



SEPTEMBER 2019: JESUS IN ICONS  
*CHN Series: Aid to Prayer and Reflection*



Sister Sheila Anne, CHN

The word *icon* means *image* in Greek. It is an aid to worship and prayer, concerned only with the sacred. It is not an end in itself but invites us to go into the spiritual experience. The imagery is figurative and symbolic, like the language of Jesus' parables.

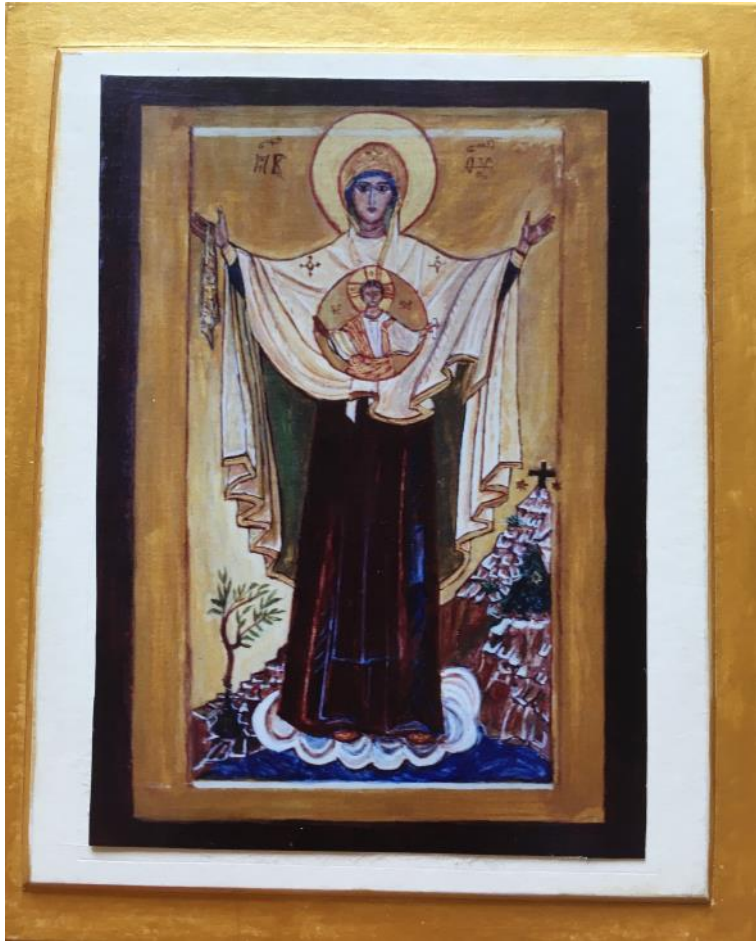
Iconographers write in silence, producing works of tradition, prayer and contemplation transformed into art. The artwork makes a theological statement about the two worlds of reality in which we live: the visible material world and the invisible spiritual world. It is sometimes called a door, a way in, to a dimension of sacred space and time. As you gaze upon an icon, keep silent and seek to look with the eyes of your heart, inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you truths not evident using only tools of reason.

As you seem to enter the icon, you notice that the perspective is inversed: figures and buildings become larger towards the background. No techniques are used to create three-dimensional space, and there is a minimum of details. Figures do not appear to speak, their mouths closed. Every element of the icon is significant. Caves or dark doorways represent unknown depths or death. Mountains are usually symbolic of divine encounters.

The use of colour is symbolic. Blues represent heaven, mystery and the mystical life; green the earth's vegetation, general fertility, youth and freshness; brown the soil and inert matter (in clothing, 'holy poverty'); red, the colour of blood, life, vitality and beauty; purple wealth and power; white the divine world, purity and innocence; and gold for sanctity, splendour, the imperishable and the glory of God.

As you consider Sr. Sheila Anne's icons,

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. (Ephesians 1:18)*



*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 )*

*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law. (Galatians 4:4 )*



The liturgical celebration of the Visitation began with the Franciscans and was then adopted by the wider church in the 13th century.

*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said in a loud voice, “You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Luke 1:41b-42, GNT)*

For full account, see Luke 1:39-56.



