

THE ICON OF THE ASCENSION

The icon of the Ascension shows Christ with angels, ascending to heaven -- "I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). To "ascend" means to "go up."

Although the icon shows the event described in the Gospels, it is not meant to be viewed as only a historical picture. The icon represents **the Church**, with Christ as the "head" and the membership as the "body" of believers.

The icon is painted with bright colors, to show joy. Christ's love and teachings are always with the Church.

At the top, Christ in Glory is ascending to heaven, accompanied by angels.

Christ is blessing us with his right hand, which shows us His love for humanity.

Christ holds a scroll in his left hand, which represents the teaching of His Word.

The oval surrounding Christ is called the "mandorla" and is a symbol of God's uncreated Light and His divinity. The mandorla and the rays of light show that Christ is present to the faithful from outside time and space.

In the middle of the lower part of the icon is the Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of God). She protects the entire Church as we wait for Christ's return, and she prays for all the faithful.

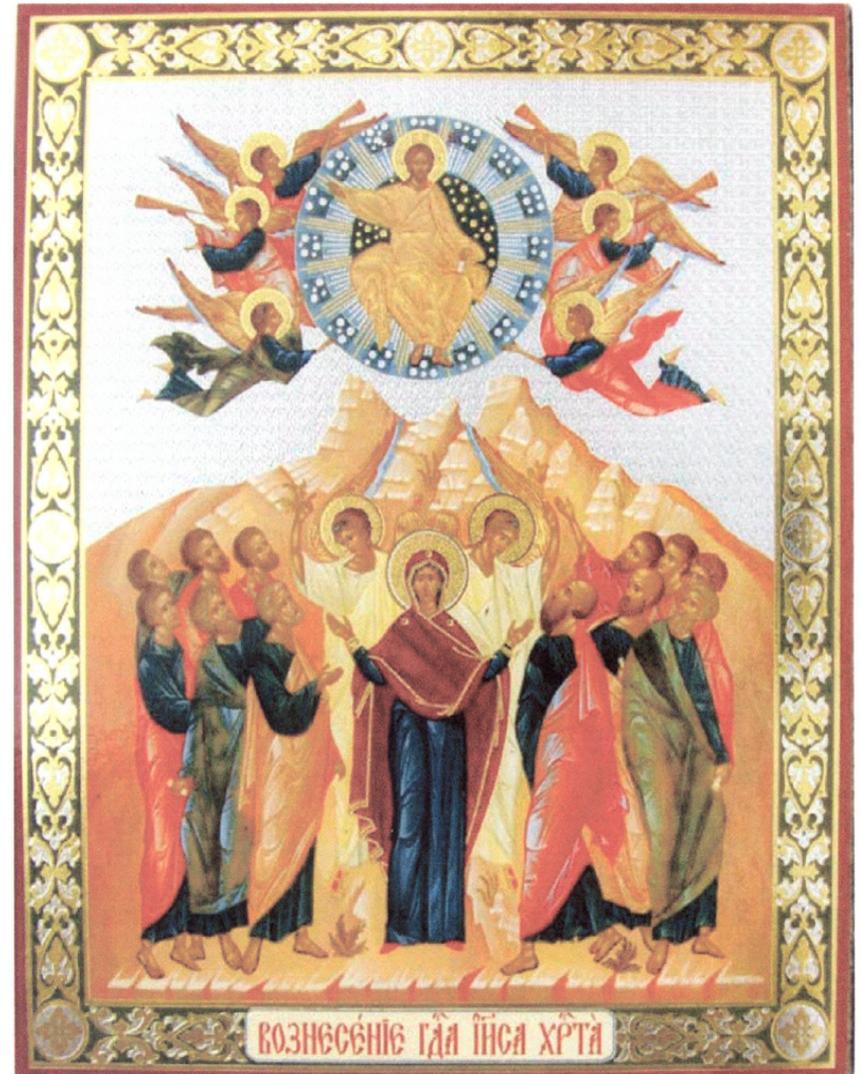
The disciples are waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit, which is commemorated at Pentecost. The Orthodox Church sees Pentecost as the final fulfillment of the mission of Christ and the beginning of the age of the Kingdom of God, which is mystically present in His Church. Pentecost is traditionally called the beginning of the Church. The Apostles were the first bishops.

Even though we see Christ going up from the earth in the Ascension icon, the Orthodox Church teaches about the Second Coming in the same icon. Christ will return exactly as He ascended. The two angels (shown in white clothing in the icon) said to the disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).

St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, Pennsylvania

Ascension of The Lord

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5)



"Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are."

THE TRINITY -- FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT

The Orthodox Church teaches that our God is one God in three Persons. They are all of the same “essence” -- their thoughts are one, and their love for us the same.

RESURRECTION

Jesus Christ arose for ever, unto eternity, in a “glorified” body which is immortal and will never change. Although Christ visited the apostles and some other persons after His Resurrection, He did not rise in order to return again to an earthly life. His Resurrection was not the same as those who He had restored to life. They returned to life in the same body, which would eventually die. However, because of Christ’s Resurrection, the soul of anyone who believes in Christ can have Eternal Life. That is why we sing that by His death and Resurrection He “destroyed death.”

ASCENSION

And now with Christ’s Ascension, He rises up to “sit at the right hand” of **the Father**. But the Spirit of Christ did not go away. He is with us, the faithful, for ever. By His Ascension, Christ opened up to us the “gates” (entrance) of heaven. He is in heaven for our sake -- “He honored them He loved by putting them close to the Father.” It is only through belief in Christ that anyone can approach God the Father, enter heaven, and have Eternal Life.

PENTECOST

Ascension is related to the descent from heaven to earth of the **Holy Spirit**, which we celebrate at Pentecost. An important Orthodox saint, St. John Chrysostom explained it this way: “Heaven received the Holy Body, and the earth accepted the Holy Spirit.”

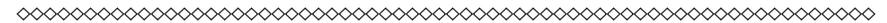
CHRIST’S PROMISE

The Resurrection, the Ascension, and Pentecost are the events that the Holy Trinity accomplished to give Salvation to the people of the earth. They are God’s promise that everyone who believes in Christ can also ascend to Eternal Life.

The Ascension is also a sign of the Second Coming of Christ. The angels said, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

THINK ABOUT IT ... Choose the correct answer:

1. WHO do we worship as God?
 - A. Only God the Father
 - B. Only Jesus Christ
 - C. The Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
 - D. Christ, the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist
2. The Ascension is:
 - A. Bringing back someone to earthly life
 - B. Christ’s glorified body going up to heaven
 - C. The announcement of the empty tomb
 - D. Christ’s entry into Jerusalem
3. The icon of the Ascension also represents:
 - A. The Church
 - B. A sign of the Second Coming
 - C. Christ’s promise of Eternal Life
 - D. All of the above
4. In icons, the sphere shown surrounding Christ, which is a symbol of God’s uncreated Light and divinity, is called the:
 - A. Chrysostom
 - B. Eucharist
 - C. Mandorla
 - D. Pentecost



7th Sunday of Pascha -- Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

On this day we commemorate the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. They were bishops who met together during the fourth century to stop any false teachings about Christ and the Trinity.

Among them was Saint Athanasius, who became Patriarch of Alexandria. He is called “the Great” because he was a champion for the truth of Orthodoxy. In the Sixth Ode of the Canon for today’s Feast, he is referred to as “the thirteenth Apostle.”