

WEEK 20: SIGHT - ICONS

PRE-K - KINDERGARTEN

GOALS

What is an icon?

Do we venerate or worship icons? What does venerate mean?

LESSON

Teacher Reference: "House of God: Iconography" -

<https://www.goarch.org/-/the-house-of-god-iconography>

Icon of St. Luke: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jimforest/1049743866/>

WHAT IS AN ICON?

An icon is a holy image and provides us with a "window to heaven." Icons will show saints, angels, the Theotokos, or Jesus as well as events or moments in history of the saints, Theotokos, or Jesus.

People who make icons are called iconographers. Each iconographer's icon will look slightly different from another iconographer, but they all have certain rules they have to follow when they are making an icon. Do you know who was the very first iconographer? It was God, who made man in His image. The second iconographer was St. Luke the Evangelist and he painted an icon of the Theotokos. (*Show icon of St. Luke*)

Icons come in all different sizes and we have them both in our homes and in our churches. Do you have icons in your home? Where are they?

FACES:

Let's look at an icon for a moment. (*Show the icon of the Three Hierarchs included with this lesson*) Icons do not look like a photo of us. They look slightly different from how we look in person - and that's done on purpose.

When you look at an icon, you notice that the saint's eyes are often looking off into the distance. This is because the saint is thinking only about God, not this world.

Their nose is longer than normal and quite thin because their nose no longer detects the smells of this world.

Their mouth is tiny and closed because they are concentrating so hard on God that they are silent and quiet. It is also because the saint no longer needs food to survive like we do right now.

Their ears look different too because they only hear directions from God now.

Last week, we talked about using all of our senses to learn about God, but we also use them in our everyday life for watching tv, playing on the computer, eating food, and doing all sorts of stuff. The saints are no longer interested in those things. They only want to use their eyes to see God, listen to God, and keep their mouths silent. Our icons are showing us that God is more important than anything else!

HALOS:

Do you see the circles drawn around the saints' heads? Those are called halos and are there to tell us that these three men are saints. They represent the Divine Light that shines from them because they have a close relationship with God.

CLOTHES:

What does it look like these saints are wearing? Do their clothes look like anything you see when you go to church on Sundays? (They look like vestments.)

This icon tells us that these men were either deacons, priests, or bishops because they are wearing vestments. In another lesson, we're going to learn more about the different types of vestments and then you might be able to tell on your own that these three men were bishops.

HANDS:

It's very rare for a person in an icon not to be holding something, unless they are part of an icon that shows an event. Usually, the person in an icon will have something in one of their

hands and their other hand will oftentimes be posed in a specific way.

Whatever the saint is holding in their hands gives us a hint about their life.

What are all three of the bishops in this icon holding in their hand? (A book)

What do you think that book is about? (God)

These bishops wrote and spoke about God all the time.

COLORS:

Colors have certain meanings in icons. An iconographer cannot color an icon any way they want - there are certain rules they have to follow.

Gold is used to show pure light or the Light of God.

(Show the icon of Christ in this lesson) You will see Jesus wearing blue and red clothes. The blue represents his divinity - that He is the Son of God. The red represents His humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

(Show icon of the Theotokos and baby Jesus included in this lesson) What's another name for Jesus' mom? (Theotokos) She also wears red and blue clothes. The red represents her humanity as well and the blue represents that she gave birth to Jesus.

Do you remember when we talked about how the saints are usually holding something in their hand in an icon? Who is the Theotokos holding in this icon? (Baby Jesus) We always know immediately that an icon is the Theotokos when we see baby Jesus in her arms.

VENERATING ICONS:

I know things have changed a bit during the pandemic, but normally when we come into our church, how do we greet the icons in our narthex? (We kiss them)

We kiss the icons because the saints, the Theotokos, and Jesus are very special to us. This is called venerating the icons. We are showing our love and respect for the people on the icon, just like we show to the people we love in our everyday life.

REVIEW:

- Who is shown on an icon? (The saints, angels, the Theotokos, and Jesus)
 - Most of you can't read yet, but you can still learn about the saint on the icon by looking at their clothes and what they are holding in their hands. Both of these things will give you hints about their life. You can also ask your mom and dad to tell you more about that saint or read a story about their life to you.
 - When you come into a church and venerate an icon, what do you do? (You make the sign of the cross and nicely kiss the icon)
 - Why do we kiss icons? (To show our love and respect to that person)
-

THREE HIERARCHS



Saint Gregory the Theologian Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great

They are commemorated on January 30th



CHRIST



THEOTOKOS HOLDING CHRIST

WEEK 20: SIGHT - ICONS

1ST - 2ND GRADES

GOALS

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Do we venerate or worship icons? What does venerate mean?

