

Icons of the Mother of God

Icons of the Most-Holy Theotokos.

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She Who is Quick to Hear.

This ancient wonderworking Icon is located on Mt. Athos at the Monastery of Docharou. The Monastery's tradition dates the time of the writing of this Icon to the 10th Century, when St. Neophytos (co-founder of the Monastery) was Superior.

In 1664, the Steward, Nilos, passing through the dining-hall at night with a flaming torch, heard from the Icon of the Theotokos which was hanging over the door, a voice, appealing to him not to pass by here in the future in order not to blacken the Icon with smoke. The Monk thought that this was a practical joke by one of the brethren, and, disregarding the sign, continued to pass through the dining-hall with the smoking torch. Suddenly he was struck blind!

With bitter repentance, Nilos prayed before the Icon of the Mother of God, beseeching her forgiveness. And again he heard the wondrous voice, announcing forgiveness and returning his sight, while commanding all of the brethren to proclaim: From this time forth, this My Icon will be called She Who Is Quick To Hear, because to all who come to it will be revealed quick mercy and complete forgiveness. The Most-Holy Theotokos fulfilled then and even now fulfils her promise manifesting quick help and consolation to all who hasten to her with faith.

In Russia, copies of the wonderworking Athonite Icon, She Who Is Quick To Hear, were always regarded with great love and honor. Many of these have been glorified with miracles and individual cases of healings from epilepsy and frenzy have been especially mentioned. A copy of this Icon, from Mt. Athos, is to be found in the iconostasis of the monastery church of the Russian Orthodox Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Of the Sign (Znamenny).

This Icon depicts the Most-Holy Theotokos sitting prayerfully, with uplifted arms. On her chest, with a background of a circular shield (or sphere) is the Divine Infant the Savior-Emmanuel giving a blessing. This representation of the Mother of God is considered to be one of the first of Her iconographic Images. In the Catacombs of St. Agnes in Rome, there is a representation of the Mother of God, arms outstretched in prayer, with the Infant sitting on her knees, dating from the 4th Century. In addition to this, there is an important ancient Byzantine Icon of the Mother of God, from the 6th Century, where the Most-Holy Theotokos is represented sitting on a throne and supporting with both arms in front of her an oval shield with the Image of the Savior-Emmanuel. Icons of the Mother of God known under the name Of The Sign, appeared in Russia in the 11th-12th Century, recalling the wondrous sign from the Novgorod Icon of this name which occurred in 1170.

In that year the Princes, headed by the son of the Suzdal Prince, Andrew Bogoliubsky, joined together and gathered before the walls of Great Novgorod, intending to capture the city. The Novgorodians remained, however, trusting in God, and day and night they prayed, beseeching God not to abandon them. On the third night, the Archbishop of Novgorod, Elijah, heard a wondrous voice, commanding him to take from the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilinoi Street the Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos and to carry it about on the walls of the city.

When the Icon was carried out, the invaders shot off at the Cross-Procession a storm of arrows, one of which pierced the iconographic face of the Theotokos. From Her eyes poured out tears and the Icon was turned with the face to the city. After this Divine Sign, the invaders were suddenly seized with indescribable terror and they began to beat each other. At the encouragement of the Lord, the Novgorodians fearlessly rushed upon the enemy and defeated them in battle.

In remembrance of the wondrous help of the Queen of Heaven, Archbishop Elijah then established a feast in honor of the Sign of the Mother of God, which the whole Russian Church observes to this day. For 186 years after the Sign of 1170, the Icon remained in the Church of the Transfiguration on Ilinoi Street; but in 1356, a Church of the Sign of the Most-Holy Theotokos was erected in Novgorod, next to the Cathedral Church of the Monastery of the Sign.

Many copies of the this Icon were made and have received prominence in Russia. Many of them have shone with miracles in local churches and received fame as a place of miracles. Among these are the Icons of the Most-Holy Theotokos Of The Sign of Dionysius-Glushetsk, Kursk, Seraphimo-Ponetaevskaya, and others.

