

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Jesus in the Jordan

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تمثل الأيقونات في الكنائس تقليداً مسيحياً فريداً ، من خلاله تعلن الكنيسة إيمانها للمؤمنين وغير المؤمنين على السواء بطريقة واضحة ، ليتمكنوا من فهم الحقائق الإيمانية التي قد يصعب إستيعابها لدى البعض. من هذا المنطلق، قام الفنانون المسيحيون عبر العصور بمجهودات خارقة لتجسيد ما ذكر في الكتاب المقدس من قصص ومواقف بكل دقتها وتفصيلاتها، وهو ما يعد بمثابة البنية الأساسية للإيمان المسيحي. وبالتالي فقد تبنت الكنيسة واعتمدت فن الأيقونة في صميم عباداتها الليتورجية، بأن سمحت بتكريس الأيقونات ووضعها داخل الكنائس ورفع البخور أمامها والتبرك منها وتقبيلها في كافة المناسبات والإحتفالات الكنسية. ومن أمثلة هذه الأيقونات تلك الخاصة بصلب وقيامه الرب يسوع. ويجدر الإشارة إلى أهمية التفرقة بين الأيقونة والصورة. فالأخيرة يقوم الفنان عادة برسمها من عندياته ومن إطلاق العنان لخياله الحر، محاولة منه لتصوير موقف معيّن، كما في قصة الإبن الضال أو حادثة إشباع الجموع. وعلى الرغم من خضوع هذا النوع من فن التصوير لخيال الفنان بصفة عامة، إلا أنه ينبغي الإلتزام بالحقائق التاريخية والإيمانية الثابتة، وذلك حتى لا يتسبب هذا الفن في بلبلة الفكر وزعزعة الإيمان لدى العامة من البسطاء الذين قد يشاهدون هذه الصور ويصدقونها على انها حقائق. هذا المقال يتطرق لمناقشة أيقونة الغطاس الشهيرة من منطلق هذه الفكرة.

**Dutch:** Iconen maken deel uit een traditionele gewoonte binnen het christendom, waarmee de kerk haar geloof op een precieze manier toont om gelovigen en niet-gelovigen te helpen diverse moeilijke theologische concepten te begrijpen. Gebaseerd op dit begrip hebben kerkelijke kunstenaars door de eeuwen heen serieuze inspanningen geleverd om te voldoen aan de bijbelse details die de fundering vormen van het christelijk geloof. Als gevolg daarvan heeft de kerk de kunst van de iconografie in haar liturgische diensten geaccepteerd en geïntegreerd, door het gewijde icoon deel te laten uitmaken van verschillende vieringen, wierook voor iconen op te steken, eerbiedig voor hen te buigen en ze ook te kussen. Voorbeelden van christelijke iconen zijn: De kruisiging en De opstanding van de Heer Jezus. Iconen moeten onderscheiden worden van afbeeldingen die door kunstenaars zijn getekend op basis van vrije verbeelding, opnieuw in een poging om een christelijke gebeurtenis af te beelden, voorbeelden hiervan zijn het verhaal van de verloren zoon en het voeden van de vijfduizend. Ondanks dat het een relatief vrije vorm van kunst is, moeten afbeeldingen en portretten zich zoveel mogelijk houden aan de goed vastgestelde historische en religieuze feiten om verwarring te voorkomen bij kijkers, van eenvoudige gelovigen die ze mogelijk ten onrechte als feitelijk erkennen. Dit artikel bespreekt het icoon van de doop van de Heer Jezus als voorbeeld.

