

***Pictures and Commentary of the icons
of St. Edmund's Church
by Andre Prevost***



St. Edmund's Catholic Church
545 Mahon Avenue
North Vancouver, British Columbia
V7M 2R7

Icons Painted By André Prevost

The Mural of icons at St. Edmund's Church, North Vancouver was started in 1980 and completed by Easter 1981. The medallions in the Nave were started in 1981 and completed in 1984. The overall size is 8 feet by 15 feet and materials used were acrylic, laytex and gold paint on wood.

On February 24, 2014, Andre began a restoration of the Sanctuary Icons, in cleaning the icons and redoing the backgrounds in 23K Gold Leaf. He also gold---leafed the trim around the Cross. The project was completed on March 6th.

Introduction

What is an icon?

“No one could describe the Word of the Father! But when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos, He consented to be described, and restored the fallen image to its former state by uniting it to divine beauty. We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images.”

(Taken from the kontakion of the Triumph of Orthodoxy; which is the feast of the victory of the Icon and the ultimate triumph of the dogma of the Divine Incarnation.)

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As you can see, this kontakion is complete in itself.

The icon is not a portrait or a nice picture. The icon is an image not only of a living but also of a deified prototype. It does not represent the corruptible flesh, destined for decomposition, but transfigured flesh, illuminated by grace, the flesh of the world to come. (1 Cor. 15: 35-46) It portrays the divine beauty and glory in material ways which are visible to the physical eyes. The icon is venerable and holy precisely because it portrays this deified state of its prototype and bears his or her name. This is why grace, characteristic of the prototype, is present in the icon; the grace of the Holy Spirit which sustains the holiness both of the represented person and the icon.

There is a difference between an icon and a portrait. A portrait represents an ordinary human being, and an icon, a man united to God.

“The icon is distinguishable from the portrait by its very content, and this content creates specific forms of expression which are characteristic of the icon alone and which distinguish it from all other images. The Icon indicates holiness in such a way that it need not be inferred by our thought but is visible to our physical eyes. As the image of the sanctification of man, the icon represents the reality which was revealed in the transfiguration on Mount Tabor. We contemplate not only the face of Jesus Christ, but also His glory, the light of divine Truth made visible to our eyes by the symbolic language of the icon.”

As Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow says, “The world does not see the saints, just as a blind man does not see light.”

Consequently, we cannot represent this holiness, which we cannot see; it cannot be portrayed by word, by image, or by any human means. In the icon, it can only be portrayed with the help of forms, colours, and symbols, by an artistic language established by the Church e.g. the halo.

The icon represents the saint as free from sin. It is not caught in the sensual (pretty faces etc.) but presents holiness. “An icon cannot be contrived. No artistic imagination, no technical perfection, no talent can replace definite knowledge. The icon opens up to us an immense vision which embraces both the past and the future of the universe”

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The following pages give a breakdown of the icons in St. Edmund’s Church in North Vancouver, British Columbia. The icons are found both in the Sanctuary and the Nave of the church.

A short explanation is given as to ‘Why’ and ‘What’ each means, along with a black and white illustration.



**The Mural in the Sanctuary at St. Edmund's Church
which includes the icons:**

Our Lady of the Presentation

St. Joseph

St. Edmund

St. Andrew

St. John the Baptist

St. Michael

St. Gabriel

Christ Triumphant (Pantocrator)

Icon of Our Lady of the Presentation

First icon for the St. Edmund's Church Mural in North Vancouver:

36" x 48" Laytex and gold paint on wood

Icon of Mary: "Theotokos (Greek for 'Birthgiver' or 'Mother of God')

This title was conferred on the Virgin at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in the year 431. The Church Fathers felt it was necessary to use the term in order to correctly understand the Incarnation – that true God became true man.

“The image of the Mother of God is placed directly behind the altar above the Eucharist. Her place close to the sacrament corresponds to Her place in the Eucharistic canon. The Mother of God personifies the Church itself, because she contained in Herself the creator of the world whom the world cannot contain. This is why she is represented in the ‘oranta’ position, that is, interceding before God for the sins of the world. The uplifted hands are a gesture which completes the sacrifice. This is why the priest also makes this same gesture during the liturgy.”

Mary is presenting Her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ both symbolizing “the fruit of the womb”, and the consecrated host. Our Lord welcomes us with outstretched arms. His halo bearing the symbol of His cross, also has the inscription “w,o,n” which stands for “the being” for God said to Moses in a vision “I am that I am”.

