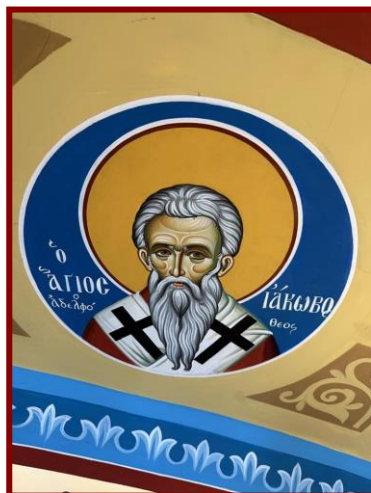
St. Paul the Apostle



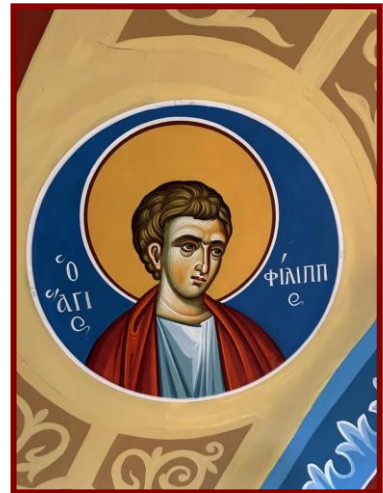
St. Andrew
the First-Called Apostle



St. Bartholomew (Nathanael)
the Disciple



St. James the Apostle
"The Brother of God"



St. Phillip of the 70
Apostles and Deacon

CHAPTER 12. ST. MATTHEW THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."

- St. Irenaeus of Lyon (+202 AD/CE)

In the front-left pendentive, we find St. Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist. As St. Irenaeus said, St. Matthew writes to the Hebrew people in their own dialect, presumably, while he lived in Antioch following the fall of Jerusalem.

The major theme of the Gospel according to St. Matthew is Christ, the incarnate God, Emmanuel, Who has inaugurated the kingdom of God and the new covenant, which is realized in the true Israel, the Church. He does so by conclusively linking Christ as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament.

From the Gospel according to Matthew, which was written in Aramaic, but quickly translated into Greek, we learn of the Jewish culture, religious observances, and the Jewish techniques of argument, giving us a glimpse into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

St. Matthew is depicted writing, in a home, the first words of his Gospel account, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ..." In this pericope, we learn of the earthly genealogy of Jesus (which was discussed in chapter 6).

Many times in the icon, a man is depicted with St. Matthew, symbolizing how God took on flesh and became man (as prophesied in the Book of Ezekiel 1:10).



CHAPTER 13. ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST AND APOSTLE OF THE 70

“Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without however recording in order what was said or done by Christ. For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow him; but afterwards, as I said, (attended) Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs (of his hearers) but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord’s oracles. So then Mark made no mistake, while he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them; for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard, or to set down any false statement therein.”

- Papias (+163 AD/CE)



We find in the back pendentives the Apostles of the 70 and Evangelists, Saints Mark and Luke. Papias, who writes in the 2nd Century, reminds us that Mark, neither heard nor followed Jesus, until he learned about the Good News from Paul, Barnabas, and Peter.

The Gospel according to Mark was presumably the first of the four written and was addressed to the Christians in Rome, who were facing the great persecution by Emperor Nero; he used Peter’s teachings as his primary source. Because his audience already believed in Christ, St. Mark speaks clearly and plainly; his account gets straight to the point, recounting the life and ministry of the Christ without extra explanation, context, or details.

The major themes of his Gospel account include, “The suffering Messiah,” as well as discipleship.



On the suffering Messiah, Christ is fully God, (Who can heal the sick, cast out demons, and forgive sins) and is also fully man (Who expresses agony in the garden of Gethsemane and through suffering on the Cross). Jesus is addressed by Peter as, “The Christ,” (in Greek; Messiah, in Hebrew; the Anointed One, in English). Only after the Resurrection do His followers recognize Him as God. While “discipleship,” doesn’t appear in the text, the call to take up one’s cross and follow Christ is ever present.

