

## VENERATING ICONS

“The saints, during their earthly life, are filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. After their departure the same grace remains in their souls as in their bodies. The very same grace is present and active in their sacred images and icons” (St. John of Damascus). It is the practice of the Church to venerate, not worship icons. The Orthodox Church calls for the elaborate use of symbolism and iconography in the interior decoration of the church building. Icons are not simply portraits representing people, but graphic presentations of spiritual truths that are visual aids to contemplation and prayer. When we venerate icons the honor is directed to Christ or to the Saint depicted on the icon, not to the wood, paint, or colors of the icon.

In the Orthodox Church the icons bear witness to the reality of God’s presence with us in the mystery of faith. We are to look beyond the external and deep into the spiritual meaning of living the Christian life. Icons are the witnesses of the presence of the Kingdom of God to us, and so our own presence to the Kingdom of God in the Church. It is in the Orthodox Christian Faith that icons are not only permissible, but are spiritually necessary because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Christ is truly man and, as man, truly the "icon of the invisible

God" (Col. 1:15, 1 Cor. 11:7, 2 Cor. 4:4).