

Icons in the Armenian Church

Vocabulary

1. սրբապատկեր (surpabadger) – icon: a representation of some sacred personage, as Christ or a saint or angel, painted usually on a canvas surface and venerated as sacred

Icons as Mirrors

When we enter the Armenian Church, we are encountered with various sacred images, or icons. Some of these are permanently fixed on the walls, others are painted on banners and used during particular celebrations within the Church calendar, and others appear. Unlike other religious art, icons are anointed with sacred oil, called *muron*, which is reserved for extraordinary liturgical uses. Icons are images either of Christ or of the saints of the Church, and have a particular purpose within the sanctuary. On one level, we believe that the saints are present with us during the liturgy, and these visible representations of those saints point to that reality. On another level, icons are meant to be used as mirrors to remind ourselves who we are.

The first title given to human beings in the bible was during creation, when God said that we are made in his image and likeness, or to put it another way, that human beings, unlike the rest of creation, were made to be icons of God. On all of the other days of creation, God calls what he has made good, but after making humankind in his image, God calls his creation *very* good. It is for this reason that even in the midst of the worst that humanity has to offer, God still sees our worth as the infinitely precious crown of his creation. So when that image of God within us becomes hard to see, becoming covered with the dirt that living in our fallen world throws on us, God does whatever he can, even to the point of death on a cross, to reveal the goodness he has built within us. He does this that we may be reminders to the world of the image of God he has formed within each one of us. For that reason, when we pray before an icon of a saint, we are encountered with the sanctity that God has put within us. We are reminded that the core of who we are is an icon of the immortal, all-loving God. And we are assured that the beauty of the icon before us, which points to the beauty of the life that saint lived, is a beauty that God wants to reveal within each of us if we will allow him. Icons are mirrors. They show us both the bad and the good within our lives. They condemn us in the areas we have fallen short of God's glory while showing us our potential and our path to God's kingdom.

The Central Icon of the Armenian Church

At the main altar in the Armenian Church, we see an image of Mary holding Christ as an infant. We are brought back to the Christmas story, but not to a manger and to shepherds. Rather, we are brought back to the moment of Christ's incarnation; the moment when the infinite God who created the entire universe was made finite, being born as man and dwelling among us incomprehensibly in the most intimate of ways. When we look at that icon, we are encountered with the meaning of everything we do as Church. Just as during Christ's birth, during the Divine Liturgy, the infinite God comes among us and becomes present in the finite elements of bread and wine transformed into his body and blood. During baptism the Church gives spiritual rebirth to us into eternal life, just as Mary gave physical birth to the Immortal One. Everything that we do as Church is to celebrate that God is among us in an intimate way beyond our comprehension and that he has called us to be united with him. This is a mystery beyond our limited understanding that is shown to us most clearly through the image of the Incarnation, of Christ's birth and revelation to us. This is why this icon is at the center of the Church. It reminds us why we gather as Church, who we have been called to become as Christians, and of the boundless love God has shown to us.

Church Word Search

P W Y I R W S F H X U D O U V
E A F U K W G C O A Z O R D M
P L T K K A E X A A T T W Z Q
D U S T D M E T D P S E J J L
T J U G E C H Z E V T L I E V
U Q R R I N G O H U O O C Y C
V Y P L A O H A M Z H G A M I
Q J A G T V F O B G S E X C N
O H B S G V R J G U U P O Z Z
C J A X I N D O M D K N Q Q E
D V D P U S W K O V Q F F W F
U Z G N P W F Q J P P D P I I
J B E R I L T E B S T X D V Q
Z C R W I Q X F A C E N S E R
Q G N B R R W Q L A D G O G X

CENSER

CHALICE

DZADZGOTS

ICON

KUSHOTS

MAGHZMAH

PATTEN

POORVAR

SGEEH

SURPABADGER

VEIL

MP

AI

IC XC



Badarak Scavenger Hunt

Activity: Icons

1. How many icons are in the sanctuary? _____
2. Who is in the icon at the main altar? _____
3. There are 6 icons throughout the Church with Jesus in them.

What bible stories are they connected with?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____

4. Which icon is your favorite and why?

5. What object do you find placed directly above some of the icons? _____

6. There is an icon with a large group of people in it.

Who are the saints in this icon and when were they canonized as saints?

7. How do we venerate icons in the Church?