**English:** Icons comprise a traditional Christian practice, through which the church displays her belief in a precise way in order to help the believers and non-believers to grasp various difficult theological concepts. Based on this understanding, church artists, over the centuries, put serious efforts to comply with the biblical details that constitute the foundation of the Christian faith. Consequently, the church embraced the art of iconography into her liturgical worships, by making the consecrated icon part of various celebrations, raising the incense in front of icons, bowing in reverence before them and also kissing them. An example of Christian icons is that

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of the crucifixion and resurrection of Lord Jesus. Icons should be distinguished from pictures drawn by artists based on free imagination, again in an attempt to depict a Christian event, example of those are the story of the prodigal son and feeding the five thousands. Despite being a relatively free form of art, pictures and portraits should adhere, as much as possible, to the well-established historic and religious facts in order to avoid confusing viewers from simple believers who may erroneously acknowledge them as factual. This article discusses the icon of the baptism of Lord Jesus as an example.

**French:** Les icônes constituent une pratique chrétienne traditionnelle, à travers laquelle l'Église affiche sa croyance de manière précise afin d'aider les croyants et les non-croyants à saisir divers concepts théologiques difficiles. Partant de cette compréhension, les artistes d'église, au fil des siècles, ont déployé de sérieux efforts pour se conformer aux détails bibliques qui constituent le fondement de la foi chrétienne. Par conséquent, l'Église a adopté l'art de l'iconographie dans ses cultes liturgiques, en intégrant l'icône consacrée à diverses célébrations, en levant l'encens devant les icônes, en s'inclinant avec révérence devant elles et en les embrassant. Un exemple d'icônes chrétiennes est celui de la crucifixion et de la résurrection du Seigneur Jésus. Les icônes doivent être distinguées des images dessinées par des artistes sur la base de leur imagination libre, toujours dans le but de représenter un événement chrétien, par exemple l'histoire du fils prodigue et de la nutrition des cinq mille personnes. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'une forme d'art relativement libre, les images et les portraits doivent adhérer, autant que possible, aux faits historiques et religieux bien établis afin d'éviter de confondre les spectateurs et les simples croyants qui pourraient les reconnaître à tort comme étant factuels. Cet article traite de l'icône du baptême du Seigneur Jésus à titre d'exemple.

**German:** Ikonen sind eine traditionelle christliche Praxis, in der die Kirche ihren Glauben präzise vermittelt, um Gläubige und Nichtgläubige bei der Aneignung verschiedener schwieriger theologischer Konzepte zu unterstützen. Künstler der Kirche haben sich über Jahrhunderte hinweg ernsthaft bemüht, den biblischen Details zu folgen, die das Fundament des christlichen Glaubens darstellen. In diesem Zusammenhang hat die Kirche die Kunst der Ikonographie in ihren liturgischen Gottesdienst integriert, indem sie die geweihte Ikone in verschiedene Zeremonien einband und vor ihnen Weihrauch schwang, sich in Ehrfurcht vor ihnen verneigte und sie küsste. Ein Beispiel für christliche Ikonen sind die Darstellungen der Kreuzigung und Auferstehung des Herrn Jesus. Ikonen sollten von Bildern unterschieden werden, die auf der freien Vorstellungskraft von Künstlern basieren, auch wenn sie versuchen, ein christliches Ereignis darzustellen, wie die Geschichte vom verlorenen Sohn und die Speisung der Fünftausend. Obwohl Bilder und Porträts eine relativ freie Kunstform darstellen, sollten sie sich so weit wie möglich an die etablierten historischen und religiösen Fakten halten, um Verwirrung bei Gläubigen zu vermeiden, die sie fälschlicherweise als faktisch ansehen könnten. Dieser Artikel diskutiert beispielsweise die Ikone der Taufe des Herrn Jesus.