Smolensk (Hodigitria).

This Icon, called Hodigitria, which means Directress or Guider of the Way, according to Church Tradition was written by the Holy Evangelist Luke during the earthly life of the Theotokos. At this time, according to the same Tradition, the Mother of God blessed her portrait, saying, My blessing will remain always with this Icon. According to St. Dimitry of Rostov, this Icon was written at the request of Theophilus, Governor of Antioch, the most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:1). From Antioch, the Holy Object was transferred to Jerusalem and from there, about the middle of the 5th Century, the Empress Eudoxia, wife of the Emperor Arcadius, transferred it to Constantinople, as a gift to Pulcheria, her sister-in-law, who placed the Icon in the Blachernae Church.

The Greek Emperor Constantine IX (1042-1054), in 1046, giving his daughter, Anna, in marriage to Prince Vsevolod of Chernigov (son of Yaroslav the Wise), blessed her on her way with this Icon. After the death of Prince Vsevolod, the Icon was presented to his son, Vladimir Monomach, who presented it to the Cathedral of Smolensk in 1101. At this time the Icon received the name, the Hodigitria of Smolensk.

In 1238, at a voice from the Icon, the selfless soldier, Mercurius, defeated a mighty Mongol army (led by the great invader Batu). Later receiving the blessed end of martyrdom, he was numbered among the Saints by the Russian Orthodox Church (commemorated Nov. 24).

In the 14th Century, Smolensk fell under the rule of the Lithuanian princes. The daughter of Prince Vitovtus, Sophia, was given in marriage to Grand Prince Dimitry of Moscow (1398-1425) and in 1398 she brought to Moscow the Smolensk Icon of the Mother of God. The Holy Image was placed in the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kremlin at the right corner of the Holy Doors.

In 1456, at the request of the inhabitants of Smolensk, headed by Bishop Mishael, the Icon was festively returned to Smolensk, while two copies were left in Moscow one in the Annunciation Cathedral and the other, in 1524, in the Novodevichy Convent, memorializing the return of Smolensk to Russia. This Monastery was erected on the Devichy Field where, with many tears the Muscovites had bid farewell to the Holy Icon when it had been returned to Smolensk.

In 1602 an exact copy of the wonderworking Icon was written, which was then lodged in the Tower of the Smolensk fortress wall over the Dnieprovsky Gates, under a specially-constructed roof. Later, in 1727, there was erected there a wooden church and in 1802 one of stone.

The new copy received the blessed power of the ancient Image and, on August 5, 1812, when the Russian armies left Smolensk at the advance of Napoleon, they took with them the Icon for safekeeping. The day before the Battle of Borodino, they bore this Icon around the camp so that the troops would be strengthened. The ancient

Image of the Smolensk Hodigitria, temporarily placed in the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow, on the day of the Battle itself, together with the Iveron and Vladimir Icons of the Mother of God, were carried through the streets of Moscow, as well as to the sick and wounded in the Lefortovsky Court. After the victory over Napoleon, the Smolensk Hodigitria, as well as the glorified copies, were returned to Smolensk.

The Feast in honor of this Icon was established on July 28, 1525, in memory of the return of Smolensk to Russia. This Icon is one of the principle Holy Objects of the Russian Church and the faithful have received and still receive from it abundant graces of help and healing. The Mother of God, through Her Holy Image helps and strengthens us, guiding us to salvation and thus, we cry out to her: O All-gracious Hodigitria, Praise of Smolensk and the whole Russian Land you are the confirmation of the believing people. Rejoice, Hodigitria, Salvation of Christians!

Tikhvin.

According to Church Tradition, this Icon was written by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke. In the 5th Century it was transferred from Jerusalem to Constantinople, where it was placed in the Blachernae Church. In 1383, about 70 years before the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, the Icon vanished from the church and with luminous rays of light appeared over the waters of Lake Ladoga. Wondrously borne from place to place, it finally settled near the city of Tikhvin.