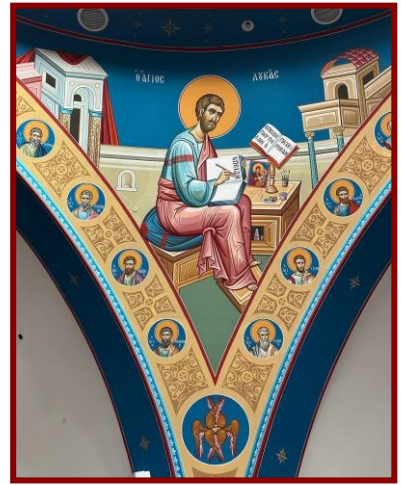
In the icon, we see on his easel the first words of his Gospel account, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”

Often times in iconography, St. Mark the Evangelist is depicted with a winged lion, symbolizing the royalty of Christ the King of Glory (as prophesied in the Book of Ezekiel 1:10).

CHAPTER 14. ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST AND APOSTLE OF THE 70

"Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed."

- St. Luke the Evangelist and Apostle of the 70 (Luke 1:1-4)



Hearing about the ministry of Jesus Christ, Luke, who was a Gentile, arrived in Palestine and learned from the Lord Himself. As St. Luke writes in the opening lines of his Gospel account, being an eyewitness and understanding these things, his aim was to write an orderly, chronological account of Jesus Christ. Combining what he was taught by the Christ, what lessons he received from the Virgin Mary, and recording the current oral tradition of the Church, St. Luke's Gospel proves beneficial to theologians and historians, as well as clergy and laity alike, about the Good News of the Resurrection.

In addition to the Gospel attributed to him,

- 1) Christ appeared to Luke and Cleopas on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:12-35; Mark 16:9-20), depicted above the *soleas* and discussed in chapter 9.
- 2) Luke is the author of the Acts of the Apostles, recording the foundation of the Church and the growth following the descent of the Holy Spirit (celebrated on Holy Pentecost).



St. Luke was a physician by trade, but also had a close relationship with the Mother of God. He received the blessing from the Theotokos to paint images of her holding Christ as a child, which is why in his icon, next to where he is writing, we see an icon like he would have completed, along with paint brushes and medical tools. Many of these icons still exist and can be venerated today, including the icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ at the Monastery of *Mega Spileon* (The Great Cave) in the Greek Peloponnese, and the Monastery of *Panagia of Kykkos* in the Troodos Mountains of Cyprus.

On his easel are the opening words of his Gospel account, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand...," which is quoted above. One can sometimes find in the iconography of St. Luke the Evangelist an ox or calf, symbolic of Christ's sacrificial and priestly office (Ezekiel 1:10).

CHAPTER 15. ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE, EVANGELIST, AND THEOLOGIAN

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

- St. John the Evangelist (John 1:1)

The last of the Gospels written is according to John, "The Disciple whom Jesus loved." St. John the Apostle and Evangelist is also given the title Theologian, because of the profundity of his Gospel. This is the same John who stood at the foot of the Cross, who Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to, and who gives us, the faithful, centuries later, a glimpse into the relationship of the Trinity. Because he is one of the 12, like Matthew, John is placed on the pendentive to the right of the Holy Altar.



Of the four Gospels, St. John's was written last, presumably to accompany and supplement the first three, while he lived in Ephesus. The Gospel according to John is theological; while of course recounting the life and ministry of Jesus, it speaks more deeply to Who Jesus is, "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name" (John 20:31).

St. John is very explicit in discussing the relationship of the Holy Trinity as One God. "The Father is Unbegotten, the Son is the Only-Begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father" (1:18; 3:16, 18; 15:26).

He also addresses the sacramental and mystical presence and activity of God in the world, through the Holy Spirit, by Christ in baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

Later, he was exiled to the island of Patmos in Greece, in the eastern Aegean Sea, which is where he recorded the Book of Revelation.



Not only does St. John teach us so much theologically, but he was present with Peter and James at the Transfiguration of Christ. He was also the only Disciple of the 12 to be at the Crucifixion, which is why he is the only one to record the details and dialogue that happened on the Cross.

In iconography, St. John is depicted with the cave on Patmos where he lived out his days and reposed in peace. St. John's easel reads the first words of his Gospel account, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". He is associated with the eagle, which indicates the descent of the Holy Spirit and how his Gospel soars above the others from a theological perspective (Ezekiel 1:10).

CHAPTER 16. THE LOWER WALLS: THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT

"The saints, during their earthly life, are filled with the grace of the Holy spirit. After their departure, the same grace remains in their souls as in their bodies. The very same grace is present and active in their sacred images and icons."

- St. John of Damascus (+749 AD/CD)

We began by explaining that iconography does not simply tell a story, but explains the story of our salvation through Jesus Christ. Chronologically, we have descended from Jesus, Who was present in the beginning with God the Father, to the Prophets who foretold of the coming of the Christ, to the Life of Jesus Christ, and His Disciples and Apostles who preached and baptized all nations. Finally, we arrive at the present day. The lower walls of the Cathedral are adorned with the icons of the saints, from the early Church to the present day.