Our Lord is also encircled by His glory.

In this form of icon, Mary is shown seated on a throne as Queen. This is why she is shown in this icon in a seated opposition. She is also portrayed in a brown mantle which symbolizes that she is a creature of God (this colour being that of the earth), and the blue robe, that she is our Queen.

The three stars on her mantle symbolize her virginity. Above Mary, on either side, there are two Seraphim (the 6-winged angels of the highest rank). The inscription above Her head, MP OY, means Mother of God.

***Note: This icon was included as a two part centerfold of the BC Catholic along with a colour photo of Pope John Paul , on the occasion of his Papal visit to Vancouver.**

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Icon of Christ Triumphant **(with the four creatures) (Pantocrator: All Powerful)**

“Because the Sanctuary is the place where the unbloody sacrifice established by Christ is offered, the image of Christ is placed above that of the Virgin. It is He who is Himself the offered sacrifice and the Sanctifier who offers.”

Christ Triumphant is portrayed seated on a throne holding an open book bearing the inscription “Ego sum via, veritas et vita” which means “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” in Latin.

The position of His right hand is very important. It is according to the following rule of iconography; they are in such a position as to form the letters ICXC. This inscription is also on either side of the throne.

Our Lord is portrayed in a rust coloured robe to symbolize ‘Son of Man’ and wears a bright blue mantle to symbolize ‘Son of God’. His glory is shown both by the throne and by the rainbow which encircles Him. The “bow in the cloud” also attests to God’s everlasting covenant with Noah and his descendants, and to His faithfulness.

Within Christ’s halo, once again there is the symbol of the cross and the inscription O,Ω,N which means ‘the being’.

Lastly, Christ is surrounded by the four creatures from the Book of Revelation:

- The winged Man: symbolizing St. Matthew
- The winged Ox: symbolizing St. Luke
- The winged Lion: symbolizing St. Mark
- The Eagle: symbolizing St. John
- (these are the four Evangelists)
- (each are holding a book or parchment representing the Gospels they wrote.)

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***added note of interest not in the booklet:**

A very fond memory about the Icon of Christ Triumphant is that I had really pushed to assure that the icon would be completed by Easter. Father Monroe, now Bishop of the Kamloops Diocese, and I had put together a purple cover for the mural, but included the space where the icon would be (for all of lent). During Holy Week, Father and I mounted the icon into its place without anyone else seeing it, and recovered the mural as before. During the Easter Vigil, during the ringing of the bells and the Gloria, the veil was lowered to everyone's amazement. I will always cherish the impact on the congregation and the Easter Vigil.

Other note: The mural was contracted with the original idea that it could become a triptych that could close on itself during lent. The weight of the panels proved too risky.

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Icon of St. Andrew:

St. Andrew is the apostle that introduces others to Christ, therefore it is fitting to portray him below the Icon of Christ Triumphant. The face of St. Andrew is portrayed according to early Church tradition. His blood red mantle represents his martyrdom, and his light gold robe, his crowning glory in heaven. He also bears his 'X' shaped cross, the instrument of his death.
"Sancte Andrea – ora pro nobis"

Icon of St. John the Baptist:

St. John is represented in the traditional camel skin tunic and earthly mantle to symbolize his life of repentance and fasting. His face is more severe and tanned with tangled hair to represent the harshness of his life in the desert and his self-sacrifice. He holds a silver tray which symbolizes the tray his head was put on, but instead of the head we see the Lamb of God. He holds the cross shaped staff in his right hand with the inscribed banner: "Ego vox clamantis in deserto; Dirigite viam Domini sicut dixit Isaias prophete." Meaning "I am the voice crying in the desert. Make straight the way of the Lord," as said Isaias the prophet. (John 1:23)
"Sancte Ioannes – ora pro nobis"

Icons of St. Gabriel and St. Michael:

St. Michael is on the left and St. Gabriel on the right.

St. Michael is dressed in regal colours. The purple is also a liturgical colour representing humility, contrition, and penance. The gold vestment draped on his shoulders (with blue crosses) symbolize his position as leader of the angels that fought against Satan and his legions. In his left hand, he holds the gold orb mounted by a cross, symbolizing God's Dominion; His kingly power and justice. In his right hand he holds a spear which represents his fight against Satan (evil). The inscription reads "Sancte Michael".

