

Icons of the Mother of God “Of the Sign”

Icons of the Mother of God “Of the Sign” are also known by various names. These icons have a center panel with an icon of the Theotokos. She is prayerfully lifting up her hands (which is called the “orans” pose). The Christ Child is seated in front of her.

History

This kind of icon of the Theotokos is one of the very first kind of her icons and were seen in ancient times.

Several icons of the Mother of God, known as The Sign, appeared in Russia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

They were called The Sign because of a miraculous sign from the Novgorod Icon in the year 1170.

In that year, an army of princes marched toward the walls of the city of Novgorod. For the people of Novgorod, their only hope was that God would help them. Day and night they prayed, asking the Lord not to abandon them.

On the third night, Bishop Elias of Novgorod heard a voice commanding that the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos be taken out of the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilina Street, and carried along the city’s walls.

While the icon was being carried, the enemy fired arrows at the procession, and one of the arrows pierced the icon’s face. Tears trickled from her eyes, and the icon turned its face towards the city.

This was “The Sign” that the city would be protected. After this Sign, a confusing terror suddenly gripped the enemy. They began to fight one another, the people of Novgorod won the victory, and the city was saved from destruction.

The Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God



“God is with us! Understand this all nations,
and submit yourselves, for God is with us.”

The **Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God of the Sign** is one of the oldest icons of the Orthodox Church.

The icon shows the Theotokos of the Sign with the Christ child before her. Her arms are outstretched in prayer.

On either side and below are nine prophets who wrote about the birth of Christ (clockwise, starting in the top right): King Solomon, Prophets Daniel, Jeremiah, Elijah, Habakkuk, Judge Gideon, Prophet Isaiah, Moses, and King David.

The wooden icon is covered with a decorated cover of blue and gold.

History

During an invasion in the thirteenth century by people who did not believe in Christ (the Tatars), the city of Kursk was burned down and no one lived there any more. Afterward, the people of the city of Rylsk would go to where Kursk used to be, to hunt wild animals.

On September 8, 1259, a hunter noticed the icon lying on a root of a tree, face downwards to the ground. The hunter lifted it and saw that the image of the icon looked similar to the “Znamenie” Icon of the Mother of God (the famous icon “Of the Sign” in the city of Novgorod).

Just as the hunter lifted up the holy icon from the ground, a spring of pure water gushed up at the very place where the icon had been resting.

Chapel

With the help of friends the hunter rebuilt an old small chapel and placed the newly-found icon in it. When news of this spread, many came from Rylsk to this old chapel to venerate the icon and pray about their sorrows and needs. There the Mother of God healed all who came to her icon.

The Icon’s Disappearance and Reappearance

Soon after, the icon was transferred to Rylsk and it was placed in a new church in honor of the Nativity of the Theotokos. But the icon disappeared and it was found again at the place of its first appearance. People were questioned, but no one could explain the move.

The people of Rylsk repeatedly took it and carried it back to their city, but the icon mysteriously returned to its former place. They then realized that the Theotokos wanted her icon to stay in the place where it had originally appeared. That place is now part of the grounds of the Kursk Root Hermitage. (A hermitage is a monastery.)

Miracles

The Kursk Root Icon icon, and the help granted by the Mother of God, is linked with events in Russian history, such as the defeat of Napoleon who had invaded Russia in 1812. Several copies of the icon were made, and they all have been associated with miracles of protection from visible and invisible enemies, and miraculous saving from accidents.

Troparion (Tone 4)

Having obtained thee as an unassailable rampart
and wellspring of miracles,
O Most Pure Mother of God,
thy servants quell the assaults of enemies.
Wherefore, we pray to thee:
Grant peace to our land, and to our souls great mercy.

Notes about the Troparion:

- * A “rampart” is a wall, so prayers to the Theotokos act like a wall that protects.
- * A “wellspring” is a well that never runs dry, which means that the Theotokos is always available to help those who call on her.
- * To “quell” means to stop.