

Softener of Evil Hearts icon

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(Redirected from Softener of Evil Hearts)

The **Softener of Evil Hearts** icon is also called the **Prophecy of Simon** (or *Simons Prophecy*) since St Symeon said to Mary, upon the presentation of Our Lord in the temple:

"Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sin which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."^[note 1]



The Theotokos is depicted in this icon with her heart pierced by seven swords; a symbolic number possibly indicating the the fullness and boundless sorrow, pain and "sickness of heart" that would have been experienced by the Mother of God at His crucifixion.^[note 2] Three of the swords enter her heart from the left, three swords enter from the right and one sword from underneath. This icon is very similar to the Seven Swords icon and they differ only in the arrangement of the swords.^[note 3] The "Softener of Evil Hearts" icon is commemorated on the Sunday of All Saints^[1], although other references commemorate it February 2 / February 15.

Contents

- 1 Prophecy of Simon
- 2 History
- 3 Stories
- 4 See also
- 5 Notes
- 6 References
- 7 External links

Prophecy of Simon

According to the Evangelist Luke, the Holy Spirit told righteous Elder Symeon the God-receiver that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. And thus when, forty days after the Divine Infant's birth His parents brought Him to the Temple of Jerusalem, Symeon "was inspired" to come there as well, and took the Infant into his arms (hence the title "God-receiver"), and pronounced those famous words which ever since have been spoken at the conclusion of each Vesper service, and which are known as the Prayer of St. Symeon the God-receiver: "Now lettest Thou Thy servant to depart in peace, O Master, according to Thy word" After that, he blessed St. Joseph and the Most-pure Mother of Our Lord, and addressed Mary with that same prophecy. It was after he had blessed St. Joseph and the Most-immaculate Mother of the Savior, that he addressed Mary with that same prophecy: "Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sin which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

History

This icon appears to have its origins in the southwestern Russia, however, no supporting documentation exists for its origins and where it first appeared. This is one of the few Orthodox icons of the Theotokos which do not depict the infant Jesus.

Stories

During World War II, in the southern part of Voronezh Province, in a place known as Belogorye ("White Hill" a reference to the chalk cliffs on the right bank of the Don near the town of Pavlovsk), there was a detachment of Italian mountain artillery men, allies of the Nazis. During the second half of December 1942, soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Giuseppe Pereigo found a "Softener of Evil Hearts" Icon in a bombed-out house. They gave it to their military chaplain, Fr. Policarpo, who was from Valdania. According to the locals, the Icon had come from the Belogorye Cave Monastery of the Resurrection near Pavlovsk. The Italians called the Icon the "La Madonna del Don," the Madonna of the Don not to be confused with the Donskoy Icon of the Mother of God. After the Ostrog-Rossoshansk campaign by Soviet forces in January 1943, the remnants of the decimated Italian contingent left Russia. Chaplain Policarpo took the "Madonna of the Don" with him to Italy, where in Mestra, a part of Venice, a chapel was built to house it. It remains a center of mass pilgrimages by friends and relatives of the Italian soldiers who perished in Russia.

Finally, there is another miraculous icon of the same type in the cathedral in the town of Zhizdra, near Bryansk, in southwestern Kaluga Province. It

was known as the "Strastnaya" (i.e., Passion) Icon or, as it was described in the Cathedral inventory, the "And a sword shall pierce through thy soul also" Icon. It is also commemorated on August 13, the same day as the "Seven Swords" Icon and the far better known "Passion" Icon, which is of an entirely different appearance (the original miracle-working icon is in the Monastery of the Passion in Moscow. On it, near the "Hodigitria" image are two Angels and the implements of the Lord's Passion the Cross, the sponge, and the spear. Unlike in other "Passion" icons, in the Zhizdra Icon the Immaculate One is depicted in an attitude of prayer. With one hand she supports the Infant lying at her feet; with the other hand she guards her breast against the seven swords pointed toward it.

See also

- Seven Swords icon
- Mother of God Joy of All Who Sorrow
- Assuage My Sorrows

Notes

1. ↑ Just as Christ would be pierced with nails and a spear, so the soul of Mary would be pierced by a certain weapon of sorrow and pain in the heart, when she saw her Son's suffering. After that, the heretofore hidden thoughts of the people regarding the Messiah would be revealed, and they would face a choice: to be with Christ, or against Him. Such an interpretation of Symeon's prophecy became the subject of a number of icons of the Theotokos. All those who turn to them in prayer sense that with the softening of evil hearts comes an easing of spiritual and physical suffering. People come to recognize that when they pray for their enemies before such icons, their feelings of enmity are softened, and that internecine strife and hatreds abate, giving way to kindness.
2. ↑ In the Roman Catholic Church, the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary consist of:
 1. The prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35)
 2. The flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)
 3. Loss of the Child Jesus for three days (Luke 2:41-50)
 4. Mary meets Jesus on his way to Calvary (Luke 23:27-31; John 19:17)
 5. Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (John 19:25-30)
 6. The body of Jesus being taken from the Cross (Psalm 130; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-37)
 7. The burial of Jesus (Isaiah 53:8; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42; Mark 15:40-47)
3. ↑ On the Seven Swords icon there are three swords on the right and

four on the left. This icon is commemorated August 13 in the Old Calendar.

References

1. ↑ <http://www.antiochian.org/node/18648>

External links

- Orthodox Icons of the Theotokos (http://www.stjohndc.org/Russian/theotokos/e_0802_softener.htm)
- Posted by Fr. John Abberton at 15:14 on the Yorkshire Blog (<http://yorkshireshepherd.blogspot.com/2009/01/softener-of-evil-hearts-icon.html>) .

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Categories > Church Life > Theotokonymia

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Categories > Images > Icons

Categories > Liturgics > About Icons

Categories > Liturgics > About Icons > Icons of the Theotokos

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