

What Makes an Icon an Icon?

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The Apostle Luke was recognized as the first Iconographer. It was his recreation of the image of “Holy Theotokos”(Mother of God) that started early Orthodox Christians in the practice of venerating an image as a way to help the faithful become more Christian in their life, behavior and attitude.

An Icon is an image created by an iconographer according to strict standards by the church. They have, in most cases been sanctified and blessed inside the church by a priest.

Icons are venerated by the faithful and help to remind us of the sacrifices made by the Saints, Martyrs and Prophets of the Church. These holy people have been canonized and passed on into the afterlife. Icons are the manifestation of this faith and include images of Christ, the Mother of God, Saints, religious and historical events. In some rare cases, usually in Monasteries, those who have not been canonized may appear in spiritual images for inspiration to the monks but will not have classic “halo” above their head. Icons allow Orthodox Christians to repent, renew their faith, and pray they have the strength to be good Christians.

What makes an Icon an Icon? An image created by an iconographer is venerated and viewed by the owner as a path to spiritual enlightenment. The veneration of an Icon helps a practicing Orthodox Christian to become a more spiritual person who not only professes but lives his life by the example set by the subject of the Icon. It is a way to connect to their religion. As an icon, age or the fact that it is a copy of an establish Icon is not relevant in any way. Each Icon is an original in it's own right. An icon owned by a non orthodox Christian and is not used in a spiritual setting can be viewed as a work of art or a historic relic. These factors are not important as an Icon, but may impact the intrinsic value as a relic or as a work of art. Century old Icons are indeed beautiful and although we may admire them as a work of art created in antiquity, they are not religious Icons unless they are used in a spiritual setting.

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