**Greek:** Οι εικόνες αποτελούν μια παραδοσιακή χριστιανική πρακτική, μέσω της οποίας η εκκλησία εκφράζει την πίστη της με έναν ακριβή τρόπο προκειμένου να βοηθήσει τους πιστούς και τους μη πιστούς να καταλάβουν διάφορα δύσκολα θεολογική έννοια. Με βάση αυτή την κατανόηση, οι εκκλησιαστικοί καλλιτέχνες, μέσα στους αιώνες, κατέβαλαν σοβαρές προσπάθειες για να συμμορφωθούν με τις βιβλικές λεπτομέρειες που αποτελούν τη βάση της χριστιανικής πίστης. Ως αποτέλεσμα, η εκκλησία ανέδειξε την τέχνη της εικονογραφίας στις λειτουργικές λατρείες της, κάνοντας τον αφιερωμένο εικονογραφημένο ιερό παράγοντα διάφορων εορτασμών, ανυψώνοντας το θυμίαμα μπροστά από τις εικόνες, γονατίζοντας με ευλάβεια μπροστά σε αυτές και επίσης ασπάζοντάς τις. Ένα παράδειγμα χριστιανικών εικόνων είναι αυτές του σταυρώματος και της ανάστασης του Κυρίου Ιησού. Οι εικόνες πρέπει να διαφοροποιούνται από τις εικόνες που σχεδιάζονται από καλλιτέχνες με βάση την ελεύθερη φαντασία, ξανά σε μια προσπάθεια να απεικονίσουν μια χριστιανική εκδήλωση, παραδείγματα των οποίων είναι η ιστορία του ασώτου υιού και ο χορτασμός των πέντε χιλιάδων. Παρά το γεγονός ότι αποτελεί μια σχετικά ελεύθερη μορφή τέχνης, οι εικόνες και τα πορτρέτα πρέπει να προσαρμόζονται, όσο είναι δυνατόν, στα καθιερωμένα ιστορικά και θρησκευτικά γεγονότα προκειμένου να αποφεύγεται η σύγχυση των θεατών από απλούς πιστούς που ενδεχομένως να τα αναγνωρίζουν εσφαλμένα ως πραγματικά. Αυτό το άρθρο συζητά την εικόνα της βάπτισης του Κυρίου Ιησού ως παράδειγμα.

**Italian:** Le icone costituiscono una pratica tradizionale cristiana, attraverso la quale la chiesa manifesta la sua fede in modo preciso al fine di aiutare i credenti e i non credenti a comprendere vari concetti teologici difficili. Basandosi su questa comprensione, gli artisti della chiesa, nel corso dei secoli, si impegnarono a rispettare i dettagli biblici che costituiscono il fondamento della fede cristiana. Di conseguenza, la chiesa ha accolto l'arte dell'iconografia nei suoi culti liturgici, facendo dell'icona consacrata parte di varie celebrazioni, offrendo l'incenso di fronte alle icone, inchinandosi con riverenza davanti ad esse e anche baciandole. Un esempio di icone cristiane è quello della crocifissione e risurrezione del Signore Gesù. Le icone dovrebbero essere distinte dalle immagini disegnate dagli artisti basate sulla libera immaginazione, nuovamente nel tentativo di rappresentare un evento cristiano, esempi di questi sono la storia del figliol prodigo e il nutrimento dei cinquemila. Nonostante sia una forma relativamente libera d'arte, le immagini e i ritratti dovrebbero aderire, per quanto possibile, ai ben consolidati fatti storici e religiosi al fine di evitare di confondere gli spettatori dai semplici credenti che potrebbero erroneamente riconoscerle come reali. Questo articolo discute l'icona del battesimo del Signore Gesù come esempio.

One of the church traditions is to use various types of art in order to display its faith to believers and non-believers to assist them in understanding various challenging theological concepts. An example is the famous icon of the Holy Trinity, the nativity and resurrection of Lord Jesus. In this context, the art of drawing is classified into two categories: icons and pictures/portraits. The icons are the ones that follow strict theological rules, following the biblical references and approved church traditions. Hence, they get consecrated, in the Coptic tradition, and are venerated, incensed and kissed in different feasts and celebrations, and they are always kept at church. On the other hand, pictures and portraits, although they are expected to follow the same rules, accommodate the artists' free imagination to a larger extent. The same principle applies to other forms of art, such as music, with its ecclesiastical well-defined hymns and melodies that are chanted in official liturgical services compared to the more liberal songs that are sung in congregational and youth meetings. The objective of this short article is to address the issue of the current significant diversity of the icon of the 'Baptism of Lord Jesus', which we see in different churches. It raises the question about the details and movements seen in those pictures and the extent at which they depict the details of the event, as mentioned in the gospels.

