

An Icon is a religious representation (IKON- Greek word meaning likeness) depicting Christ, Theotokos (Virgin Mary) and feast days in the Christian Church. From as early as the 5th and 6th centuries, holy icons have been handed down to Christians as a "sacred doorway" into the spiritual world providing believers with a spiritual connection to the Divine.

Iconography, is an art purely idealistic creating forms not meant to be realistic but an abstraction producing spiritual art creating celestial figures. Icons are painted in a way that is designed to be timeless and represent the eternal Kingdom or the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Besides Christ, the basis of all iconography, no other subject has been more depicted than Mary, the Theotokos (Greek for “Mother of God”, literally “God-Bearer”). It shouldn’t be surprising: no human being resembles Jesus Christ more than His Mother. We can certainly look to her as an example of what it means to be “Christ-like”.

The tradition of the Orthodox Church maintains that the first iconographer was the evangelist Luke, and that the first icon he painted under divine inspiration was of the Mother of God holding the Christ-child. Just like the icon of Christ Pantokrator, icons of the Son of God with His Mother are powerful testimonies to the reality of God’s incarnation as a human. Mary is shown wearing a veil typical of Jewish women of the period, an historical fact no doubt, but which also reveals to us her humility and piety. The veil is red, the color of divinity, whilst the clothes under the veil are green or blue, the colors of humanity. This is the exact opposite of the usual depiction of Christ: Who has humanity worn upon His eternal, divine, nature. As the evangelist Luke records, the angel Gabriel said to Mary:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the Power of the Highest will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35) And so this takes us into describing various symbolic details in this icon:

Symbolism-

The depiction represents the Theotokos or birthgiver of God in the Hodegitaria

prototype asking us to accept Christ as our guide and saviour. Hodegitria is the greek word for “to guide”. Joseph is not depicted in the centrality of the scene in the same plane as the role for the birthgiver of Christ, but as the guardian of this most profound mystery and his role in the Holy Family.

Three stars of Mary- upon her veil are three stars, which represent her eternal virginity: before, during, and forever after the birth of Christ. Suffice to say that the ever-virginity of Mary is dogma within the Church that is proclaimed in its artwork.

Scroll- A Scroll indicates holy Wisdom; rolled up revealing the Word yet not revealed.

2 doves- The Bible depicts doves as loyal, honest and loving. In Leviticus 12:8, two turtle doves replaced a lamb sacrifice. Mary and Joseph sacrificed two turtle doves in Jerusalem at Christ's birth. The doves also represent the spiritual nature of Joseph- pure, just and faithful.

White cloth- Joseph's hands are covered, in reverence, anticipating his future betrothal to the future Mother of God, pure virginal vessel of the Son of God.

Cross in Christ's halo- always identify Christ as our Saviour; forbearing the passion.