

Exploring the depth of the "Queen of All" Holy Icon and Akathist Prayer

The Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary known as "Queen of All, the Healer of Cancer" (Panagia Pantanassa), was brought by Elder Joseph of Nea Skete to the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos in the 17th century.



The grace-filled Elder was accounted worthy to be first to witness the icon's miraculous powers. This event occurred when a young Cypriot man, not particularly religious, visited Athos with a friend and entered into the Vatopedi Church. As the young man stood before the Queen of All Icon, Elder Joseph watched as a light radiated from the face of the Theotokos and some invisible power hurled the man to the ground. When the young man recovered from this fall, he began to weep and confessed that he had been engaged in the black arts. He repented at that very moment and turned his life around, becoming a faithful Orthodox Christian.

Recognizing this as a wonder-working icon, from that time people afflicted with various needs and illnesses have come before the Queen of All Icon seeking the Mother of God's protection and grace. Healings of all kinds have occurred and notably, people suffering with cancer have been completely healed.

This miraculous Icon became known far and wide and one day, the faithful believers at a children's cancer clinic outside of Moscow requested a copy of the icon for their clinic. This petition was blessed by His Holiness, Patriarch Alexius II of Moscow and All Rus, which facilitated the commission. The brothers of Vatopedi faithfully reproduced the icon and it was sent to the clinic. The icon has since been moved to the Alekseevsky Convent at Krasnoe Selo. It was here that in 1996 the beautiful Akathist service to the Queen of All¹ was written.

There is a difference between this Akathist and the Great Akathist (O Champion Leader) that is normally read in churches in the Paraklesis service. The latter is about protection: its theme is about saving us from our enemies, specifically, saving the city of Constantinople. But the Akathist to the Queen of All is one of healing: of healing from our spiritual, bodily and psychological wounds.

Throughout the Queen of All Akathist is woven the theme that this healing is made possible through the Eucharist: as the priest imparts Holy Communion to us he states "unto the healing of both soul and body." The Akathist highlights the role of the Theotokos, as this enabled the Divine dispensation of God taking flesh.

The Queen of All Akathist begins with the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary; it is because of her obedience to God that our salvation is made possible. This sets an example for us to be, in like manner, obedient to God. Sometimes people say "I know this is what God wants me to do, but I am not ready." The Virgin didn't say "come back another time," she said YES, be it done unto me as God wills – God won't force us to do anything without our free-will consent. *Thy* will be done, not *my* will be done. The Akathist then leads into Christ's Incarnation made possible through her "yes" and subsequently speaks of his desire to give Himself as Divine Food (the Eucharist) for the faithful.

In Ikos 1 the Queen of All is called the "heavenly manna", and as such restores hearts to life. She is not really manna, but Christ who took flesh of her becomes the life-saving manna in the Eucharist that

¹ Akathist to the Mother of God "Pantanassa", Healer of Cancer (Safford, AZ, St. Paisius Orthodox Monastery, 2017), trans. from Russian by Elizabeth Purdy.

will nurture us as we traverse the wilderness of life. This same Ikos affirms "Rejoice, Beginning of our salvation".

Listening to Gabriel speak, in Ikos 2 the Virgin questions the angel: "reveal to me, how I, as a pure Maiden, shall be the Mother of the Most High." This echoes the Gospel dialogue between Mary and the Archangel:

"Then said Mary unto the angel, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?'
And the angel answered and said unto her, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'."

Lk 1:34-35

How is it that Zacharias questioned the angel who told him that his wife, Elizabeth, would conceive and he was struck mute for his disbelief, and yet, isn't Mary basically asking the same thing? Blessed Theophylact tells us that it was not because of Mary's lack of faith that she asked this, but because there was no precedent in human history for such an occurrence. Zacharias had "...many examples of barren women who had given birth. But for the Virgin, there was no precedent"² of a seedless conception.

