

About Icons

An icon is more than a work of art: someone once said that it is like a prayer or a hymn in colour. Iconography is very traditional and very symbolic. Heaven and earth come together in the painting: the animal world with sable and hog's hair brushes and the egg used to bind the pigments; the vegetable world with the wood on which the icon is painted; and the mineral world with the powdered gesso (white plaster), earth pigments and gold leaf. The background is usually gold leaf. The colours are then applied in layers beginning with the darkest first. The last stage is the blessing and the naming of the icon.

Orthodox Christians believe that our flesh and blood have been hallowed because God became man in Jesus. Icons are therefore painted to reflect the spiritual nature of the body: the flowing lines of nature become harmoniously arranged straight lines which give the figures stillness and intensity. Various techniques help to create a sense of spiritual luminosity: the white background gesso; brushstrokes of pure white; translucent washes; and of course the gold leaf. The figures never cast shadows because they themselves are sources of light. The halo represents the radiance of mankind transformed by the Holy Spirit. The large eyes, small mouths and thin noses are all ways of suggesting the spiritual rather than the material.

Colour usually reflects the spiritual rather than the natural world, which is why some elements such as hills and buildings appear unnatural. Gold is the colour of God; Jesus is often shown wearing a blue robe over a red robe (to signify his divinity and his humanity); purple is a royal colour; green is the colour of natural things; black represents evil and death. Colours are never mixed: you will never see grey in an icon because iniquity and righteousness have no place together.

The figures in icons seem to come from another world; it can seem that we do not view them but they view us, from the eternal kingdom.



A Service for Advent 2010 at St Nicholas

Welcome and introduction

Hymn

Hail, gladdening Light, of His pure glo-
-ry poured
Who is th'immortal Fa-ther, heaven-
ly, blest,
Ho-li-est of Ho-lies, Je-sus Christ our
Lord!

Now we are come to the sun's hour of
rest;

The lights of eve-ning round us shine;
We hymn the Fa-ther, Son, and Ho-ly
Spi-rit di-vine!

Worthiest art thou at all times to be
sung

With un-de-fi-lèd tongue,
Son of our God, gi-ver of life, alone:
There-fore in all the world thy glo-
ries, Lord, they own.

Opening prayer and confession

Cantabile: *The Lord's Prayer (N
Rimsky-Korsakov)*

Reading 1: *The people that walked
in darkness (Isaiah 9:2-
7)*

Cantabile: *Come thou redeemer of
the earth (M. Praetorius,
arr. S. Cleobury)*

Reading 2: *The angel Gabriel (Luke
1:26-38)*

Cantabile: *Bogoroditse Devo, radu-
isya (Rejoice, virgin
Mother of God) (S.
Rachmaninoff)*

Reading 3: *Mary visits Elizabeth
(Luke 1:39-56)*

Hymn

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Come, then, and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings from the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every Christian
breast,
And furnished for so great a guest!
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.
Without Thy grace our souls must fade
And wither like a flower decayed.

Stretch forth Thine hand, to heal our
sore,
And make us rise and fall no more;
Once more upon Thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee
Whose Advent sets thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Spirit blest, for evermore. Amen.

Prayers

Hymn

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Daystar, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day's return,
till thy mercy's beams I see;
till they inward light impart,
cheer my eyes and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiance divine,
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Reading 4: *The rod from the stem
of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-9)*

Cantabile: *Even so Lord, quickly
come (P. Manz)*

Saint Clement's blessing

Hymn

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train:
Alleluya! Alleluya! Alleluya!
God appears on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold Him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at naught and sold
him,
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply
wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshippers:
With what rapture, with what rapture,
with what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee,
High on Thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for thine own;
O come quickly! O come quickly! O
come quickly!
Alleluya! Come, Lord, come!

The Grace