On the site where the Icon appeared, there was constructed a wooden church in honor of the Dormition of the Most-Holy Theotokos. Later, with great fervor, Grand Prince Vasily (1505-1533) constructed a stone church in place of the wooden one. In 1560, at the order of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, a men's monastery was erected by the church, enclosed by a stone wall.

In 1613-14, Swedish armies, having captured Novgorod, attempted to destroy the Monastery, but, by the help of the Mother of God, it was saved. In view of the approaching Swedish armies, the Monks had resolved to flee the Monastery, taking the wonderworking Icon with them, but there had been unable to remove it from its place. This miracle overcame their faintheartedness and the Monks remained in the Monastery, placing their hope on the protection of the Mother of God. The small number of defenders successfully turned back the attacks of the invaders, for the attacking Swedes saw a multitude of warriors coming from Moscow like a heavenly army and they fled.

After the miraculous deliverance of the Monastery, royal emissaries came from Moscow and having made a copy of the miracle-working Icon, they returned to the ancient town of Stolbovo, not far from Tikhvin, where peace was concluded with the Swedes. The main guarantee of peace in the Russian lands was the bringing of this

copy of the Tikhvin Icon. Subsequently this copy was transferred to Moscow and placed in the Dormition Cathedral. Then, at the request of Novgorod, whose citizens had participated in the war with the Swedes, the Icon was returned to Novgorod and placed in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom. The All-Russian festival of the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God, glorified by countless miracles, was established by the Church in memory of its wondrous appearance and the conquering of the enemies by the protection of the Theotokos. It is celebrated on June 26.

Pochaev.

In 1340, two Monks made their abode on the mountain of Pochaev (Volynia Little Russia) in the place where there is now the Monastery of Pochaev. One day, after having completed his cell rule, one of the Monks ascending to the top of the mount, suddenly saw the Mother of God, standing on a rock and surrounded by flames. Astonished, he called his brother to see the miracle. A third witness to this vision, was the shepherd, John Bosoi, who ran up the mount. Together the three glorified God and on the rock where the Theotokos stood, there remained the imprint of her right foot. In addition, a healing spring also poured forth from the spot where she had stood.

In 1559, the Greek Metropolitan, Neophytos, traveling through Volynia, stopped to visit the noblewoman Anna Goiskaya, on her estate of Orlya, not far from Pochaev. In thanksgiving for her hospitality, the Metropolitan blessed her with an icon of the Theotokos, brought with him from Constantinople. Later it was noticed that a radiance sprang from the Image and when Philip, the brother of Anna had been healed before it, she presented it, in 1597, to the Monks living on the mountain of Pochaev. The Holy Image was placed in the church erected in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God and later a monastery was built, for which Anna Goiskaya provided large sums for its upkeep. Later, in 1602, the Icon was transferred to the newly-completed Church of the Holy Trinity.

The wonderworking Icon began to be known as the Pochaev Icon and among many witnesses concerning the help of the Queen of Heaven, the following is especially well known. A Monk of the Pochaev Monastery was captured by the Tatars, and finding himself held in captivity, he recalled the Pochaev Monastery, its Holy Objects, Divine Services, and singing. In particular, the Monk longed for the approaching Feast of the Dormition and with tears beseeched the Mother of God for deliverance from captivity. Suddenly, at the prayers of the Most-Holy Virgin, the walls of the prison vanished and the Monk found himself within the walls of the Pochaev Monastery.

In 1675, during the wars with the Turks, regiments of Tatars approached the Monastery, surrounding it on three sides. The weak monastery enclosure, together with the weak stone buildings of the Monastery, did not present an adequate defense for the besieged Monks. At this the Abbot, Joseph, convinced the brethren and laity

there to turn to the Heavenly Protectors the Most-Holy Theotokos and Venerable Job of Pochaev. The Monks and laity prayed fervently, falling down before the wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God and before the shrine of the relics of Venerable Job.

