

THE PANTOCRATOR ICON

This Coptic icon is simple in form, capturing the essential features of the *Pantocrator* icon, but omitting some aspects found in other versions. *Pantocrator* means “Creator of All”, and usually refers to the Holy Trinity. However, the Pantocrator is often depicted as the Christ, and is to be seen painted in the dome in Orthodox churches. It shows the Christ, who is the Person of the Father made visible, and is introduced to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the three aspects (‘persons’) of the Trinity are always implicit in icons of the Christ.

An icon depicts only what is said to have been seen by human eye. So it is the human face of Christ which appears here. Nevertheless the unseen character of the Son, the Word who was in the beginning, and without whom nothing was made, is to be understood. It is the Alpha and the Omega who presides over the destiny of the whole world – the Cosmic Christ.

Christ is seated on the throne, but in half-length Pantocrators, such as this icon, the throne is not visible. Some Pantocrators emphasise the nature of Christ as judge, and give him a fearful aspect, but this icon, and many other forms of the icon, lacks all fearfulness. What is depicted is the compassionate Lord, concerned for humanity. Thus he blesses us with his right hand. The prominent three fingers represent the Trinity, the other two remind us of the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The gesture is a summary of the Nicene Creed, and gives the person praying before the icon the sense of belonging to the family of God that confesses the Creed. This right hand, so close to the centre of the picture, also leans towards the book. It is ‘the book of life’ which Christ is offering to the viewer and to the world; the book from which the Creed is formed. (We could consider it as the Book of Gospels, which contains the Word of God, and from which the Creed of the Church is derived.)

There is a serenity about this Christ, who lives through all ages and is at the beginning and the end. It enables the viewer to trust in the eternal goodness and love of God, and to feel secure at the depth of one's being.

The two colours of Christ's robes (usually red and blue) indicate the two natures of Christ. Red, the colour of blood, indicates his humanity. Blue is a wonderful colour for encouraging the journey into the infinite mystery of God. Like the sky, the being of God is without boundaries. Here the lighter colour suggests the cloud of unknowing, the cloud that enveloped Christ in the moment of transfiguration, the cloud from which God spoke a word of blessing.

The cruciform halo also points to the crucifixion. Often the Greek letters "*o w n*" appear in the arms of the cross. Literally they are translated "the being", but the meaning is conveyed even better by the words "I am", the answer to Moses' question about the name of God. However, "I am" is a verb, not a noun or a proper name. Thus the Name of God continues to be a mystery, as something truly ineffable and incapable of comprehension by God's creatures. The best we have is the face of Christ, expressing/showing us part of the mystery of God and his love for humanity.

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Easter 2011

CONTEMPLATION OF THE PANTOCRATOR ICON

As you contemplate the icon, pray that the heavens may open,
and that you will be transported into the heavenly realm
by a vision of the holy God.

*Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to
come!*

We sing:

*'Tis mystery all! The immortal dies,
Who can explore this strange design.
In vain the first born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mystery all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.*

Let praise and awe fill your being.

Glory in the Godhead –

the Word that was in the beginning,
the "I AM" that is the ground of all being,
the compassionate Lord who suffers for us,
the lamb upon the throne,
the Spirit of life that doubts not God's rule,
and reveals a vision of the end time.

*Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to
come!*

Around the thrones is the company of heaven,
elders, angels, saints and believers, singing praises
to the eternal,
the Alpha and Omega, who sits upon the throne.

*Alive in him, my living head,
and clothed in righteousness divine.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.*

You belong in the communion of saints.
You have a personal place in the heavenly company.
You are alive with the life of God.
Let your soul sing to the Lord.

*You are worthy, our Lord and God
to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.*

Praise God with the four evangelists, the writers of our
gospels,
pillars of the faith, without whom we would not know
the story of salvation.

Around the throne are four living creatures, full of eyes:
the first like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with
the face of a man and the fourth flying like an eagle.
Day and night, without ceasing, they sing:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to
come!*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.*

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