Her consent to the Archangel Gabriel allows us to receive Christ. She is called a Chalice, a Golden Spoon, an Ark, and a Holy Table. She is the God-bearer, and as such, she makes us also God-bearers in that through our reception of Holy Communion, we carry within us Christ. This theme is also reflected in the 5th Ode, where she is "...the most-pure Temple of the Saviour..." and we ask her to "...make us also temples of the Godhead...".

If we think about what the statement "temples of the Godhead" means, every time we receive Holy Communion we go out into the world as walking tabernacles carrying within us Christ. The Saviour Himself states that "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). It is for this reason that following reception of Communion, you may observe that Orthodox Christians honor this by not making prostrations or bows down to the ground – symbols of compunction – rather, they stand aright as they have just partaken of the Resurrection.

The Akathist continues to direct our attention to the reception of Christ and the role of the Virgin Mary in this, when in the 7th Ode we read:

"Desiring to give Thyself as food for the faithful Thou didst will to be incarnate of the Virgin, that receiving Thy Most-pure Body and Thy Blood they might know Thee, the Perfect God; therefore, marvelling at this ineffable wisdom we cry: Alleluia."

The verses that follow this Ode reinforce this thought: "Rejoice, Giver of the Heavenly Bread.... Rejoice, guide of mortals to the fountain of immortality."

In the middle of the Akathist, we read of the aforementioned young Cypriot man who visited Mount Athos with a friend, just as a "tourist", and was cured from satanic possession before the Queen of All Icon:

"Wondrous grace shone from Thine Icon, O Queen of All, when the youth, darkened by satanic teachings, fell motionless before it. Freed beyond hope from the bonds of darkness, with fear and joy he cried to Thee thus:
Rejoice, Correction of a dishonorable life.
Rejoice, Consolation of those grievously tormented.

² Theophylact, Blessed, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke* (House Springs, MO, Chrysostom Press, 2007) 17.

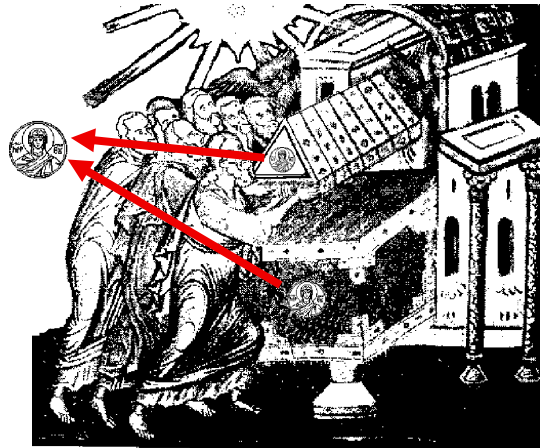
Rejoice, Expeller of demonic hordes from the Church.
Rejoice, Dispenser of the gloomy cloud of sin.
Rejoice, Abolition of invisible snares.
Rejoice, all-powerful Conqueror of demonic charms.
Rejoice, Lamp, guiding those led astray...."

Simply for the act of coming before her Icon, to gaze upon it, without asking for anything, she proactively reached out in a most extraordinary way and healed this man. She discerned the man's delusion and saw beyond his sinfulness. While on the one hand she perhaps didn't want him gazing upon her holy image, on the other, being the loving mother, she saw that he could become a faithful Orthodox Christian man of upright life and responsible adulthood if he were healed. And as a caring mother, she healed this child.

As we proceed towards the end of the Akathist, the astute observer may ask, why does the prayer celebrate the Dormition of the Virgin Mary before hymning her Nativity? These two events of her falling asleep and her birth are strategically set in the 6th (Dormition) and the 12th Odes (Nativity).

To answer this question, we have to understand the poetic imagery here: the death of the Mother of God is framed as a "birth" into life; but her Nativity is a static occurrence. She entered into creation and became the animate tabernacle in which God would dwell. The 12th Ikos compares her to the tabernacle of ancient times, which the Hebrews glorified with cymbals, and which foreshadowed the Virgin, the true Tabernacle, who is glorified with virtues. There is an ancient icon depicting the Hebrews carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and on the side of the Ark is an icon of the Virgin Mary.

