

Commentary on the 'St. James the Great' icon

Icons of St. James the Great in the Byzantine school of iconography are few. Most depictions are set within the Spanish tradition, in the western art style, not within the correct era (mostly Medieval), and not at all in the tradition of Byzantine icons.

James is called James the Greater because another younger apostle was named James. He is the patron saint of Spain, pilgrims, hat makers, rheumatoid sufferers, and laborers. He is often portrayed as a pilgrim with walking staff and wide brimmed hat with a scallop shell '(The shell of St. James') on the front brim; symbol of The Way of St James has existed for over a thousand years. It was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during medieval times, and a pilgrimage route on which a plenary indulgence could be earned. He is also depicted as seated on a white horse holding a sword in his hand (the later being completely out of context to the historical Apostle and based on legend). The iconographer wanted to maintain the icon of St. James within the Byzantine tradition, which focuses less on the assorted symbols but on the Word of God, and with the 24K gold background being the prime symbol. Gold symbolizes Heaven. Gold applied on clay (bole) symbolizes Heaven's plans for Man, for Earth. It represents the union of Heaven and Earth; if clay is Man's basic nature, we cover it with God's.

The colours often used for St. James the Great are green and a pale purple. Finally, the iconographer used the traditional portrayal of St. James from a Greek book 'ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ', which included a mural of the Descent Of The Holy Spirit.

St. James the Great is portrayed dressed in a pale purple tunic (the tradition of the inner garment representing the spiritual) and his himation (outer garment) is in a green colour for the earth. He is holding the Word in his left hand and blessing with his right.

The face of the icon is covered in 24K gold and is 52" x 36". The icon is written on a wood panel with inset surface, covered with linen and a minimum of 7 coats of gesso. The iconographer works in archival quality acrylic paint, which has a higher pigment colour, which gives the vibrant colours seen.

The St. James Roman Catholic Church in Calgary Alberta commissioned this particular icon in 2010.