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FACES:

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Their mouth is tiny and closed because they are concentrating so hard on God that they are silent and quiet. It is also because the saint no longer needs food to survive like we do right now.

Their ears look different too because they only hear directions from God now.

Last week, we talked about using all of our senses to learn about God, but we also use them in our everyday life for watching tv, playing on the computer, eating food, and doing all sorts of stuff. The saints are no longer interested in those things. They only want to use their eyes to see God, listen to God, and keep their mouths silent. Our icons are showing us that God is more important than anything else!

HALOS:

Do you see the circles drawn around the saints' heads? Those are called halos and are there to tell us that these three men are saints. They represent the Divine Light that shines from them because they have a close relationship with God.

CLOTHES:

What does it look like these saints are wearing? Do their clothes look like anything you see when you go to church on Sundays? (They look like vestments.)

This icon tells us that these men were either deacons, priests, or bishops because they are wearing vestments. In another lesson, we're going to learn more about the different types of vestments and then you might be able to tell on your own that these three men were bishops.

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 - You can learn about the saint on an icon by looking at their clothes and what they are holding in their hands. Both of these things will give you hints about their life. You can also ask your mom and dad to tell you more about that saint or read a story about their life to you.
 - When you come into a church and venerate an icon, what do you do? (You make the sign of the cross and nicely kiss the icon)
 - Why do we kiss icons? (To show our love and respect to that person)
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CHRIST



THEOTOKOS HOLDING CHRIST

WEEK 20: SIGHT - ICONS

3RD - 5TH GRADES

GOALS

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Their mouth is tiny and closed because they are concentrating so hard on God that they are silent and quiet. It is also because the saint no longer needs food to survive like we do right now.

Their ears look different too because they only want to hear God.

Last week, we talked about using all of our senses to learn about God during the Divine Liturgy, but we also use them in our everyday life for watching tv, playing on the computer, eating food, and doing all sorts of stuff. The saints are no longer interested in using their senses for this world. They only want to use their senses to focus on God.

HALOS:

Do you see the circles drawn around the saints' heads? Those are called halos and are there to tell us that these three men are saints. They represent the Divine Light that shines from them because they have a close relationship with God.

CLOTHES:

(Still looking at the icon of the Three Hierarchs) What does it look like these saints are wearing? Do their clothes look like anything you see when you go to church on Sundays? (They look like vestments.)

This icon tells us that these men were either deacons, priests, or bishops because they are wearing vestments. These three men were bishops and in a later lesson we'll learn more about the different types of vestments so you will be able to tell the difference yourself.

HANDS:

Most of the time, you will see a saint holding something in one hand and their other hand will be posed in a specific way. Whatever the saint is holding in their hand gives us a hint about their life. Oftentimes (but not always), a martyr - someone who died because of

their belief in God - will be holding a cross. People who write or teach about God will oftentimes be holding the Gospel book. Old Testament prophets will oftentimes be depicted holding a scroll indicating their wisdom. If you look at our iconostasis (icon screen near the altar), there is an icon of St. Mary Magdalene on the far left. She is holding a small jar of myrrh in one of her hands. She was one of the myrrh bearing woman who went to anoint Christ after his crucifixion.

Looking back at the icon of the Three Hierarchs, what are each of bishops holding in their hands? (A Gospel book)

All three of these bishops wrote extensively about God and also taught people through their actions and words about God as well.

The three saints on this icon are St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Basil the Great. We learned earlier this year that St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great both wrote the Divine Liturgy.

COLORS:

Colors have certain meanings in icons. An iconographer cannot color an icon any way they want - there are certain rules they have to follow.

Before the 1800's, painters had to make their own paint. It took a lot of training to know what materials to use and how to mix them in order to make the colors they needed for their work. They would use things like plants, minerals, and insects to create their paints. Depending on where you lived in the world would determine what materials you had to make paint. So, a red in Russian may not look exactly like a red in Greece - but they were close. Today, we can go to the store and buy paints that are mixed in a factory and painters no longer are required to make their own. Some iconographers use paints from the store and some still like the old way of mixing it themselves.

(Show the icon of Christ in this lesson) Gold is used to show pure light or the Light of God. This is why you almost always see the halo around a saint's head in gold.

You will see Jesus wearing blue and red clothes. The blue represents his divinity - that He is the Son of God. The red represents His humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

(Show icon of the Theotokos and baby Jesus included in this lesson) The Theotokos also wears red and blue clothes. The red represents her humanity as well and the blue represents that she gave birth to Jesus.