St. Peter writes, "Be Holy, because I am Holy" (1 Peter 1:15-17). We are all called to be holy. Holy in Greek, is *Agios*, which also translates to Saint. Who are the Saints? The Saints are people just like you and me, who answered the call to become holy, striving to take up their cross and follow Christ, and who have received their crown in heaven.



Saints are an important part of the life of the Orthodox Church because they pave the way for us to follow Christ. Of course, we have the example of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who we follow and worship! But the saints have shown us that it is possible to become holy: from St. Helen, who found the precious Cross of our Lord in the 300s AD/CE, to St. Amphilochios Makris of Patmos (+1970) a monastic who shared God's Love to all who met him. We are all called to be saints; we are all called to be holy. Death is not an end for us, nor for the saints. Death from this world means being born to the Heavens, to a life with God, which is why we celebrate Feast Days (or name days) on the day the saint dies, rather than when they were born. We pray to the saints, just as we ask our friends and family to pray for us. We ask that they may pray to the One, True God with us and for us, that whatever we may pray for may be granted to us, for the benefit of our salvation. We could go on and on listing the countless number of saints that have been crowned in heaven, sharing of their life, death, and miracles, brought about through our God.

God willing, during the Summer of 2026, the lower north and south walls of the Cathedral will be installed with the Church Triumphant, that is, the saints from the time of Christ to the modern day.

CHAPTER 17. THE HOLY SANCTUARY: THE ICON SCREEN, HIERARCHS, AND THEOLOGICIANS

"The Church, the House of the Lord, is built upon the foundations of the faith of the Apostles and Prophets"

- St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, the Heaven-Revealer (+379 AD/CE)

Orthodox Churches are divided into three parts; the Narthex, Nave, and Holy Sanctuary. In the Narthex, we prepare ourselves. It is customary to light a candle before the icons as a sign of one's faith and prayers. Entering into the second part of the church, called the Nave, the faithful gather for prayer. The word, Nave, derives from the Latin for the body of a ship. Symbolically, the church is the ark of salvation, just like Noah's ark which saved his family and God's creation from the flood. Finally, we see the Holy Sanctuary, or Holy Altar, which is separated from the Nave by the *Ikonostasio*, or icon screen.

The icon screen is symbolic of the curtain in the temple of Jerusalem that separated the people from the Holy of Holies. While it does divide the space into two distinct parts, the icon screen actually draws us closer to Christ our God. In the center are the Beautiful Gates, through which only the clergy enter. To the right of the Beautiful Gates, we see the icon of Jesus Christ

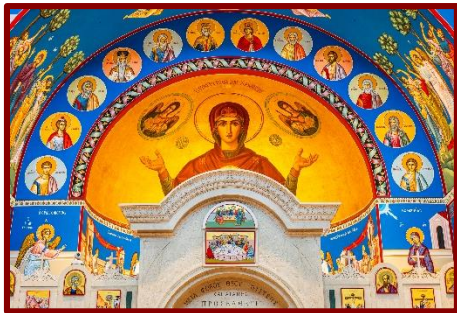


(discussed in Chapter 2), then St. John the Forerunner and Baptist, who points to Jesus and carries the scroll bearing, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Finally, on the wood-carved door, we find the Archangel Gabriel. To the left of the Beautiful Gates, we see the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. This style of icon is called *Hodegetria*, or Directress, because she is pointing us to her Son and our God. Next, we have the icon of the Church, in this case the icon of the Annunciation, and on the wood-carved door the Archangel Michael. The rectangular icons on the upper tier of the icon screen are depictions from the life of Christ. Chronologically, from left to right: the Entrance of the Theotokos to the Temple, the Annunciation, the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation of Christ to the Temple, Holy Theophany (Epiphany), the Transfiguration, Jesus Raising Lazarus from the Dead, Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, the Mystical Supper, the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, the Triumph over Death (Resurrection), the Myrrh-Bearing Women finding the Empty Tomb, Jesus Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection, Thomas placing his hand in Christ's Side, the Ascension, Holy Pentecost, and the Dormition (Falling Asleep/Assumption) of the Theotokos.

At the top of the icon screen, we find icons of the Disciples and Apostles. From left to right: Phillip, Simon, Andrew the First-Called Apostle, Mark the Evangelist*, Matthew the Evangelist, Peter, Paul*, John the Evangelist and Theologian, Luke the Evangelist*, James, Bartholomew, and Thomas the Twin.