The Feast of the Theophania (Epiphany or Theophany) is one of the oldest feasts in Christianity. Its uniqueness stems from the exact event that happened at the beginning of the manifestation of Lord Jesus Christ at the start of His journey for our salvation. The Lord Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John the Baptist, in order to fulfil Moses' law as He indicated to John. He stood amongst the sinners who came out from Judea and the surrounding regions, to repent, confess their sins and to get baptised by John. John recognised Him and declared that he himself was the one who needed to be baptised by Jesus, but the Lord insisted and John reluctantly allowed Him. The four gospels described the details of the baptism of the Lord; however, the most important fact that they all shared was the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and resting upon Him. Another important mention was the sequence of events; 'immediately coming up from the water heavens were opened,...the Spirit of God descended ... then the voice of God the Father saying 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' *Matthew 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11 and Luke 3:21–22*

Lord Jesus, the Son of God, did not need to be baptised as testified by John when he saw Him, and this was further confirmed by the voice and words uttered by the Father, as soon as He came out of the water. This famous picture of Jesus in the water,

the dove representing the Holy Spirit resting upon Him and the opened heavens, has become the icon of the feast of Epiphany that reminds the believers of the details of the event and its relevance with regards to the journey of the Lord on earth. It also sheds light on His nature and the way He was seen, particularly by the last prophet of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, who was sent by the Spirit to prepare the way for the Lord. That icon is expected to adhere with what the gospels said about the baptism of Lord Jesus. Based on the available biblical evidence and explanation above, the icon should depict Lord Jesus, standing in the water with the dove above Him in between the opened heavens and His head. Of course, John the Baptist is expected to be standing by Him in great reverence since he confessed, 'I am not worthy to carry His sandals'.

In view of the above scene, it is unusual to see that the epiphany icon depicts John putting his hand on the head of the Lord. It is worthy to mention that the gospel's description of the baptism was only through immersion in the water, and the tradition of laying hands for blessing people came later, in the book of acts, *Acts 8;17–20*, particularly when appointing servants to start a mission. Even if it had happened before that event, it is inconceivable that John accepted to put his hand on the Lord's head to bless Him, knowing that He is the Son of God, as he said in the Gospel of St John **'And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God, John 1:34**. In a beautiful Greek hymn that is sung during the third royal hour of Epiphany Eve, it says 'John's hand was filled with terror when it touched the Head of Jesus, but he did so out of obedience to Him so that the fullness of Righteousness be accomplished which had been left unaccomplished by Adam because of his disobedience'. It, also, makes one wonder about the accuracy of some of the currently seen icons portraying John the Baptist pouring some water from his hand on the head of the Lord. A person coming up from the water will have his body wet as is his head; therefore, what would some extra few drops of water add to the effect of the water on the body. It is logical to expect that water to be from the Jordan river itself rather than from any other source. Furthermore, some artists chose to draw John the Baptist holding a pot full of water and pouring it on the head of the Lord Jesus. This seems to be an exaggeration that is out of context, and more likely to be 20th century innovation rather than original theological biblical art. Finally, a question arises with respect to the pictures which present John the Baptist holding a cross in his left hand. The only icon/picture Christians are used to venerate with someone holding a cross is that of Lord Jesus' resurrection in order to highlight the role of the cross, which lead the Lord to death and then the glorious resurrection and completion of the journey for human salvation. The Greek depiction of the same meaning is the icon of resurrection with Lord Jesus standing on the cross and raising up Adam and Eve from hades.

As much as the church encourages the talented members of the congregation to learn the art of iconography and practice it, artists are expected to pay serious attention to details and adhere to the clear and precise words mentioned in the bible, which have strong theological relevance. Ecclesiastical art should not be treated in a free form according to the individuals' taste and choice. It should not be seen to be less than a sermon given or a book written and distributed for a clear teaching objective and to bring the congregation close to the details of different events related to our Lord.