Do you remember when we talked about how the saints are usually holding something in their hand in an icon? Who is the Theotokos holding in this icon? (Jesus as a child) We always know immediately that an icon is the Theotokos when we see baby Jesus in her arms.

VENERATING ICONS:

I know things have changed a bit during the pandemic, but normally when we come into our church, how do we greet the icons in our narthex? (We kiss them)

We do not venerate the icons themselves, but our veneration goes to the person depicted in them.

What is the difference between worship and veneration? Worship is reserved for God and veneration is for the saints. We neither venerate nor worship icons, but we venerate/worship the prototype.

REVIEW:

- What is an icon? (A holy image depicting the saints, angels, the Theotokos, or Christ)
 - You can begin to learn about a saint on an icon by looking at their clothes and what they are holding in their hands. Both of these things will give you hints about their life. You can also read a story about their life.
 - When you come into a church and venerate an icon, what do you do? (You make the sign of the cross and kiss the icon)
 - Why do we kiss icons? (To show our love and respect to that person)
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THREE HIERARCHS



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CHRIST



THEOTOKOS HOLDING CHRIST

WEEK 20: SIGHT - ICONS

MIDDLE SCHOOL

GOALS

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The printing press was not invented until the 1400’s. Before then, only the very richest of people could afford to own books. Most people couldn’t read, simply because books were too expensive and therefore the opportunity to even touch a book was not something that the general population had access to. Yes, everyone could hear all of the Bible by regularly attending church services, but icons provided a visual way of learning about their faith too for those who did not have access to books. Interestingly enough, there used to be a common understanding and therefore literacy amongst the general population regarding the colors used in icons. Today, we find that most of us can read a book, but few of us understand the significance of the colors that are chosen to be used in icons. As we go along in this lesson, we’ll learn more about why this happened and hopefully improve our own literacy about icons.

FACES:

Let's look at an icon for a moment. (*Show the icon of the Three Hierarchs included with this lesson*) Icons do not look like a photo of us. They look slightly different from how we look in person - and that's done on purpose.

When you look at an icon, you notice that the saint's eyes are often looking off into the distance. This is because the saint is thinking only about God, not this world.

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Their ears look different too because they are internalized towards God.

Last week, we talked about using all of our senses to learn about God during the Divine Liturgy, but we also use them in our everyday life for watching tv, playing on the computer, eating food, and doing all sorts of stuff. The saints are no longer interested in using their senses for this world. They only want to use their senses to focus on God and our icons help to remind us that our goal is not of this world but of another.

HALOS:

The circles drawn around a saint's head are called halos and are there to tell us that the person depicted is a saint. They represent the Divine Light that shines from them because they have a close relationship with God.

CLOTHES:

(*Still looking at the icon of the Three Hierarchs*) What does it look like these saints are wearing? Do their clothes look like anything you see when you go to church on Sundays? (They look like vestments.)

This icon tells us that these men were either deacons, priests, or bishops because they are wearing vestments. These three men were bishops and in a later lesson we'll learn more about the different types of vestments so you will be able to tell the difference yourself.

The clothes a person is wearing in an icon will sometimes indicate the time period they lived or their occupation, but more often than not, there isn't a huge emphasis on the clothing. The clothing conveys information about the person, but is not meant to be a defining point of interest of the icon. The face of the person is the focal point.

HANDS:

Most of the time, you will see a saint holding something in one hand and their other hand will be posed in a specific way. Whatever the saint is holding in their hand gives us a hint about their life. Oftentimes (but not always), a martyr will be holding a cross. People who write or teach about God will oftentimes be holding the Gospel book. Old Testament prophets will usually be depicted holding a scroll indicating their wisdom. If you look at our iconostasis (icon screen in front of the altar), there is an icon of St. Mary Magdalene on the far left. She is holding a small jar of myrrh in one of her hands. She was one of the myrrh bearing woman who went to anoint Christ after his crucifixion.

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COLORS:

Colors have certain meanings in icons. An iconographer cannot color an icon any way they want - there are specific rules they have to follow.

Before the 1800's, painters had to make their own paint. It took a lot of training to know what materials to use and how to mix them in order to make the colors they needed for

their work. They would use things like plants, minerals, and insects to create their paints. There was a true art and science involved with making the various shades that we take for granted today. The easiest colors to make were shades of brown and black. You could typically make them with plants and minerals around your area. Since these colors were the easiest and cheapest to make, these tended to be the colors used by the poor for their clothing. Yellow and green were also relatively easy and cheap to make as well. However, there are three colors that were notoriously hard and expensive to make - red, blue, and purple - and they were labeled the “royal colors” because only royalty or the rich could afford to buy fabrics dyed in these colors. If a person was wearing red, blue, or purple, everyone around them instantly knew they were rich and important.