All the hymnography of the Church interacts to teach us theology: if we look at the Dismissal Hymn of the Dormition, the verse tells us that she is still with us, looking out for us. The Virgin Mary reposed in a natural human death, and after three days in the tomb was carried to Heaven.

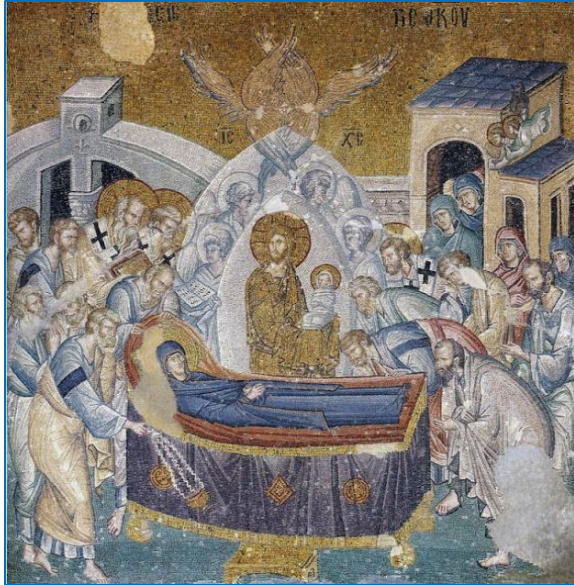


The Theotokos is depicted as the "Ark" holding the "Law" in this icon.

Dismissal Hymn of the Dormition

In giving birth thou didst preserve thy virginity, /
In thy Dormition thou didst not forsake the world, O Theotokos; /
Thou wast translated unto life, since thou art the mother of Life. /
And by thine intercessions dost thou redeem our souls from death.

This Dismissal Hymn is important for us to understand as we navigate the Queen of All Akathist: She has not forsaken us (*Our God is a God of the living*, Mt 22:32, Mk 12:27, Lk 20:38).



Byzantine mosaic, 14th c., Dormition of the Theotokos, surrounded by the Apostles. In the center, Jesus Christ holds an infant, symbolizing the soul of Mary borne into Paradise.

Nave of the Church of the Saviour in Chora, Istanbul, Turkey.

At the end of the Akathist we celebrate her birth:

"We hymn Thy Nativity, as of old Israel extolled with cymbals the tabernacle of the law, which was but a foreshadowing of Thee, the true Tabernacle, whom we now glorify with virtues, that Thou mightest hear from all such things as these..."



St. Basil the Great icon from the Kiev Hagia Sophia Church, 11th c.

It is notable that the Church Fathers stressed this concept that we can learn all we need to know about theology through the Orthodox Church's iconography, hymnography and worship. In the 4th century, St. Basil the Great eloquently expressed this connection: "What the word transmits through the ear, that painting silently shows through the image, and by these two means, mutually accompanying one another, we receive knowledge of one and the same thing."³

Poetic Imagery and Literary Techniques

A review of the Queen of All Akathist would be incomplete if it did not mention the sheer beauty of the composition: the Akathist, like so many of the God-inspired Orthodox prayers, is a masterpiece of literary style which leads us to deep contemplation.

In the 6th Ikos there is an interesting comparison of the Virgin as the "Reflection of the eternal light". If we look at the full moon in its glory brightening the night, we realize that in and of itself, the moon is nothing special, it is just another rock, but it is made special by reflecting the light of the sun. So, too, the Virgin Mary, by bearing Christ, becomes a reflection of the Divine and Pre-Eternal Light. Her whole life becomes of importance because of her cooperation in the Divine plan – "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

³ Basil the Great, "Discourse 19 on the 40 Martyrs", Lossky and Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1982), 30.

