

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

**LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:**

ANGELS
BLESSING OF ICONS
BUILDINGS
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
CALENDAR
CHRISMATION
CHURCH AND STATE
DIVINE LITURGY
DYING, DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT
ECUMENICAL COUNCILS
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
ESPERINOS
FASTING
GLOSSARY
GREAT, HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA
HOLY ANOINTING
HOLY BAPTISM
HOLY COMMUNION
HOLY ICONS
HOLY MATRIMONY
HOLY ORDERS
HOLY SCRIPTURES
IN THE UK
"IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME!"
LITURGICAL YEAR,
MONKS AND NUNS
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OTHER CHRISTIAN CONFESSIONS
PRAYER AND WORSHIP
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SOME FOODS
VESTMENTS
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WHAT'S HAPPENED TO OUR SUNDAYS?
WORLDWIDE FAMILY

All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
www.thyateira.org.uk

Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.10.22

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: The Blessing of Icons



Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy over the Iconoclasts ("icon breakers") 730-843 when during the Seventh Ecumenical Orthodox Council held at Nicaea in 787 the use of icons was upheld for services, in churches, homes and other places.

Painted according to Canon. Or mounted prints.

It would be rare indeed to find any Orthodox Christian temple or home without the presence of the Holy Icons,



The Holy Icons are never worshipped but by simple acts of veneration in prayer the person or subject the icon represents is brought into closer communion with them and with God.

Often a person will buy or be given an icon from a friend, or buy at a monastery or from other supplier. These in turn may be given to someone else or placed in the home icon corner, a simple example of which is shown here:



Also, icons will be given to their local church by members of the Community or by visitors. Or one member will give to another an icon which may have special meaning for them, such as an icon of the saint whose name they bear. The possibilities are many!

It is not always the case but sometimes someone will ask if it is necessary for an icon to be blessed and often the idea of blessing an icon satisfies a real desire for “validity”. The simple answer is no but it is not so simple as that.

Apart from that implied in the documents from the debate at the 7th Ecumenical Council in 787 regarding the place of icons in Orthodox Christianity there is no liturgical text for the blessing of icons until Peter of Mogila (1645) Metropolitan of Kiev produced a text for this purpose within his jurisdiction. In 1730 a brief service for blessing of an icon is found in the Greek Euchologion (Book of Services). So in time scale it could be said that any form of developed blessing of icon texts was rather late! Neither was it without question and debate, all depending upon understanding the nature and essence of image (icon).

What of more recent times and the present? Translations from Greek and Slavonic texts of services into English always present difficulties and the first two significant service books are no exception. Published in the early years of the 20th century they are in American English with a rather “quaint” version of traditional English and often using western terms, i.e., calling the Divine Liturgy the Mass and using other terms which we no longer find in our more recently published liturgical books.

The first of these two we call the **Hapgood** after the lady who was responsible for working on the translation mostly from the Slavonic texts but with reference to earlier Greek, Arabic and other sources of Orthodox services. Much additional informative material is included in this book. In this very comprehensive work first published in 1921 there is no provision for the blessing of icons.

The second is known as the **Nasser**, first published in 1938 and called after the principle translator and compiler – Father Seraphim Nasser. With differences from the Hapgood, nevertheless the two together have been important books particularly for English speakers and of the Diaspora.

In these two very comprehensive works there is no provision for the blessing of icons. Nor is there in the Greek/English Priests Service Book (1989) with Foreword by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia). The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOARCH) now has a brief text for the blessing on an icon. There may of course be jurisdictional differences on this matter which do not have canonical status and therefore not binding on other Orthodox Churches. A common practice although without universal status has been for icons to be placed **IN** the Ieron (Altar, Holy Place or Sanctuary) during the Divine Liturgy or for a period of forty days. Not **ON** the Holy Table (altar) which is reserved only for those items required in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries

The Holy Icons and all other items adorning a church and used in worship may not have an individual blessing but at the Feast of the Theophany will, with those gathered in worship, be blessed and sprinkled with Holy Water in this annual and liturgical celebration. Homes and icon corners too at this festal time.

It is said that what makes an icon holy (blessed) is threefold. The **subject** depicted; the **making**: painted, carved, mosaic; and the **use** of the icon in the liturgies of the Church and in private prayer..

See Catalogue of St Elisabeth Convent:
“*Consecration of Icons: Does it agree with the Orthodox Tradition?*”