In 1856, William Henry Perkin accidentally created the first artificial color, mauve, which ignited the production of colors being synthesized in factories. This led to our ability to go to the store today and buy any color in any shade we want for a relatively cheap price. Prior to this discovery though, everyone was acutely aware of their economic status based on the color of clothing they were wearing.

How does this apply to icons? That’s a good question!

Today, some iconographers still prefer the old way of mixing their own colors from minerals, plants, and insects, but some iconographers will use paint they buy from the store. It depends on the person and how they were trained. But - understanding the meaning of colors will help you greatly when you are looking at an icon and trying to understand the story it is conveying.

(Show the icon of Christ in this lesson) Gold is used to show pure light or the Light of God and is not a color you naturally see in nature. This is why you almost always see the halo around a saint’s head in gold.

You will see Jesus wearing blue and red clothes. The blue represents his divinity - that He is the Son of God. The red represents His humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Think about what we said earlier too - blue and red are royal colors. People would have looked at an icon of Christ and immediately known that He was someone who was very important! Christ was not royalty, per se, on earth with a jeweled crown and flowing expensive robes, but we all know that He certainly was royalty over all of creation.

(Show icon of the Theotokos and Jesus as a child included in this lesson) The Theotokos also wears red and blue clothes. The red represents her humanity as well and the blue represents that she gave birth to Jesus. Did you know that Theotokos means, “God-bearer” or the mother of God?

Do you remember when we talked about how the saints are usually holding something in their hand in an icon? Who is the Theotokos holding in this icon? (Jesus as a child) We always know immediately that an icon is the Theotokos when we see baby Jesus in her arms.

(Show icon of Sts. Constantine & Helen, link above) During the reign of the Byzantine Empire, the color purple was made using a specific type of snail. It was so difficult and expensive to make this shade that only the emperor and those who were working in his name were allowed to wear this purple. This was not a color that the normal person would have worn and therefore to see purple in an icon would have let the person know instantly that this saint was important and probably royalty.

As you look at the icon of Sts. Constantine and Helen, you can immediately see the crowns, jewels and the clothing they are wearing that all indicate they are rich and royalty. The style of their crowns would also be an indication of the time period they lived and if you are familiar with these time periods, then you could probably figure out that these two saints were Sts. Constantine and Helen. A second clue as to who they are is the larger than normal cross depicted in this icon. Normally, a martyr will hold a small cross in their hand. This cross is as tall as them indicating that this is the Cross that Christ was crucified on and found by St. Helen’s expedition to the Holy Land.

Typically, brown and black clothes on a saint will indicate a monk or a nun.

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REVIEW:

- What is an icon? (A holy image depicting the saints, angels, the Theotokos, or Christ)
 - Explain to me one element of an icon - the face, hands, clothing, etc. (Provide the opportunity for multiple students to answer)
 - When you come into a church and venerate an icon, what do you do? (You make the sign of the cross and kiss the icon)
 - Why do we kiss icons? (To show our love and respect to that person)
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THREE HIERARCHS



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CHRIST



THEOTOKOS HOLDING CHRIST

WEEK 20: SIGHT - ICONS

HIGH SCHOOL

GOALS

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The clothes a person is wearing in an icon will sometimes indicate the time period they lived or their occupation, but more often than not, there isn't a huge emphasis on the clothing. The clothing conveys information about the person, but is not meant to be a defining point of interest of the icon. The face of the person is the focal point.

HANDS:

Most of the time, you will see a saint holding something in one hand and their other hand will be posed in a specific way. Whatever the saint is holding in their hand gives us a hint about their life. Oftentimes (but not always), a martyr will be holding a cross. People who write or teach about God will oftentimes be holding the Gospel book. Old Testament prophets will usually be depicted holding a scroll indicating their wisdom. If you look at our iconostasis (icon screen in front of the altar), there is an icon of St. Mary Magdalene on the far left. She is holding a small jar of myrrh in one of her hands. She was one of the myrrh bearing woman who went to anoint Christ after his crucifixion.

Looking back at the icon of the Three Hierarchs, what are each of bishops holding in their hands? (A Gospel book)

All three of these bishops wrote extensively about God and also taught people through their actions and words about Him as well.

The three saints on this icon are St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Basil the Great. We learned earlier this year that St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great both wrote the Divine Liturgy.

COLORS:

Colors have certain meanings in icons. An iconographer cannot color an icon any way they want - there are specific rules they have to follow.

