

TIMELINE OF BYZANTINE HISTORY

- 324 Constantine I became sole emperor of Roman Empire; foundation of Constantinople
- 330 City of Constantinople dedicated on 11 May
- 527-65 Reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian. He tried to reunite the eastern and western branches of the Christian church which were bitterly divided
- 726-787 First period of Byzantine Iconoclasm
- 787 Seventh Ecumenical Council of Orthodox Church at Nicaea condemned opposition to icons as heresy
- 815 Iconoclasm re-affirmed as Orthodox belief
- 843 Final condemnation of Iconoclasm as heresy
- 1054 Split between Catholic Church of Rome and Orthodox Christian Church of Byzantium
- 1096-9 First Crusade
- 1204 Capture of Constantinople by armies of Fourth Crusade on 12 April
- 1204-61 Latin Empire of Constantinople
- 1274 Council of Lyons agreed union of Greek and Latin churches
- 1282 Church Union of Council Lyons repealed
- 1439 Union of Greek of Latin churches agreed at Council of Florence on 6 July

Sasha Makuka and Allison Stevens, co-curators and Jeanne Brasile, Director of the Walsh Gallery would like to extend their gratitude to the following for making this exhibition possible:

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 Michael Villanueva
 The Walsh Gallery Advisory Board

Symposium Saturday October 10th, 2009 10am to noon
 Journey to the Holy Icon:
 Insights into the Icon
 Collection of the Heritage Museum of the Eparchy of Passaic
 featuring Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.,
 organized by Marta Deyrup.
 Call 973-275-2223 for information and to R.S.V.P

Windows to Heaven



Co-curated by
 Sasha Makuka &
 Allison Stevens

14 September - 16 October 2009

Walsh Gallery,
 Seton Hall University
 400 South Orange Avenue
 South Orange, NJ 07079
 973-275-2033

Windows to Heaven: Byzantine Icons

BYZANTINE HISTORY

The Byzantine faith is a type of Christianity that originated in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, but today is practiced all over the world. When Constantine left Rome to found Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey) in the 4th century, C.E., he allowed Christianity to be practiced there.

In Constantinople, the Church adopted Greek as its liturgical language and integrated Eastern culture into its rituals and practices, thus creating a new type of Christianity tied to its Roman roots by doctrine, but separated by cultural and artistic differences. Missionaries began to spread Byzantine faith throughout the Slavic world in the 9th century, C.E.



Photo courtesy of Fr. James Spera



Photo courtesy of Fr. James Spera

Growing political tension between thriving Constantinople and declining Rome eventually led the Byzantines to separate themselves from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054, C.E. The Byzantines, no longer under the direction of the Pope, were then known as Orthodox.

In the 15th century, a small group of Orthodox faithful rejoined the Roman Catholic Church, seeking the protection of the Vatican and the leadership of the Pope. Today, this group is known as the Byzantine Rite of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church in the west is the Latin Rite.



Photo courtesy of Fr. James Spera

ICONS

Icons are painted images of biblical scenes, angels, saints, the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ. Iconographers create them to be visual scriptures; they are instruments for teaching as well as veneration. Icon painting is an ancient art, but it is still practiced today. Iconographers do not merely paint icons, but "write" them through a meticulous process of fasting, prayer and ritualistic painting.

The use of icons for religious study and aid in worship is common practice for Byzantines, much like the stained glass and statuary of the Latin Rite. However, icons have a special place in the Byzantine Church that supersedes other forms of religious art; icons are viewed by the faithful as windows into the divine world. Believers pray with icons, asking for intercession between themselves and God.

In addition, the faithful look to icons to reflect upon the virtuous qualities of the saints: love for God, obedience, humility, strong faith, mercy and generosity. Icons tell a visual story. The figures' elongated bodies, small, stylized facial features and the unrealistic flatness of the images contribute to the icons' sense of other-worldliness. Iconic subjects radiate an internal light. Their surrounding halos indicate their holiness and divinity.

The most common colors in icons, gold, blue, red and white, also have specific symbolic meanings. Gold represents the radiance of Heaven. Red and blue represent the subjects' dual divinity and humanity, respectively. White represents God's essence and His unseen presence.



Photo courtesy of Fr. Joseph Bertha



Photo courtesy of Fr. James Spera

THE EXHIBITION

"Windows to Heaven" features icons depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. Nicholas, important Byzantine feast days and the theme of holy trinities. It is our goal in creating "Windows to Heaven" to showcase icons from

throughout the world in a variety of media in order to illustrate the unique and integral role Byzantine icons play both in the Church and in the home.

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Byzantine faith. Icons depicting Christ represent the incarnation of the divine in human form, when the Son of God became the Son of Man. Christ can be portrayed in different ways, depending on the Biblical story illustrated.

The Virgin Mary is seen by the faithful as a primary intercessor between themselves and her son, Christ; she is a favorite saint to petition for favors and to ask for aid in prayer to God. Byzantines believe Mary was born without sin, immaculately conceived Christ and remained a virgin throughout her life.

Saint Nicholas is one of the most venerated miracle-working saints in the Byzantine Church. His generous spirit, acts of charity and several miracles, both in life and posthumously, have contributed to his esteemed adoration.

The number three appears repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Trinity, the Holy Family and the three hierarchs of the Church are common iconic themes.

Although every day is a feast day celebrating specific saints and events on the Byzantine liturgical calendar, some feasts, such as the Resurrection of Christ, have greater significance. "Windows to Heaven" showcases several important feast day icons.



Photo courtesy of Fr. James Spera