*... when the time came for the baby to be circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name which the angel had given him before he had been conceived....*

*“Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,  
and you may let your servant go in peace.  
With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:  
A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles  
and bring glory to your people Israel.”*

*The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him.  
.. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings  
were upon him. (Luke 2:21, 29-33, GNT)*





*Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, “This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart.” (Luke 2:29-35, GNT)*



“ICON OF CHRIST  
NOT MADE WITH  
HUMAN HANDS” or  
“ICON ON THE  
CLOTH”

Numerous legends of Prince Abgar of Edessa account for the origin of this icon-type. The title comes from the gospel verse, *“I will destroy this temple made by human hands and in three days I will construct another, not made by human hands.”* (Mark 14:58)

The iconographer creates *the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures.* (Colossians 1: 15)

The icon shows only the face of Christ, framed in long locks of hair. Total symmetry allows this impassive expression to lead us into spiritual awareness. The large eyes, attentive but subdued, saddened but concerned, reach into our hearts, for *God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him.* (John 3: 17)

Surrounding the head is a nimbus, bearing the cross-form in which the Greek letters  $\text{O} \Omega \text{N}$  express “I am who I am”, the name which God gives Himself (Exodus 3: 14). About Christ’s Head are the Greek letters “IC” and “XC”, a widely used four letter abbreviation of the Greek for Jesus (IHCOYC) and Christ (XPICTOC). These inscriptions identify all icons of Christ.



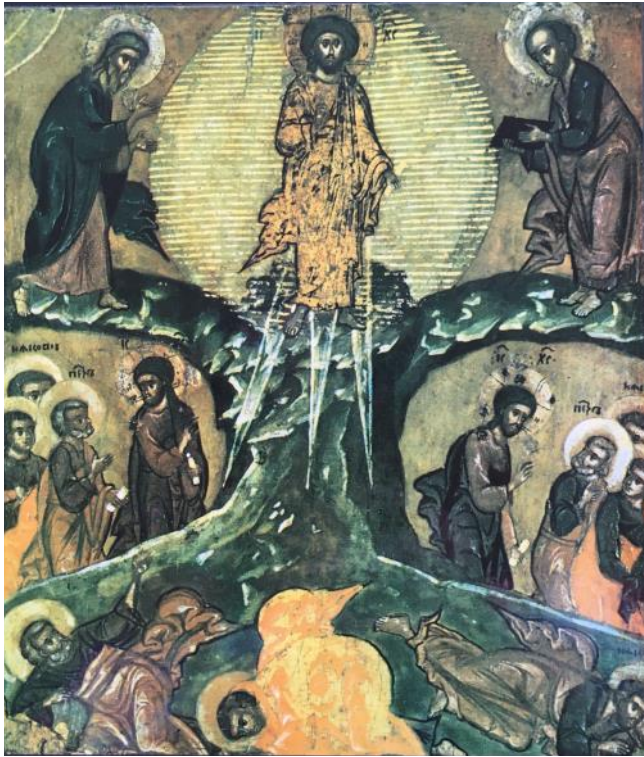
### “CHRIST PANTOCRATOR”

The word Pantocrator means “Almighty,” or “All-powerful.” In the Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX), pantocrator is the translation of “Lord of Hosts” and “God Almighty.” In the book of Revelation, pantocrator appears nine times as a title that emphasizes God’s sovereignty and power.

Christ is shown dressed in a purple robe, symbolic of his status and importance. His left hand is raised to make the sign of a blessing and his fingers form the letters “IC XC”, the Greek abbreviation for Jesus.

In his right hand he holds a book, signifying his teachings.

