



## The Virgin Mary and her Child

The tradition of the Orthodox Church is that the first iconographer was the Evangelist St Luke. The tradition maintains that the first icon he wrote under divine inspiration was of the Mother of God holding the Christ-child.

Mary is shown wearing a veil typical of Jewish women of the period, which also reveals to us her humility and piety. The veil is red, the colour of divinity, whilst the clothes under the veil are blue - the colour of humanity. The three stars on her veil represent her eternal virginity.

In the icon, Mary looks directly at us, yet with her hand she directs us to the Infant Christ whom she is holding. The Infant is identified as Jesus Christ (abbreviated as IC XC - the first and last letters of Jesus Christ in Greek).

Above Mary's head are the letters "MP OY", an abbreviation of the Greek: "Mater Theos" – the Mother of God.

In each icon of the Mother and Child, the infant Christ either has a sandal hanging from his foot or is holding a sandal. This is an Orthodox way of pointing to the child's real humanity and dependence on his Mother in the early years of his life.

### *A prayer to the Virgin Mary*

Loving Mother of the Redeemer,  
Gate of heaven, star of the sea,  
Assist your people  
who have fallen yet strive to rise again,  
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,  
yet remained a virgin after as before,  
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,  
have pity on us, poor sinners. Amen