



Johnny Issa Andonieh

Iconographer from Bethlehem

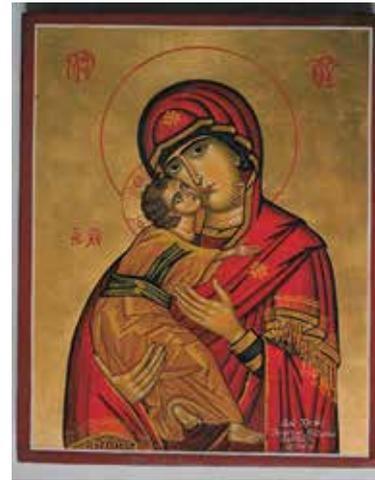


An icon is a religious painting that represents divine events. In the early church, icons came into use mainly to illustrate stories from the Bible and to aid illiterate faithful in understanding Christian teachings.

Johnny Issa Andonieh was born in Bethlehem in 1957. Interested in theology and monastic life since his youth, Johnny was introduced to iconography while in his thirties by a monk who lived at Mar Saba Monastery, located on the edge of the Kidron Valley (Wadi Nar) in the Jerusalem Wilderness. Since that time, Johnny has dedicated himself to writing icons. Between 1990 and 1992, he studied Byzantine and Russian methods of iconography in Cyprus, working in several churches with Greek and Cypriot iconographers.

As the first among his greater achievements, Johnny wrote icons for the nine chapels of Mar Saba Monastery in 1993, just after his return to Bethlehem. After that, he became recognized as an iconographer and was commissioned to paint for the Greek Orthodox churches of Shepherds' Field in Beit Sahour (1994), the Tomb of Lazarus in Bethany (1995), Prophet Eliseus in Jericho (1998), St. George in Ramleh (2000), Forefathers in Beit Sahour (2013), and currently he works for the Oratorio Residence located in Abu Gosh.

Most of these wall icons were created in Johnny's studio in Bethlehem. They were written on canvas and then placed on the walls of the monasteries. Each of the sets of icons is unique. Before picking up a brush, the artist studies each church's interior and prepares sketches and chooses the most suitable icons, many of them visualizing Biblical verses, bringing them closer to people.



The iconographer likes to surround himself with nature; his veranda in Bethlehem is filled with various kinds of plants and stones. These surroundings, the smell of incense, and daily prayer help him to focus before starting an icon. At the beginning of his journey as an iconographer, Johnny would read about each saint that he aimed to represent. Nowadays, he knows the stories of their lives by heart.

It is very possible that when visiting any Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine a person would come across Johnny Andonieh's works in a variety of shapes and sizes. However, Johnny finds the most fulfillment when writing icons from his inspiration. This is when he is able to achieve the greatest spiritual connection with an icon. These special pieces are often smaller in size than his other works and created on wooden tablets. He carefully writes them with egg

tempera paint and uses thin gold leaves to gild them. They are created in the silence and seclusion of monasteries.

While writing icons Johnny follows specific rules and patterns – almost everything within the image has a symbolic meaning. Figures have consistent facial expressions, hold attributes personal to them, and have a few conventional poses. Most icons include some calligraphic text naming the person or event depicted.

One of Johnny's personal future projects is to depict the events described in the Book of Revelation in one complex artwork. His wish is to create the masterpiece within the remoteness of one of the wilderness monasteries.

Johnny Andonieh welcomes visitors to his studio in Bethlehem. To make a reservation, contact him at iconj_andonieh@yahoo.com.

