

AN “ICON” IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Just like a picture, an icon can capture the essence of a moment with greater clarity than the written word. It can teach a story instantly. Today we turn our attention to the icon of the FEAST DAY OF THE ASCENSION. If we look at the Book of Acts 1: 1-12, we see that the iconic depiction of the holy day carefully follows this scriptural account. The main focus of the icon is Christ Himself, Who was taken up into heaven as His Apostles watched. He is shown in such a way that it is impossible to determine whether He is LEAVING the earth or RETURNING to it. Angels appeared soon after He ascended, saying: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus Who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Act 1:11)

The Mother of God is also shown prominently in the Ascension icon. Church Tradition tells us that she was present for this joyous event, as well as for the Feast Day of Pentecost. While the Apostles seem to be perplexed by what they have just witnessed, the Theotokos wears an expression of peace on her face, fully comprehending the deep mysteries of her Sons’ Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. Unlike the Apostles, she is not looking upward into the sky, but rather towards us in prayerful serenity. Note also that the Apostles are depicted without halos, a further symbol of their continued lack of understanding of the moment.

The icon of the Ascension certainly expresses the concept of Christ reigning over His Church. We, His followers, must embark on His Command to “go and teach all nations.”