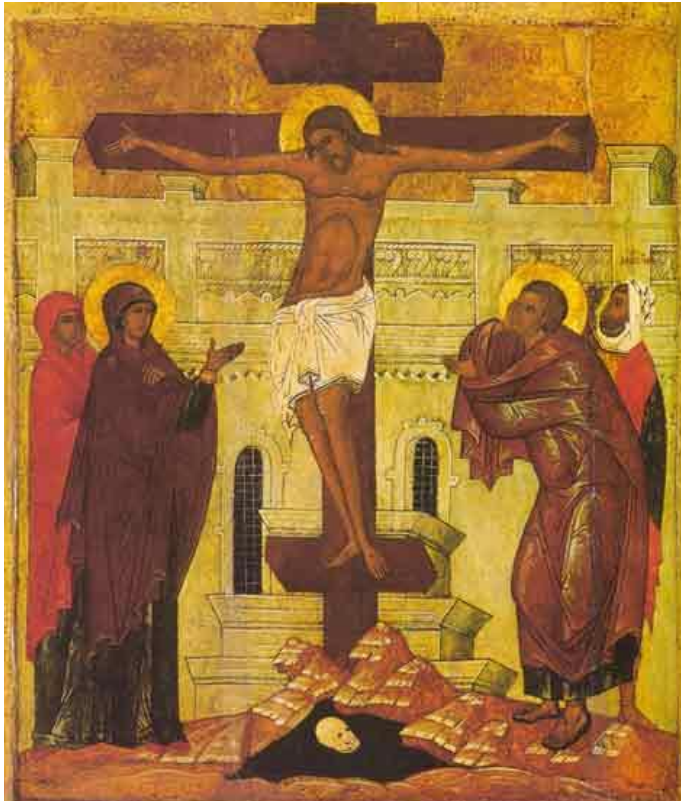




### THE TRANSFIGURATION (Matthew 17:1-13)

Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus wished to give His disciples an assurance of His Godhood and reveal to them the glory that awaits those who follow Him faithfully to the end. He took Peter, James, and John to the summit of Mount Tabor, and there He was transfigured, His face and robes shining like the sun. Moses and Elijah stand beside Jesus, representing the Law and the prophets. A voice came from heaven saying, "*This is My beloved Son*" (Matthew 17:5).

This was the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that "*some standing here will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom*" (Matthew 16:28), for the fulness of the heavenly glory was revealed. This knowledge would strengthen the Apostles as they faced many persecutions for their preaching.

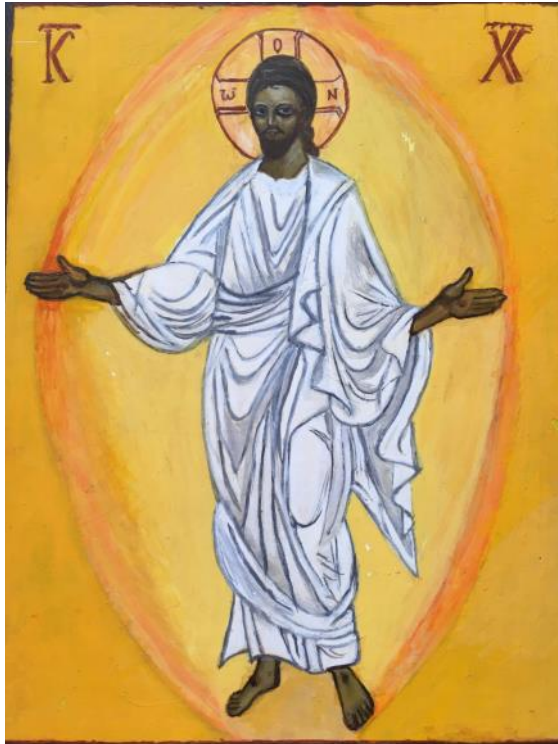


*This icon is not drawn by Sr. Sheila Anne; fair use*

## THE CRUCIFIXION

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)*

The sorrow of this scene is etched into the faces of those at the foot of the Cross. The ground beneath the Cross is cracked in two, revealing a skull. Christ's place of execution was called Golgotha, the place of the skull, and tradition related that this was the site of the first man Adam's tomb.



## CHRIST RESURRECTED

The risen Christ stands radiant and triumphant, arms opened wide in a gesture of welcome but also displaying the wounds of His crucifixion. Jesus' hair is depicted long and flowing, signifying the endless flow of time in which His love has existed for us. His gaze is serious and spiritual but full of warmth and compassion for we who have been saved through His sacrifice.

His white robe recalls the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2). Jesus invites us to share in His new life by donning white robes of baptism, the ancient symbol of membership in His church (Revelation 6:11). The elliptical shape of light around him is called a *mandorla* (Italian for almond) or *doxa* (Greek for glory). It represents an opening ripped asunder in the fabric of the world to expose the glory of Heaven beyond, symbolic of Divine revelation.

The content of this booklet is from Sister Sheila Anne, CHN, based on her work for the Prayer Day of September 2019. It is part of a series of 'Aids to Prayer and Reflection' which have been developed from our monthly Prayer Days, for your personal use. You may pick up other Aids from the Spirituality Centre or simply download copies from our website. We hope our readers find them helpful in their prayer lives.



You are welcome to join us for Days of Prayer and Reflection, which are held at the Spirituality Centre, on the first Thursday of the month, from March till November, 10am until 3pm.

The Eucharist is celebrated at midday and there are opportunities to sit quietly, use our library and wander in the gardens. BYO lunch; tea and coffee are provided.

There is no charge but a donation is appreciated.

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