St. Gabriel is dressed in greens, which is the liturgical colour symbolizing "Hope" (our hope of salvation). The red shoulder dressing represents the yoke which Christ bore to save us from our sins. In his right hand, Gabriel holds a disc with the image of the Christ Child which represents the Annunciation. In his left hand he holds a staff bearing three small globes forming a triangle, symbolizing the Trinity. The inscription reads "Sancte Gabriel".

Icon of St. Joseph:

He is placed at Mary's right, having been her husband on earth, and foster father of Her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is simply portrayed as a middle-aged man, dressed in a robe and mantle of earth colours. He leads us to Mary and Our Lord with his left hand and holds the flowering staff with his right hand. His head is bowed to our Lord.

"Sancte Joseph – ora pro nobis"

Icon of St. Edmund:

It is fitting to have the icon of St. Edmund at Mary's left seeing that he had a very special love for Her. He too leads us to Her and Her Son, but with his right hand. St. Edmund also has his head bowed to our Lord. He is dressed in full liturgical vestments, including: the alb, stole, dalmatic, maniple, chasuble. He is without his Mitre because he is in the presence of God Himself, but he is wearing his Palium and carries his Crosier in his left hand, representing his office as Bishop. (The gold chasuble is worn on special feast days).

"Sancte Edmunde – ora pro nobis"

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Explanation of the Medallions surrounding the Nave of the church:

(Starting from the left of the Nave)



The monogram of our Blessed Mother can be seen in the decorative band (near our Blessed Mother's side chapel). The band contains a design with a cross in its centre with two grapevines branching out from it one either side.

**Note: Upon visiting St. Edmund's in July 2004, I noticed that the side chapels had been switched, therefore the monograms are no longer in order.*

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Saint Gregory the Great

(Pope & Doctor of the Church)

Feastday: September 3rd



Medallion of St. Gregory the Great 1981

For the Nave of St. Edmund's Church,

Laytex and gold paint on masonite
4 feet diameter

- Usually represented in a tiara and pontifical robes, carrying a book or musical instrument, or sometimes bearing a staff with a double cross.
- Born in 540 AD of a patrician family in Rome; joined a Benedictine Abbey (St. Andrew's) as a monk, then deacon.
- Introduced new styles of church music and formed the 'Schola Cantorum'
- 'Dove' Coat of Arms: symbolizing the dove that his deacon Peter said he once saw whispering in his ear.
- The other Coat of Arms bears a red roundel with gold HIS representing the Host and red lions guardianship, a reference to St. Gregory's Mass. Three bands refer to his establishing a monastery, the primacy of his office, and reform of church music. All on a gold field.
- Patron of Musicians. Invoked against Gout; patron of fringe makers, scholars, musicians, singers, students and teachers.

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St. Catherine of Sienna
Virgin and Doctor of the Church
Feastday: April 29th



- Painted in 1982
- born in Sienna in 1347 on the feast of the Annunciation.
- "Euphrosyne" was her nickname as a child (Greek for 'joy')
- received a vision (when a young girl) of Christ seated in glory. The stigmata were only visible to herself until her death on April 29, 1380 – then, all could see them.
- She wrote "The Dialogue of St. Catherine" under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and worked with Pope Gregory XI and under Urban VI.
- She is often portrayed all in white (Dominican robe) with a dark outer mantle. She has stigmata on her hands (also her heart and feet). She has a lily and prayer book in her hands. She is shown here with a crown of thorns rather than with a halo.
- She has two shields: 1) The lily and 2) a red cross and gold heart on a black field (refers to her faith and charitableness).

- St. Catherine is also a Doctor of the Church, and is the patroness of philosophers and spinsters, fire prevention and headache sufferers.

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St. Augustine of Hippo
Bishop and Doctor of the Church
 Feastday: August 28th



- Painted in 1983
- Born on November 13, 354 AD at Tagaste (North Africa). His mother is St. Monica.
- He wrote “Confessions” and “Rule of St. Augustine” (basis for constitution of canons regulating friars and nuns.)
- Died on August 28, 430 AD at the age of 76.
- His shield refers to his intense zeal and devotion of Christ. (a gold heart aflame, on a blue field).
- He is patron of theologians and scholars, brewers, printers, and is invoked for sore eyes.
- He is often portrayed in Bishop’s robes (of that day) and miter. He is sometimes depicted holding a heart in his hands. He is portrayed here with his crozier and holding a parchment representing his writings.