On the morning of July 23, with the rising of the sun, the Tatars held a last council concerning the assault against the Monastery, while the Abbot ordered the faithful to sing an Akathist to the Mother of God. At the first words of the Akathist, the Most-Pure Theotokos Herself suddenly appeared, unfurling her white and shining omophor, surrounded by heavenly angels holding unsheathed swords. Venerable Job was seen near the Mother of God, bowing to her and praying about the defense of the Monastery.

The Tatars took the heavenly army for ghosts and in confusion began to fire arrows at the Most-Holy Virgin and Venerable Job, but the arrows turned backwards and wounded those who had fired them. Terror enveloped the invaders and in panic they took to flight, in the confusion even killing many of their own fellows. The defenders of the Monastery rushed upon the fleeing Tatars in pursuit, taking many captives. Subsequently, many of the captives embraced the Christian faith and remained, forever after, in the Monastery. Thus a festival was instituted by the Russian Church for July 23 in memory of the deliverance of the Monastery. The Icon is also feasted on September 8 and on the Friday of Bright Week.

Vladimir.

The Vladimir Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos was written by the Holy Evangelist Luke on a board taken from a table on which the Savior, together with His Most-Pure Mother and the Righteous Joseph ate. The Mother of God, having seen this Image, pronounced: Henceforth all generations will call Me blessed. Let the grace of Him Who was born of me, as well as Mine, be with this Icon.

In 1131 the Icon was sent to Russia from Constantinople to the Holy Prince Mstislav (1132) and was sent to the Devichy Monastery of Vyshgorod an ancient appanage town of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Princess Olga. In 1155, Andrew Bogoliubsky, the son of Yuri Dolgoruky, brought the Icon to Vladimir and installed it on Sept. 21, 1164, in the magnificent Dormition Cathedral, where it remained for 230 years. At this time the Icon received the name Vladimir.

In 1395 Russia was threatened by the terrible Conqueror of the East, Tamerlane. Grand Prince Vasily, son of Dimitry Donskoy who had first defeated the Mongols at the River Don, gathered together an army, greatly inferior in numbers and strength to that of Tamerlane, and took his stand on the Oka River beyond Kolomna. The fearful inhabitants of Moscow fasted and prayed fervently through the Dormition Fast, while

the miraculous Icon of the Most-Holy Mother of God was transferred in a solemn procession from Vladimir to Moscow.

On August 26, when the tearful inhabitants of Moscow went out to meet the miraculous Icon at Kuchkovo Field, Tamerlane had a vision in which a majestic woman, surrounded by a luminous radiance, commanded him to leave the boundaries of Russia. Inquiring as to the meaning of the dream, he was told that the radiant woman was the Mother of God, the great Protectress of Christians. At this time Tamerlane retreated beyond the boundaries of Russia. In memory of this event and in honor of the Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos of Vladimir, the Monastery of the Presentation of the Lord was built on the spot where the Icon had been met by the inhabitants of Moscow on Aug. 26. So, too, a Feast was instituted for this day.

In 1480, Khan Achmet of the Golden Horde invaded Russia and met the army of Tsar Ivan III on the banks of the Ugra River (called the Sash of the Mother of God], which protected Russia's boundaries. The Tatars and Russians faced each other across the River. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Moscow prayed to the Most-Holy Theotokos for deliverance of the Orthodox capital. As a result, the Khan unexpectedly retreated, leaving the bounds of Russia. In thanksgiving for the deliverance of the country from the Tatars, a Feast in honor of the Mother of God of Vladimir was instituted for June 23.

In 1521, the miraculous help of the Theotokos alone saved Moscow from the forces of Mahmet-Girei, Khan of the Crimean Tatars, who, united with the Nogai and Kazan Tatars, as well as the Lithuanians, threatened Moscow. Tsar Vasily gathered an army to oppose the Tatars, while Metropolitan Barlaam, together with the Moscow inhabitants, fervently prayed for deliverance from destruction.

