



*Welcome  
to the Museum of Russian Icons!  
Use this Gallery Guide to help you  
explore the Museum's collection.  
Pick up a pencil at the front desk,  
and get started!*

## What is an Icon?

**A**n icon is a painting of a religious person or scene. Icons are painted on wooden panels with tempera paint, which is made from egg yolks mixed with pigments, or colored powders. Icons are an important part of worship in the Russian Orthodox religion. They are used in churches and in people's homes.

Andre Rublev with Scenes from his Life, circa 2006

## 5. Word Search

Using <http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/search/>

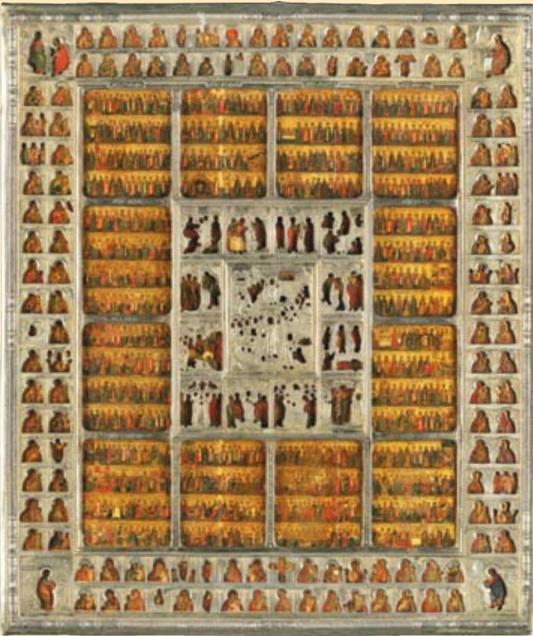
- ICON \_\_\_\_\_
- MUSEUM \_\_\_\_\_
- TEMPERA \_\_\_\_\_
- PAINTING \_\_\_\_\_
- RUSSIA \_\_\_\_\_
- PANEL \_\_\_\_\_
- PIGMENT \_\_\_\_\_
- NICHOLAS \_\_\_\_\_
- GEORGE \_\_\_\_\_
- DRAGON \_\_\_\_\_
- MINYEIA \_\_\_\_\_



## 2. Minyeia

Find icon #xxx, on the top floor of the museum.

This icon is a calendar of saints, called a minyeia. It shows all the months of the year in squares arranged around the center of the icon, as shown below. Each month is divided into days; each day is represented by a portrait of the saint whose feast – or celebration – fell on that day. Russian Orthodox people would use these small calendars in their homes and the larger ones in their churches. The portraits would help them keep track of when each saint's feast day took place. Each saint's name is written in tiny letters above his or her head in an old form of the Russian language. In the center of the icon are pictures of Jesus on the cross and of special feast days in the Orthodox Church. Around the edge are pictures of the Mother of God.



**W**hat is your favorite month of the year? Circle one . . .

**JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER OCTOBER NOVEMBER DECEMBER**

List some things that happen in that month that make it special:

\_\_\_\_\_

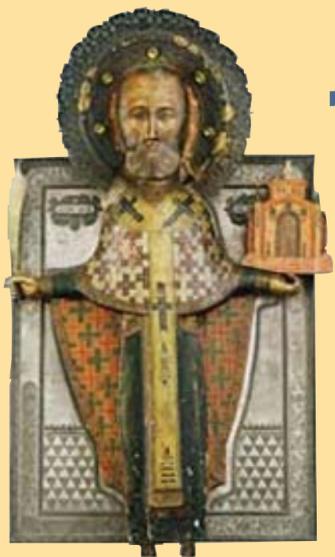
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**P**ick one of these events and draw it below:

**N**ow imagine that you had to draw this event in a space less than one square inch! Do you think you can do it? How might you have to change your picture as you make it smaller? Try it below:





# 1. St. Nicholas

On the top floor of the Museum, find the group of St. Nicholas icons. St. Nicholas was the patron saint of Russia and was very generous to the poor. If you say "Saint Nicholas" very fast you may be able to hear how it sounds like Santa Claus – another name for him!

You might notice that these icons look a lot alike. In icon painting, a person is usually shown the same way in every time, so that it is easy to recognize him. Look at the pictures below that show different parts of St. Nicholas's face and body. Next to each picture, write the number of St. Nicholas icons you see here that have that particular feature.

How many St. Nicholas icons ...

Have a short gray beard? \_\_\_\_\_

A tall forehead? \_\_\_\_\_

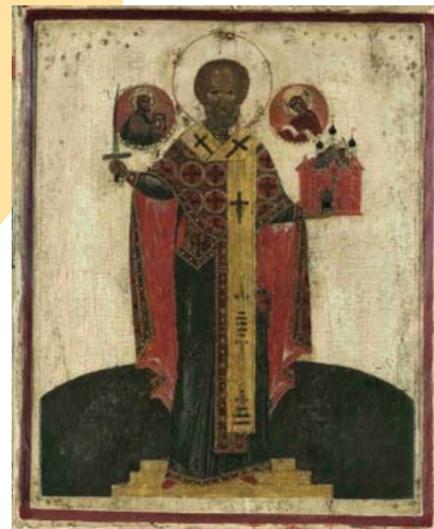
A black and white band around his neck (called an "omophorion") with crosses on it? \_\_\_\_\_

Show him as an old man? \_\_\_\_\_

Show him holding a building? \_\_\_\_\_

Show him holding a book? \_\_\_\_\_

Show him holding a sword? \_\_\_\_\_



St. Nicholas was almost always shown as an old man with a short gray beard and a high wrinkled forehead wearing, a band around his neck decorated with a cross. In one hand he sometimes holds a book, which is the Bible. Other times he holds a sword, to show his willingness to fight for his faith, and a building that represents the town where he lived.



# 2. St. George and the Dragon

The story of St. George appears in many Russian icons. He is the patron saint of Moscow, the capital of Russia. According to legend, there was a fierce dragon living in a lake in Libya. He terrorized the people who lived in the town nearby. St. George came in on a white horse to save the townspeople from the dragon. St. George icons show him on his horse, slaying the dragon. Sometimes, the princess he rescued is shown in the background.

Look below at the pictures of the dragons from some of the St. George icons in the Museum. Can you find the icons in the museum? Hint: one is on the first floor and two are upstairs (and one of them is very tiny!). Which dragon do you think is the scariest? Can you draw one that's even scarier? Use the space below.



Draw your own scary dragon here...

Dragon 1

Dragon 2

Dragon 3



Find the panel hanging from the ceiling that has lots of icons of the Mother of God (Mary holding baby Jesus). Look carefully at the icon in the bottom right hand corner of the panel. What do you notice that's different about this figure from all the other images of Mother of God?

Write your answer below:

Answer: She has three hands.

# 3. Three-handed Mother of God

Hundreds of years ago in Russia, Emperor Leo banished icons because of the second commandment in the Bible, which says that people should not worship false idols. At the same time, Saint John of Damascus wrote a book about icons called On Divine Images. As a punishment, Emperor Leo had John's hand cut off. According to legend, John prayed to the Mother of God, asking her to reattach his hand. She granted his request. In gratitude, Saint John made a small silver replica of his hand and attached it to this Mother of God image. From that point on, iconographers started painting three hands on this image of the Mother of God.