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St. Anthony of Padua:
Confessor and Doctor of the Church
 Feastday: June 13th



- Painted in 1983
- born in Lisbon in 1195 of a noble Portuguese family and spent his mature life in Padua.
- Excellent preacher; became provincial master after St. Francis of Assisi's death.
- Pope Gregory IX once called him "the Ark of the Testament".
- Died on June 13, 1231.
- "Wonder-working saint"
- St. Anthony is portrayed in a brown Franciscan habit and holding the Christ Child in his arms. He is sometimes shown "accompanied by a mule which, legend says, fell on its knees before the sacrament when upheld by the saint."
- His coat of arms refers to: 1) the book – phenomenal knowledge of Holy Scripture; his eloquence. 2) Lilies – refer to his purity, the stems to his youth. 3) Gold book, Silver lilies with green stems on a brown field.
- Patron of barren and pregnant women, of the poor, of travelers; also invoked against shipwreck.

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St. Thomas Aquinas:
Confessor and Doctor of the Church
 Feastday: January 28th



- Painted in 1984.
- From a family of royal blood, and had an imposing stature, massive build, appeared more like a Norseman.
- Assumed to be born in 1226 (between Rome and Naples).
- Joined the Dominican Order and his most important works were: 1) “Summa Theologica” 2) “Summa Contra Gentiles”.
- He is referred to as the “Angelic Doctor” and he wrote the hymns “Verbum Supernum” and “Pange Lingua”.
- he often is portrayed with an ox by his side (“Dumb Ox” – former nickname) with a rayed sun emblazoned on his breast; or holding a rayed chalice – a reference to his writings on the Eucharist; holding a book and pen, or a star (his learning).
- His coat of arms: 1) “Holy Eucharist” 2) “The Sun of Splendor” – with the eye refers to God the Father. A gold sun with eye on a black field (referring to the Dominican habit).
- Patron of universities and centres of learning; and of booksellers and pencil makers.

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St. Jerome

Most Learned Of The Fathers Of The Church

Feastday: September 30th.



- Painted in 1983.
- born in 342 AD near Adriatic, then moved to Rome and died on Sept. 30, 420.
- Read Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; revised the Latin Psalter; “The Vulgate”; “St. Jerome’s Commentary”; letters.
- Usually portrayed in the desert, as a scholar in his study; sometimes in the robes of a cardinal, because of his services for Pope Damascus; often shown with a lion (from whose paw – to legend – he once drew a thorn).
- Appears as an old man; bearded and ascetic; as a hermit in the desert praying before a crucifix, holding a stone, with which to beat his chest.
- The red Cardinal’s hat is in view and also his Coat Of Arms which is a red cross on a silver field.
- Patron of students, librarians and theologians.

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St. Theresa of Avila
Virgin and Doctor of the Church
Feastday: October 15th.



- Painted in 1982
- Born on March 28, 1515 in Avila, Spain.
- Became a Carmelite nun and established the Reform of the Discalced Carmelites – 32 monasteries established.
- Wrote many books on Mystical theology.
- St. Theresa is in a Carmelite habit holding a book and quill pen to represent her many writings.
- Two Coat of Arms: 1) Dove – representing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2) A gold heart with a red HIS inset; silver rays; on a black field. (she enjoyed much suffering with a joyful heart).
- Patroness of headache sufferers and lace makers.

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St. Ambrose
Bishop, Confessor and Doctor of the Church
Feastday: December 7th.



- born into the Roman governing class in the palace at Treves about 340 AD. He was a small man with pale yellow hair.
- Learnt Greek; was a poet and orator; mastery of law; taught and baptized St. Augustine of Hippo.
- He was the first of the Fathers to use Latin effectively and enriched Church music and wrote “Evening Hymn”, “Deus creator omnium”, “Morning Hymn – Aeterne rerum conditor”
- Died on Good Friday in 397
- Usually shown with the robes and dressings of a bishop; may hold a scourge in his hand – robe, miter, scroll of music etc.
- Also portrayed as holding a church in his hands.
- Coat of Arms: the scourges represent the strict disciplines of the Bishop of Milan. The beehive refers to his eloquence as he labored to maintain and clarify the need for respect of the Church. – Gold beehive, silver scourges on a blue field.
- Patron of beekeepers and domestic animals and candle makers.

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Near the side chapel of the Sacred Heart, the monogram of our Lord can be found in the decorative band after St. Ambrose’s Icon.

**Note: Upon visiting St. Edmund’s in July 2004, I noticed that the side chapels had been switched, therefore the monograms are no longer in order.*

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Andre Prevost

From the booklet which was printed for the parishioners after the completion of the icons.
1984