At this time, a certain pious Nun, who was blind, had a vision. From the Spassky Gate of the Kremlin came the Moscow Hierarchs, abandoning the city, and borne in their company was the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God, on account of the pending punishment of God on the inhabitants of the city. The Hierarchs were met at the Spassky Gate by the Venerable Monks Sergius of Radonezh and Barlaam of Khutinsk, tearfully beseeching them not to leave Moscow. At this entreaty the Hierarchs returned to the Kremlin and carried back the Vladimir Icon. A similar dream was granted to the Moscow Saint, the Blessed Basil, Fool-For-Christ, to whom was revealed that at the intercession of the Mother of God and the prayers of the Saints, Moscow would be saved.

The Tatar Khan had a vision of the Mother of God, surrounded by a threatening army, rushing at his regiments and in fear he fled, and the Russian capital was spared. For

this reason, on May 21, the Russian Church again commemorates the Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos of Vladimir.

Iveron (Iberian).

The Iberian Icon of the Most-Holy Virgin, which is especially honored above all of the Icons of Mt. Athos, first appeared about the middle of the 9th Century. The Holy Orthodox Church at that time was profoundly agitated by fresh waves of iconoclasm under Emperor Theophilus; and to protect the Holy Icons from being burnt and desecrated, pious people tried to hide or set them afloat on swift rivers or seas, entrusting their destiny to the will of God.

Such was the case of the Iberian Icon of the Mother of God. According to Church Tradition, to save the Icon from the iconoclasts, a certain pious widow who lived not far from the town of Nicea, floated the icon on the waters of the sea, committing it to the care of the Theotokos. But as the widow and her son, who helped her to set the Icon afloat, watched, the Holy Image did not disappear into the water, but floated westward in an upright position. This moved the widow's son to dedicate himself to God and secretly he set out for Thessalonica and from there to Mt. Athos, where he settled after taking monastic vows at the Iberian Monastery (Iveron). It was he who told the Monks there about the Icon and thus preserved its sacred memory.

One day in the latter half of the 10th Century, the Monks of Iveron Monastery saw a pillar of fire rising from the sea. It continued for several days and nights. Soon the Monks who gathered on the shore saw an Icon of the Virgin which seemed to be standing upright on the surface of the water, giving off rays of light. The mystery of the miraculous appearance of the Icon was revealed by the Holy Mother of God Herself to Gabriel, a pious hermit of Iveron, whom she willed to walk over the water and receive the Icon in his hands. With great rejoicing and ceremony the Monks greeted the Holy Image on the shore and a chapel was built on the spot soon after.

The Holy Icon, placed by the Monks on the Holy Table of the Monastery Church, was soon found to have changed its place and to stand above the gates of the Monastery. And every time the Monks returned the Icon to the place they had chosen, it miraculously moved back to the gates of the Monastery. Finally it was revealed to the Monks by the Mother of God through the same Gabriel that this was a visual sign that she herself wished to be their Gatekeeper and Guardian not only in their present life, but also in the hereafter. Thus, at this special Sign, the Monks built a special chapel for the Icon by the inner gates of the Monastery, where they worshipped zealously every day. The Icon was called Iberian (or Of Iveron) after the Monastery, and Portaitissa (or Gate-Keeper), after its place by the gates.

One day, a blow dealt by a bandit left a mark on the cheek of the Holy Virgin. The sight of the blood that ran down the cheek terrified the robber. He turned to God and to the life of a holy ascetic. Since then all copies of the Iberian Icon of the Mother of God have depicted Her with a scar and drops of blood on Her cheek.

The fame of the Icon reached Russia through pious pilgrims. It became especially venerated in Russia in the 17th Century when two early copies of it were brought from Mt. Athos one in 1648 and the other in 1656 both being made at the order of Patriarch Nikon. One copy was placed in the Tsar's palace and later in a special chapel built for it by the Resurrection Gates of Moscow. This chapel was built in 1685, and the Icon placed here was especially venerated locally as a miracle-working Icon. The other copy, which had been commissioned by Patriarch Nikon, was brought in 1656 to the Monastery of Holy Lake.

During the War of 1812, the wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God from the Iberian Chapel, together with the Icons of the Virgin of Vladimir and of Smolensk were taken in procession, while prayers were offered to the Mother of God for victory for the Russian armies over the invader, Napoleon. In time, numerous copies were made of the Holy Iberian Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos.