**Denotes of the Seventy Apostles*

The focal point of the Holy Sanctuary is the Holy Altar Table. It is here that the priest offers, "Your Gifts, of what is Yours, we offer to You, in behalf of all, and for all." The Holy Altar Table becomes the Tomb of Christ, where He laid for three days and from which He triumphantly emerges as the King of all. On top of the Holy Altar Table is a canopy, truly making the Holy Altar Table like a new tomb hewn in the rock.



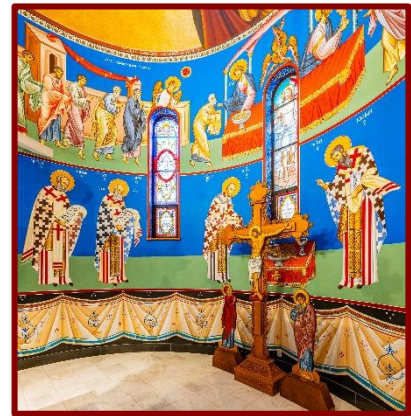
The largest icon in the church is the icon of Christ the Pantokrator, located in the dome. The second largest icon is the icon of the Virgin Mary in the apse above the Holy Altar, the *Platitera Twn Ouranon*, or "Wider than the Heavens." In this icon, we see how she contained in her womb Him Who was uncontainable. Just as she is the mother of God (Theotokos), she too is our mother. As St. Basil prays, "For the pleadings of a mother have much weight toward the favor of the Master," we too pray to the Virgin Mary that she will intercede for us to her Son and our God.

In Chapter 9, we discussed the appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection, His Ascension into Heaven, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples and Apostles (Pentecost). Also in Chapter 5, we looked at the Prophets of the Old Testament who surround the Virgin Mary. Turning now to the inside of the Holy Altar, we see an icon of the Annunciation, with the Archangel Gabriel on the left and the Virgin Mary receiving the Good News on the right. It is through the Virgin Mary accepting to give birth to the Christ that we are able to be delivered from adversity. Written in Greek, starting above the icon of the Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, continuing through the Holy Altar, and finishing above the icon of the Three Holy Youths, is the hymn of the Feast of the Annunciation.

"Today is the crown of our salvation, and the revelation of the mystery planned from eternity; the Son of God, becomes the Virgin's Son, and Gabriel announces the grace. Wherefore, we along with him, to the Theotokos let us cry out: Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you."

On the inner walls of the Holy Altar, we have the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, with Seraphim next to them.

In the curved wall below the icon of the Virgin Mary, we find the icon of the Communion of the Holy Apostles from the Mystical Supper. Christ tell us, "Take, eat, this is My Body which is broken for you..." and, "Drink from it all of you, this is My Blood of the New Testament, which for you and for many is shed, the remission of sins." St. Basil reminds us of the instructions of Jesus, "Do this in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, you proclaim My death, and you confess My Resurrection" (From the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great).



The icons included on the lower walls of the Holy Altar are those of the Hierarchs and Great Ecumenical Teachers. Mystically serving with us are six hierarchs of the Church – from left to right: St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia; St. Gregory the Theologian; St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople; St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea, the Heaven-Revealer; St. Athanasios, Patriarch of Alexandria; and St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, the Wonderworker of Aegina. Placed in the center are St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, as it is the Divine Liturgies attributed to them that we still pray to this day.



To the left of the Holy Altar is a cove. As the Holy Altar Table is the Tomb of Christ; this cove, called the *Prothesis*, or area of preparation, becomes like the cave in Bethlehem. We are reminded of this by the icon of the Nativity of Christ placed inside. It is in this cove that the priest prepares the gifts for the offering, that is Holy Communion, before it is presented to the people at the Great Entrance during the Divine Liturgy. It is worth noting that at the height of the Byzantine Empire, in the large cathedrals, such as *Hagia Sophia* in Constantinople, the *Prothesis* was actually a separate building, thus making the presentation of the offering at the Great

Entrance that much more grand. Finally, above this cove we have medallion icons of two more fathers and hierarchs of the Church, St. Photios I of Constantinople and St. Gregory Palamas.

