

New Holy Family Icon At St Andrew's Cathedral



On Saturday, September 8 2007, Fr. John Laszczyk, Rector of St Andrew's Cathedral, formally installed a new icon of the Holy Family at the Cathedral Parish. The Icon, which is 7 feet high by 5 feet wide, is the largest ever written by iconographer Andre Prevost of Manitoba and is a gift to the Cathedral parish from parishioners who desire to remain anonymous.

The icon has a dual purpose for the Cathedral parish. The icon is first and foremost meant to be a means of leading the viewer in prayer. Secondly, it is meant to be a witness to the sacredness and beauty of the family and presents the Holy Family as an example to strive after.

This icon is meant to be a balance between the iconographic traditions of the Eastern and Western Churches. For example, St Joseph is closer to Mary than is normal for the Eastern style, expressing a certain Western element and view of the Holy Family.

The icon portrays Mary embracing the Christ child while St Joseph, who takes on a more youthful look, is portrayed gazing away, ever guarding, ever open to directives received through visions, ever ready and always protecting Mary and Christ. The gaze of Mary is always downwards towards Christ, thus

leading the viewer to Him. The eyes of Jesus are directed outward, towards the viewer, thus leading the viewer ultimately towards Him.

There are three Greek inscriptions on the icon. The first is on the right hand side which simply says "St Joseph" in Greek. On the left hand side, the viewer will find the inscription "MP OY" which is an inscription for "Mother of God / God-bearer". Finally, there is an inscription in the halo around the Christ child which is abbreviated as "W.O.N.", Greek for "I Am".

There is a significance behind the clothing worn by the members of the Holy Family as well. Mary and Joseph's himations are red and orange respectively representing earthly concerns, and both have a blue tunic, blue representing the Heavenly. Mary has three stars on her himation, but only two are visible to the viewer as the third is overshadowed by the halo of Jesus. The three stars are representative of the virginity of Mary.

As is traditional in iconography, when Mary is depicted with Christ, she is on the right side of the Lord (left side for the viewer). This is done to fulfill the psalmist prophecy about her — 'at your right hand stands the queen in gold.'

Christ is at the center of the icon so that His access to the viewer is not hindered in any way. In His left hand He is holding the Word of God while blessing the viewer with His right hand. His two fingers are meant to represent His two natures, human and divine, while the other three fingers are meant to be representative of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The fact that these two expressions are on one hand have a further depth and meaning to the unity of Christ in His two natures and the unity of the three Persons in the Godhead. Christ's tunic is white which has two types of Trinity symbols on it for ornamentation.

The icon is constructed on one inch Russian Birch plywood. Both the front and sides of the Icon are covered with a muslin cloth and seven coats of gesso, with sanding after each layer has dried.

An Icon has two parts. The outer part is the container which works as a frame, while the inner part is “the contained”, which is where the design is held. The icon itself symbolizes the human person, the outer part being the body and the inner part being the soul. The background of the icon and the halos are covered with 24K Russian Gold Leaf, with the only exception being the sides which are left in the original coating of the Red Bole (a clay based colour). The sides, in the Red Bole colouring, is meant to be representative of God’s creation, while the gold symbolizes both Heaven and the Light of God. Gold, being an illuminative colour, is meant to illuminate aspects of the icon to show us all the call to holiness in our lives.

One final note on the icon is the white line around the halo of Christ. It is meant to symbolize that this particular transfiguration has been completed and thus symbolizing for an iconographer the desire to begin yet again their next project on a new white board. This white line is the completion of the iconographer’s spiritual journey within this icon and prepares him to begin yet again on another.

The icon is located in the Schola area of the Cathedral. The hope for the icon is for it to be a witness to the beauty of family life. The Cathedral is a place which receives many visitors every day. Some come to pray, some come to simply admire the beauty. No matter who comes to the Cathedral, God has the opportunity to touch them through various objects. May this particular Icon touch all visitors with the beauty and dignity of the family. May it witness to the strength and role of the father, always gazing outwards, protecting and guarding the family, leading it to holiness; to the mother who is always caring, gazing closely with the love only a mother can show her children; and to the children, a sign of hope for the world, that their innocence may be loved and cherished.

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