In the Church Calendar, the Iberian Icon is commemorated on three occasions: Oct. 13, the day when the Icon was brought from Mt. Athos to Moscow, in 1648; Feb. 12, when the main Feast of the Holy Icon was established; and on Bright Tuesday, according to the Athonite tradition. The many prayers that are offered up to the Iberian Icon of the Virgin and the services in its honor testify to the great love and veneration in which it is held among all the Icons of the Mother of God which are the spiritual beauty of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Kazan.

In 1579, during the reign of Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible), who had subjugated the city of Kazan with the aid of God (for the city had been the capital of the Tatar Khan), the young maiden Matrona was shown in a dream the Mother of God who commanded her to go into the town and tell the Archbishop and the rulers about her Precious Image which was buried in the ground, and that they should come forth and bring the Holy Object from the depths of the earth; she was also shown the spot where the pearl of great price the Mother of God's miraculous Icon would be found. The young girl saw this vision not once, but repeatedly.

Matrona told her mother of the miraculous vision, but she did not pay any attention to the words of her young daughter. Finally the young maiden caught sight of the Icon in the flames of the kitchen fire, before which she heard a strange voice: If you do not relate My words, I will manifest Myself in another place, and you will be lost. At this

time the mother listened to the words of her daughter about this awesome sight and went, together with her, to the Archbishop and the Governor of the city, but they did not want to believe them.

Having returned home, the mother of the young Matrona dug in the ground at the indicated place. Others joined her, but no one was able to find the Icon. The girl then began to dig at a spot where a stove had once stood, and others helped her. When they had dug up more than three feet, the miracle occurred, for the wondrous Icon of our Queen, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, together with the Pre-Eternal Christ Child, appeared. This miraculous Icon was covered with an old sleeve of cherry-red cloth; the Icon shone wondrously, as if it had just been painted, and the dust of the earth had in no way affected this miraculous Work.

With great honor the Icon was brought to the Church of St. Nicholas in Kazan, where a Molieben was sung by Archbishop Jeremiah. A Cross-Procession was assembled and made its way to the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kazan Kremlin. On the way, two blind men, Joseph and Nikita, were healed, making this only the first of the miracles which were to make this Icon famous throughout all Russia.

A copy of the Icon was written and sent to Moscow. Tsar Ivan commanded that at the place of the appearance, a church in honor of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God be constructed, wherein was placed the Holy Icon, and a woman's monastery was also founded there. Matrona and her mother, later received the tonsure at this Monastery. As the Holy Icon had been found on the Feast of St. Procopius the Martyr, July 8, the Church decreed that henceforth the Kazan Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos also be commemorated on that day.

Later, in 1612, during the Time of Troubles, the Kazan Icon was responsible for the deliverance of Moscow from the invading Poles. At the summons of then Patriarch Hermogenes (who was the Priest at the Church of St. Nicholas in Kazan when the Icon had first been found, and who later wrote an account of the Finding), the Russian people began to take measures to aid the homeland. At the Patriarch's request, the Kazan Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos was sent by Prince Dimitry Pozharsky from Kazan to Moscow.

Knowing that the invasion was on account of their sins, all the people and the militia took upon themselves a three-day fast, and with prayer entreated the Lord and His Most-Pure Mother for heavenly help. The prayers were heard. From Bishop Arseny (later Bishop of Suzdal) who was in captivity at the hands of the Poles, came news that in a vision there was revealed to him a change in the judgment of God to mercy, at the intercession of the Most-Holy Virgin. Heartened by the news, the Russian army, on October 22, 1612, freed Moscow from the Polish invaders. Thus a Feast in honor of

the Kazan Mother of God was instituted for that date. And until our own times, this Icon is especially honored by the Russian Orthodox people.

Excerpt taken from "These Truths We Hold - The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings". Compiled and Edited by A Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery. Copyright 1986 by the St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 18459.

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