

Commentary on the 'Holy Family' Icon



When asked to write an icon of the Holy family, the one reference icon was one that had a number of serious theological questions to it, in trying to present a loving family unit. The immediate problem was the natural depiction of 'embrace' in which St. Joseph held Mary by placing his hand on her right shoulder and Mary leaning her head on him; while both embraced Jesus as a young infant, with their hands enveloping in front of Him.

Although the intent of portraying an exemplary loving family, it is after all, depicting a non-typical family. With the depicted intimacy between Joseph and Mary, it posed the possible question that would inadvertently add to the speculation of Mary's virginity and gets into the area of natural intimate relationships between spouses. The theology of an icon, and this one in particular, is to present the Holy Family as a close unit, but keeping the clarity of the Holy Family within the Revelation of the Incarnation.

Unlike orthodox icons which keep Joseph completely separate from Mary and Jesus and portraying him as an elderly man (emphasizing his role and Mary's virginity), I have always tried to find a balance in keeping Joseph closely connected and yet with a sense of separation. Therefore, he physically does not touch either Mary or Jesus, but is yet very close to them and clearly part of the 'family'. In this icon, again unlike orthodox icons which depicted Joseph as an elderly man, he is portrayed more in his middle age, because the 'separateness' already established. His glance is more afar to accent his role as protector and making reference of his visions.

Mary's head is kept bowed but now refers to Her tenderness to her family and to redirect the viewer's eyes to Jesus who stands in front of Her. Her right hand also has a protective stance, and again is directing to Her Son.

Jesus is portrayed as older, more to the age of when He was lost at the Temple and aware of His Father's Will. He is the priority of the icon, open and not shielded as in other icons. This is truer to the purpose of the Incarnation and family that protected and supported Him in His development for His public life and ministry. Jesus holds a scroll representing the Word of God becoming Flesh.

Again, unlike regular spouses starting a family, both Mary and Joseph were aware of the extraordinary circumstances and events, which they humbly accepted and that, even before Jesus' birth, had a sense of their unique roles within this Incarnation and being part of something so much larger than themselves.

The colours maintain traditional colours for Mary and Joseph, colours of the earth on their outer garment and the heavenly blue for their inner tunics. Joseph's colour was lighted and

adjusted to better connect him to the colours for Mary and Jesus. Jesus' tunic has the iconographer's signature patterns, symbolizing the Trinity.

The icon is 84" X 60" and covered with 24K Gold