WE VENERATE ICONS

When we enter the Church, the first things we see are the icons. We cross ourselves and kiss the icons. Why do we do that?

Kissing an icon is not as if we are kissing a "picture" of something or someone. Icons are much more than simple pictures, and we do not worship icons. When we kiss an icon we are remembering and showing our **love for Who the icon represents**. In the Orthodox Church icons are considered "windows" to heaven. That means that when we kiss an icon, we are spiritually communicating our love to Christ or to the saint depicted in the icon.

Kissing icons and bowing before them is called **VENERATION**. We venerate icons of the Blessed Mother, whom we call the THEOTOKOS, just as we venerate icons of Christ and all the Saints. Veneration means to honor Who the icon represents.

Many times we see icons decorated with flowers. Flowers are one of the symbols of Christianity. There are many meanings of flowers. Think of the occasions that we decorate the church and icons with flowers or greenery: Christmas, Good Friday, Pascha, Pentecost, the Dormition of the Theotokos -- and, in fact, it is proper to decorate the Church and icons of the Saints with flowers EVERY day. Why? Because the what flowers mainly symbolize is the Resurrection and it is correct and proper to say EVERY day (not only on Pascha):
Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

CRAFT PROJECT
(Age level: Elementary School)

Objective: To decorate an icon of the Theotokos while the church school teachers explain the concept of VENERATION and the Orthodox Christian symbolism of flowers.

Materials: Printed paper icons (4" x 6" suggested size).
Unpainted wooden frames with at least a 2" flat surface.
Silk craft flowers (loose petals which can be purchased at craft stores).
Glue tabs (less messy than liquid glue, also obtained at craft stores).

Procedure: Print icons and insert in frames before class.
Children choose colorful flower petals and stick them to frames using glue tabs.
(Teachers and older children may assist the younger children.)

Icon of the Theotokos