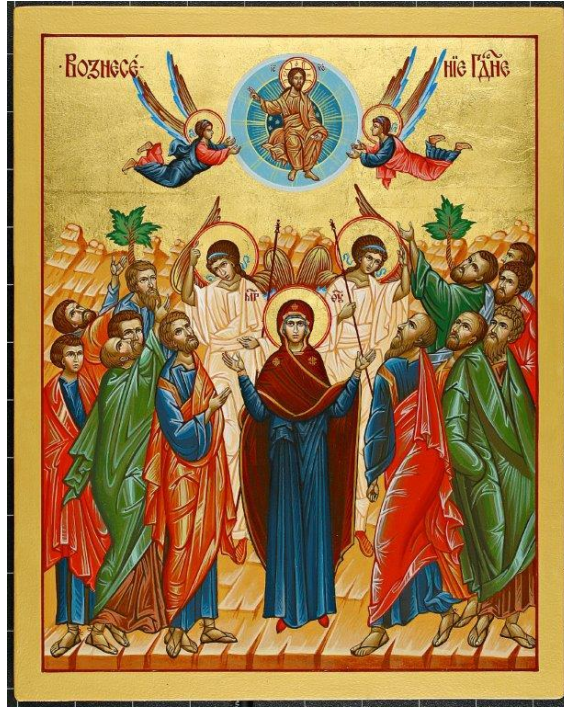


Icon of the Ascension of Our Lord

St. Josaphat's Cathedral Edmonton,
Alberta, Canada



The place of the Ascension is not distinctly stated in Scripture, but we read in Acts 1:12 that after Christ ascended, the apostles return to Jerusalem from the mount that is called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, within a Sabbath day's journey. Therefore, in the background we see the hilly landscape of the Mount of Olives, scattered with olive trees.

There is a distinct division between what is occurring in the top of the icon and the bottom. The top "Heaven" shows a calmness and a sense of order. There is wisdom and understanding about the events that are occurring. In the bottom there appears to be confusion, except for the *Theotokos* (the God bearer) who reveals her deep connection to and acceptance of God's will. Some of the apostles reach out to Christ in longing not fully understanding the depths of what is happening.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ is seated inside the [Mandorla](#) or nimbus, the tri-colour blue shape behind Christ. The Mandorla represents the glory and majesty of Christ beyond what can be physically witnessed. It is symbolic of heaven for which humanity has no ways or words to describe. Christ is blessing all with his right hand and holding a scroll

in his left. His blessing reminds us of His abiding love for His Church and the scroll is the “Good News” of the Gospel. Christ is the “Living Word of God”.

There are two angels that appear to be holding the Mandorla, in a sense, lifting the Saviour to the heavens. This recalls the Old Testament image of God enthroned above the cherubim, (Psalm 89:1, 99:1, Isaiah 37:16).

The grouping and posture of the apostles and the *Theotokos* represent the Church itself. The *Theotokos* is central to the icon, standing directly under the ascending Christ, Her Son and the Saviour of all of humanity. She has a direct connection to Him. As the personification of the Church she stands with her arms open in calm, faithful prayer, incessantly interceding for the salvation of the world and waiting for His second coming.

The apostles also represent the Church although they do not have the perfection of faith as does the *Theotokos*. They still have much to learn as Christians, but regardless, they are “The Church,” just as we, who have a lot to learn continue to be “The Church.”

This icon is a reminder that as in all icons, it is not a historical depiction. Next to the *Theotokos* is the apostle Paul who at that time of the Ascension of the Lord, was still Saul, an unbeliever and persecutor of Christians. The icon instead is a depiction of the Church which stands as a witness to Christ and therefore must include St. Paul.

Even though this icon depicts Christ departing, we also see His second and glorious coming in the same icon. During His ministry, Jesus told his apostles that He would return. Amongst the apostles, we see two angels looking directly at the group gathered there and pointing to Christ. This comes from the book of Acts 1:11: *They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

Above all, this icon is one of joy. The bright colours with which it is painted reveal this. As Christians we wait in joyful expectation of the second coming of Christ!