To the right of the Holy Altar is another cove called the *Diakonikon*, or the area of service. Often times things are stored here, like relics. We are blessed to have the relics and small icons of St. Theophan the Recluse (+1894) and St. John of Kronstadt (+1909). We also have pieces of the slippers of the Three Walking and Wonderworking Saints of the Ionian: St. Spyridon of Trimythous, St. Gerasimos of Kefalonia, and St. Dionysios of Zakynthos. Inside this cove is an icon of Melchizedek from the Old Testament. The King and Priest Melchizedek, as mentioned in the Book of Genesis, offers bread and wine as the Priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek's priesthood typifies the High Priesthood of Christ, Who gives His own Body (bread) and Blood (wine) to be sacrificed. In St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews, he compares how Christ's priesthood belongs to the Order of Melchizedek, which is important because Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the father of Aaron (thus showing the Order of Melchizedek to be superior to the Order of Aaron, which was the practice in the Mosaic Law at the time of Christ) (Psalms 109:4; Heb 5:6). Also inside this cove are the icons of St. Stephen the Proto-deacon and first martyr and St. Phillip the Deacon, who were two of the first seven deacons. Finally, above this cove we have medallion icons of two modern-day saints, St. John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco and St. Innocent of Alaska.



PART 18: SCENES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“What can the Law do without Grace? What does the earth do without the spittle of Christ? (John 9:6). What does the Apostle say...? ‘For if there had been a Law given which could give life, surely righteousness should have been by the Law’”.

- St. Augustine of Hippo (+430 AD/CD)

Often depicted around the Holy Altar are scenes from the Old Testament. These scenes are selected from the *theophanies*, or manifestations of God, which show us meetings between God and man. On either side of the Holy Altar, we have the icons of the Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah and the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace.

If we recall this passage in the Book of Genesis (18:1-16), we see Abraham and his wife, Sarah, offer hospitality to three strangers. “Then God appeared to him at the oak of Mamre,” the Prophet begins to write. Abraham, seeing the three strangers, addresses them in the singular as, “Lord,” and they too respond in the singular.



This icon is also known as the Holy Trinity. The Church has chosen this passage and icon as a divine revelation of the Holy Trinity, to represent the Father, Son, and Holy spirit, because all three angels are depicted in equal dignity, symbolizing the triune unity and equality of the three persons.

Theologically, the way the angels are dressed further explains this connection with the Holy Trinity.

The angel on the left is dressed in a light blue inner robe and a green outer garment, symbolic of heaven and earth. This angel is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, the life-giving force which animates everything that exists.

The second angel, sitting in the middle, is symbolic of the second Person of the Trinity, the Son, Jesus. Just like the icon of Jesus the Pantokrator on the icon screen and in the dome, this angel is dressed with a red inner robe and a blue outer garment. The inner red robe is symbolic of Jesus' Divine nature, being fully God, and the draped blue outer garment is symbolic of mankind, how He took on flesh by being born of the Virgin Mary, and becoming man while still being fully God.

Finally, the third angel, shown on the right and closest to the Holy Altar, is symbolic of God the Father. He is clothed with a white inner robe and a light red outer garment.

His brighter clothing reminds us of the icon of the Triumph over Death, the Resurrection icon, as well as the icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ-child on the icon screen.

These three – seated, conversing, carrying rod staffs, all as equal – preach the three equal Persons of the All Holy Trinity.

Looking to the right of the Holy Altar, we see the icon of the Three Holy Youths in the fiery furnace, as recalled from the Book of Daniel (3:1-97). In the 600s BC, the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem and ordered that all be instructed in the Chaldean language and thought. Amongst the captives were the Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths who were renamed in the Chaldean language to Shadrach (royal), Meshach (guest), and Abednego (servant of Nego). Every Holy and Great Saturday, we read from the Prophet Daniel's book about King Nebuchadnezzar and how he called all to bow down and worship the golden idol he created. Refusing to prostrate, the Three Youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were thrown into a fiery furnace. However, as they stood in the fire, they were untouched as if the fire had become a refreshing mist. When the King peered in, he saw a fourth man with them and exclaimed, "Behold, I see four men untied and walking in the midst of the fire, yet they are not destroyed; and the vision of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Daniel 3:92). They are also referred to by their original Hebrew names in the icon, and in the Prayer of Azarias (3:25-50): Ananias (God is gracious), Azarias (whom God helps), and Misael (who is what God is).



In the Old Testament, as we have seen in the Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah and the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace, we experience God revealing Himself to mankind. These icons are placed on either side of the Holy Altar because it is through the Holy Eucharist, Jesus' Body and Blood, that He is revealed to us every single Divine Liturgy. For us, the Holy Altar becomes like the oak of Mamre was to Abraham and Sarah, or like the furnace was for the Three Holy Youths.



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