Before the 1800's, painters had to make their own paint. It took a lot of training to know what materials to use and how to mix them in order to make the colors they needed for

their work. They would use things like plants, minerals, and insects to create their paints. There was a true art and science involved with making the various shades that we take for granted today. The easiest colors to make were shades of brown and black. You could typically make them with plants and minerals around your area. Since these colors were the easiest and cheapest to make, these tended to be the colors used by the poor for their clothing. Yellow and green were also relatively easy and cheap to make as well. However, there are three colors that were notoriously hard and expensive to make - red, blue, and purple - and they were labeled the “royal colors” because only royalty or the rich could afford to buy fabrics dyed in these colors. If a person was wearing red, blue, or purple, everyone around them instantly knew they were rich and important.

In 1856, William Henry Perkin accidentally created the first artificial color, mauve, which ignited the production of colors being synthesized in factories. This led to our ability to go to the store today and buy any color in any shade we want for a relatively cheap price. Prior to this discovery though, everyone was acutely aware of their economic status based on the color of clothing they were wearing.

How does this apply to icons? That’s a good question!

Today, some iconographers still prefer the old way of mixing their own colors from minerals, plants, and insects, but some iconographers will use paint they buy from the store. It depends on the person and how they were trained. But - understanding the meaning of colors will help you greatly when you are looking at an icon and trying to understand the story it is conveying.

(Show the icon of Christ in this lesson) Gold is used to show pure light or the Light of God and is not a color you naturally see in nature. This is why you almost always see the halo around a saint’s head in gold.

You will see Jesus wearing blue and red clothes. The blue represents his divinity - that He is the Son of God. The red represents His humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man.

Think about what we said earlier too - blue and red are royal colors. People would have looked at an icon of Christ and immediately known that He was someone who was very important! Christ was not royalty, per se, on earth with a jeweled crown and flowing expensive robes, but we all know that He certainly was royalty over all of creation.

(Show icon of the Theotokos and Jesus as a child included in this lesson) The Theotokos also wears red and blue clothes. The red represents her humanity as well and the blue represents that she gave birth to Jesus. Did you know that Theotokos means, “God-bearer” or the mother of God?

Do you remember when we talked about how the saints are usually holding something in their hand in an icon? Who is the Theotokos holding in this icon? (Jesus as a child) We always know immediately that an icon is the Theotokos when we see baby Jesus in her arms.

(Show icon of Sts. Constantine & Helen, link above) During the reign of the Byzantine Empire, the color purple was made using a specific type of snail. It was so difficult and expensive to make this shade that only the emperor and those who were working in his name were allowed to wear this purple. This was not a color that the normal person would have worn and therefore to see purple in an icon would have let the person know instantly that this saint was important and probably royalty.

As you look at the icon of Sts. Constantine and Helen, you can immediately see the crowns, jewels and the clothing they are wearing that all indicate they are rich and royalty. The style of their crowns would also be an indication of the time period they lived and if you are familiar with these time periods, then you could probably figure out that these two saints were Sts. Constantine and Helen. A second clue as to who they are is the larger than normal cross depicted in this icon. Normally, a martyr will hold a small cross in their hand. This cross is as tall as them indicating that this is the Cross that Christ was crucified on and found by St. Helen’s expedition to the Holy Land.

Typically, brown and black clothes on a saint will indicate a monk or a nun.

VENERATING ICONS:

I know things have changed a bit during the pandemic, but normally when we come into our church, how do we greet the icons in our narthex? (We kiss them)

We do not venerate the icons themselves, but our veneration goes to the person depicted in them. What is the difference between worship and veneration? Worship is reserved for God and veneration is for the saints. We neither venerate nor worship icons, but we venerate/worship the prototype.

LEARNING ABOUT THE ANNUNCIATION ICON:

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese has a helpful explanation of each of the feast day icons on their website. They breakdown and point out the different areas of the icon and explain them.

Here is the explanation for the upcoming feast day of the Annunciation:

<https://www.goarch.org/en/annunciation>

REVIEW:

- What is an icon? (A holy image depicting the saints, angels, the Theotokos, or Christ)
 - Explain to me one element of an icon - the face, hands, clothing, etc. (Provide the opportunity for multiple students to answer)
 - When you come into a church and venerate an icon, what do you do? (You make the sign of the cross and kiss the icon)
 - Why do we kiss icons? (To show our love and respect to that person)
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THREE HIERARCHS



Saint Gregory the Theologian Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great

They are commemorated on January 30th



CHRIST



THEOTOKOS HOLDING CHRIST