

AN ICON OF THE SIGN

Among the ancient and most revered icons of the Church are those which depict the Holy Virgin and Child Jesus. These, in turn, are divided into a number of categories, and among them are those know by the term “Icon of the Sign.”

Such icons show the Mother of God in frontal view with her arm upraised in the ancient gesture of prayer, and with Christ depicted on her chest, again in frontal view. Cherubims and Serafims are oftem include in icons, indicating that the Mother of God is “more honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond comapre more glorious that the Serafim , , ,”

It is to the Old Testament an the prophecy of Isaiah that one must turn for an undersdanding of the name of such icons. The Prophet Isaiah wrote: “Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” And so the Virgin Mother with her Child in her bosom is the “sign” of the Incarnation, of God becoming Man to save him from sin and death. This, of course, is the very essence of the Christian faith, and it is no wonder, then, that such icons are given a prominent place in the church building.

Students of iconography also like to speak of these icons as images of the Church, which brings salvation through Christ to humankind, as the Holy Virgin confined in her womb the unconfirable Lord. So we have this mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The Holy Bible refers to the Virgin Mother as “full of grace,” and “blessed among women.” The Church has given her a special place among the Saints of God and the creatures of the earth. This special veneration and esteem is given her precisely because of her relationship to Jesus Christ. She is His mother. The Church always approaches her with this special relationship in mind. Remember, the Church honors the mother becaue of the Son.