

# Iconography

Spiritual Enrichment

May 16, 2021

CLASS 23

- The Touching of Thomas
- Calling of the Disciples
- Pentecost
- Ascension



## THE TOUCHING OF THOMAS

John 20:19 - :29

*Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."*

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*So he said to them, “unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”*

*And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”*

*And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”*

*Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

## Notes:

- The Touching of Thomas is commemorated on the first Sunday after Pascha.
- “Ψηλαφισις is palpation. In Greek we broadly use it when someone for example wakes up in the middle of the night in a dark room and ψηλαφίζει to find his way around. Or a blind person ψηλαφίζει a loved one’s face to memorize the characteristics. Or a doctor ψηλαφίζει tender spots on a patient to find the spot that causes pain. It is a word I love. □ In exact translation the Greek etymology is ‘I touch with tenderness’.” Catherine Kassianides
- See Orthodox Study Bible p. 1465 notes, regarding the doubt of Thomas.

## The Icon:

- We see Jesus standing before a closed door, elevated on a platform.
- He alone has a halo.
- Jesus’ right hand is raised and His other is pulling His garment to expose the right side of His chest.
- The marks made by the nails in His hands and feet are quite noticeable. If you look closely you can see the cut on His side which He is exposing.
- Christ is flanked by His 11 faithful disciples. 5 on one side, 6 on the other side.
- Thomas is on Christ’s right side, moving toward’s Christ, with his index finger approaching the mark on Christ’s side.
- Traditionally, there’s a symmetrical building in the background which our iconography also shows.
- We know the event takes place indoors and this is also indicated in the iconography through the use of the cloth across the top.
- In the middle is a closed door—Christ with His resurrected body could go into a room with its doors closed.

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## CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

### Acts 21:1-:14

*After these things (showing Himself to Thomas and other events )Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simeon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said them, “I am going fishing.”*

*They said to him. “We are going with you also.” They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on their shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?”*

*And they answered Him, “No.”*

*And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.*

*Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about 200 cubits), dragging the net with the fish. Then, as soon as they had come to*

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*land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.”*

*Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast.” Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You”—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.*

*This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.*

## Notes:

- Sea of Tiberias is another name for the Sea of Galilee.
- Beloved disciple is John. And John is the first to perceive that this the man on the shore is Jesus, showing that love for Christ, brings spiritual insight.
- Peter jumping into the sea demonstrates his boldness of faith.
- “Who are You?” Shows indicates Jesus’ form was altered in a way that amazed them.
- This meal is reminiscent of the feeding of 5,000. The fish became a symbol of identity for early Christians. The initials of the phrase “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior” in Greek for the acronym ICHTHYS which is Greek for “fish” (ἰχθύς).

## The Icon:

- Christ is blessing with His right hand and holding a scroll with His
- We see all the elements of the Scripture verses.

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## THE ASCENSION

### Acts 1:9 - :11

*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "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".*

### Mark 16:19

*So then, after the Lord had spoken to them (11 Disciples), He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

*(Jesus had spoken to them about the Great Commission.)*

### Luke 24:50-:53

*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.*

*(Jesus speaks to them "Behold I send the Promise of My Father upon; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with the power from on high.")*

### Notes:

- The Feast of the Ascension is celebrated the 40ieth day after The Resurrection.

The icon of the Ascension has never been understood in the Orthodox Church as formal and accurate illustration of Holy Scripture. (Just as some of the other icons tell a fuller story). The image of the Ascension is a symbol of the New Testament Apostolic Church founded by Christ.

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- Therefore, such figures as the Theotokos and St. Paul are witnesses to this event and emphasize the meaning of the whole Christian Church.
- The icon expresses the sovereignty of God over the Church, as its guide and power. The main sense of the icon is rendered through the great glory of the ascended God.
- The *apolytikion* (hymn) for the Feast of the Ascension sums up the significance of this event: *“Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, and gladdened Thy disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit; and they were assured by the blessing that Thou art the Son of God and Redeemer of the world.”*
- Our church has placed this icon in its traditional location within the church.

OSB: Icons of the Ascension represent Christ in a such a way that one cannot tell whether He is going to heaven or coming again to earth. This captures the profound truth that we are already living under His reign while awaiting His return.

## The Icon:

- Christ
  - In the center of the icon is Christ ascending.
  - He is blessing with one hand, and holds a scroll in His other hand.
  - He is shown seated and is depicted in circular glory.
  - Surrounding Christ are several angels, with their arms stretched out, touching their hands to the outer side of the glory.
    - These angels are not mentioned in Holy Scripture, however, they have a symbolic significance, expressing the great reverence they have for Christ and we know from other Scripture verses that they minister to Him.
- The Theotokos is shown in the middle foreground with her hands raised in prayer.
  - She stands elevated on a footstool or platform.
  - While Scripture does not mention her presence at the Ascension, famed iconographer Photios Kontoglou remarks, “she is represented as present at the event in accordance with unwritten tradition.” (Guild to Byzantine Iconography, Volume 1, p. 207)
- Angels
  - On either side of the Theotokos, dress in white.
  - Only the Theotokos and the angels have halos.
  - The angels have a staff in one hand and their other hand is pointing to the ascending Lord.
- 12 Disciples
- Paul is included in the icon even though he was not with the other disciples at the Ascension. Famed Iconographer Kontoglou remarks : “In many instances, Orthodox iconography does not represent a topic of the Gospel according to its historical accuracy, but symbolically.”
  - Before His ascension, Christ had exhorted His disciples to preach the Gospel everywhere (The Great Commission), and St. Paul was a chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings and children of Israel. ( Acts 9:15)
- The disciples still appear a little confused, but not Mary.

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## PENTECOST

### The Promise of the Holy Spirit

#### Acts 1:8

(Christ telling the disciples): *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

#### John 14:26

*“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to you remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

#### John 15:26

*“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you shall bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”*

#### Acts 1:3-:6

*And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

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## The Day of Pentecost

### Acts 2:1-:12

*When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

*And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and they were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear each in our language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"*

### Notes:

- "Pentecost" is a Greek word meaning "Fiftieth," because we celebrate it the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Pascha.
- In the Old Testament, it is also called the Feast of Weeks (OSB notes, p.1470), which comes 50 days after Passover and celebrates the first fruits of harvest.
- Pentecost is a celebration of the descent of Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.
- This event fulfills the prophecy of John the Baptist that Christ would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). (OSB notes p. 1470).

### The Icon:

- The red cloth indicates the event takes place indoors.
- 12 Disciples
  - For symbolic reasons, Paul, who was not physically there, is shown in the icon. He is included because of his important role in God's plan to spread the Gospel.
  - They are sitting in semi-circle, showing unity of the Church.
  - There is a bit of an empty spot in the middle. This unoccupied seat is for the head of the Church, Christ.
  - They look peaceful, despite the description of the rushing wind.
  - Evangelists are shown holding books. (3<sup>rd</sup> on right hidden?).
  - Scrolls—signs that they received the gift of teaching.
- Flames of Fire
  - 12 rays descend from the heavenly vault.
- The Cosmos is represented by a bearded old man with a crown.
  - Shown in a cave-like structure
  - He is sitting in darkness for the entire world has been without faith.
  - The twelve scrolls represent the 12 disciples, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, bring light to the whole world, teaching the Good News of Christ. (The Great Commission)