The literary techniques impact us by leading us to contemplate the rich meaning of the mysteries of the Mother of God, of who she is, of her role in our salvation, of her having changed the course of history by her humility. It uses a rare technique known as chremamorphism, or attributing the characteristics of an object to a person (as opposed to personification, in which an inanimate object is given human characteristics). Some of these chremamorphisms and rich metaphors are below:

- A loom (...Thou who didst weave the fleshly garment of the Word)
- Heavenly Manna
- Radiant Star
- Armor of truth against temptation
- Fountain, pouring forth living waters
- Scepter
- Staff
- Meadow
- Inviolable Wall
- Ladder
- Living Water
- Ewe Lamb
- Protecting Veil
- City
- Herb of healing
- Flame, burning the curse of cancer
- Temple of the Saviour
- Shield of protection
- Lamp
- Cloud
- Mountain
- Valley
- Gem
- Chalice
- Spoon
- Ark
- Holy Table
- Container
- Poultice
- Holy Oil
- Burning bush
- Crown
- Candle
- Dawn
- Torch
- Right hand
- Ray of light
- Lightning
- Thunder
- Throne
- Vessel

Visual elements of the Icon

In exploring the visual elements of the Queen of All icon, we must digress to another icon, that of The Joy of All That Sorrow. In this latter Holy Icon of the Mother of God, we see the Virgin, under the blessing of her Son, sending angels to minister to the needs of people in various situations. In the Queen of All Icon we also see her Son blessing her and we see angels ready to do her bidding. One angel has an upstretched wing, showing that it is not static, but in flight, both in Heaven and on earth, ready to do the bidding of the Holy Virgin. As in the Joy of All That Sorrow Icon, we see noetic flowers. In the Queen of All Icon they adorn the throne on which she sits, and speak of her presence in the Heavenly Kingdom. Noetic derives from a Greek word and refers to a deeper form of knowledge beyond logic and reason: we intuitively understand these flowers not as sensory, as are flowers of this world, but they depict a different realm in which we, too, hope to reside in the eternity.



Most Holy Theotokos
"Queen of All"



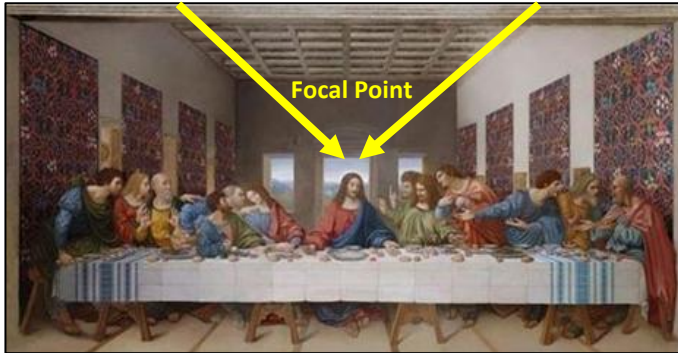
Most Holy Theotokos
"The Joy of All That Sorrow"

In other visual elements traditional to Orthodox iconography, the Virgin Mary is clothed in a deep Tyrian-red outer robe. The garment beneath is of a darker bluish-green. At the time of Christ, purple and red dyes were costly, derived from shellfish and taking thousands of shellfish to make enough dye for one garment. These colors were reserved for the imperial court, and sumptuary laws restricted their use. In the Bible, Acts 16 speaks of Lydia of Thyatira, who is singled out as a "seller of purple", which hints that she was a woman of means. The Virgin was always human, thus her inner robe is the bluish color, whereas she underwent deification when she was obedient to God and put on the imperial color when she bore Christ. Deification is perhaps best explained by the Holy Apostle Paul, in 2 Cor 3:18: "But we all ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory ... by the Spirit of the Lord."

In contrast, Jesus Christ (as an adult) is generally depicted in icons wearing a red inner robe, as He was always the Heavenly King. His outer robe is blue because he put on the lesser color when He took flesh.

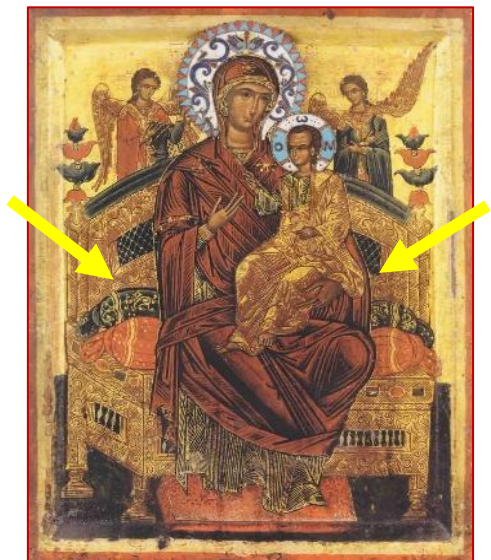
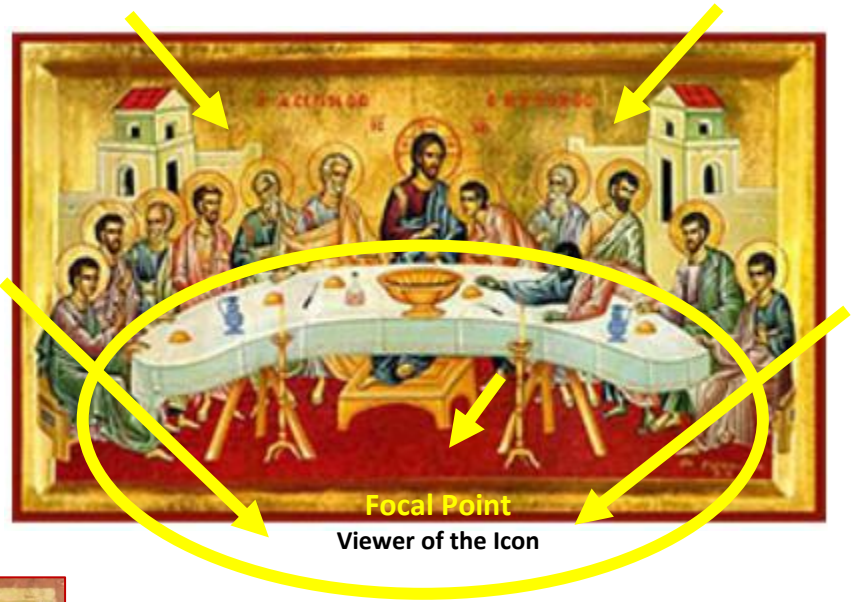
In the Queen of All Icon, Mary is the focal point, with Christ blessing her. But she is not passively accepting this honor. In her humility, she points to Him, as if to say, "Not me, look at Him, He will heal you!" In Ikos 7 of the Queen of All Akathist we read "Rejoice, Directress, pointing us to the Holy Eucharist."

In another iconographic technique, we observe an inverse perspective in the Icon. This sets hagiographic art apart from Western religious art, which has a linear and aerial perspective creating the illusion of depth (i.e. Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper). The inverse perspective (also known as Byzantine perspective) that is used in the Icon of the Queen of All draws the beholder of the Icon into its depth, mystically uniting the viewer with the Holy Icon. The Icon is reaching out to us, drawing us into Heaven as if through a window.



Left: The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, c. 1495. The linear perspective uses the point behind Christ's head as an anchor, creating depth and realism, important features of Renaissance art.

Right: Orthodox iconography is anagogic, lifting up the viewer to contemplation of the Divine. Unlike Western art, realism is not a defining factor in a canonically correct icon. In this depiction of the Mystical Supper, Monk Michael of Mt. Athos uses an inverse perspective, which gives the appearance that the objects converge towards the viewer, drawing them into the sacred event.



The Queen of All Icon subtly uses an inverse perspective.

As with the young man who was possessed and struck with light from the Icon which led to the healing of his body and soul, let us too come before the Icon with sincerity of heart, pleading with the Queen of All to provide all that is necessary for the health of our bodies and the salvation of our souls.

Rejoice, O Queen of All, who dost heal our infirmities by Thy grace!

Please click here to send us your prayer requests to be read before the Skete's Queen of All Icon, brought to us by the servant of God Thomas, from Vatopedi Monastery on the Holy Mountain of Athos.



Icon of the Queen of All from Mount Athos, located in the Skete's chapel.

[Prayer Requests](#)



To order the Akathist, icons, or medallion of the Mother of God Queen of All, the Healer of Cancer, either email us at queenofall@earthlink.net, or click here:

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