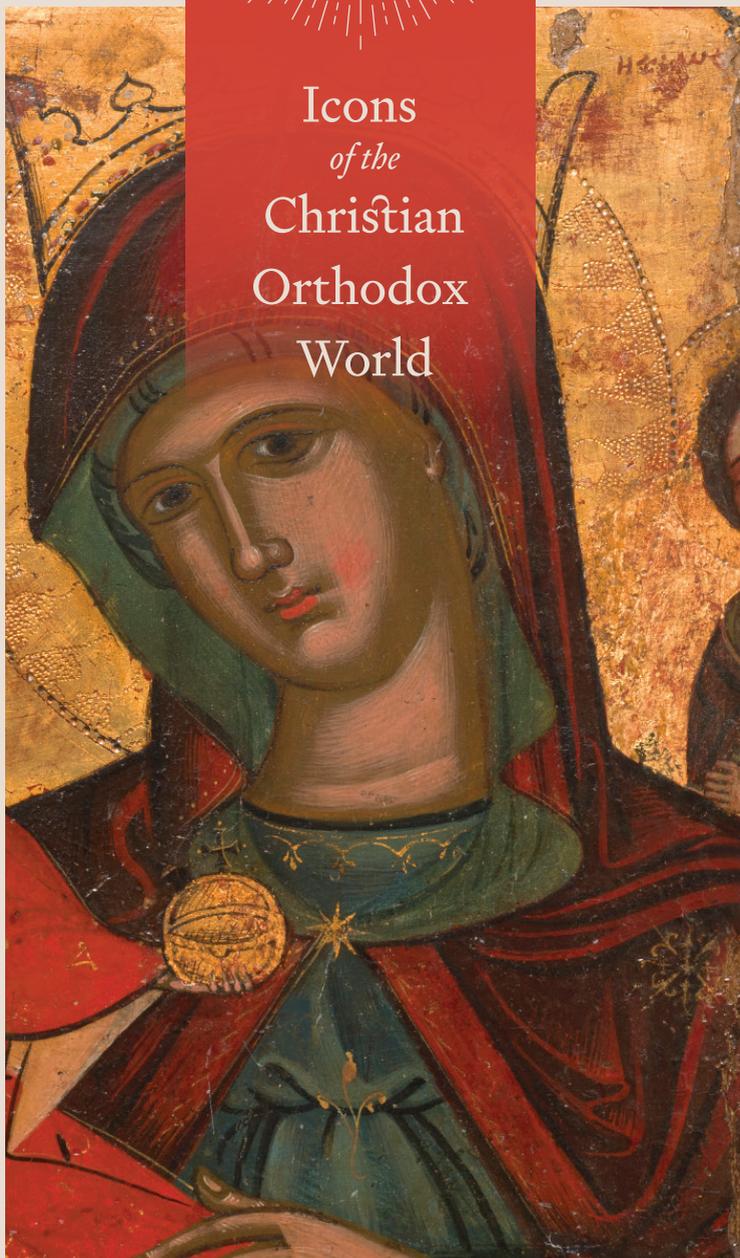


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Icons  
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Self-Guiding Worksheet



Part of the  
Auckland Council  
whānau

AUCKLAND  
ART GALLERY  
TOI OTĀMAKI



*Mother of God Umilenie*, Russia, late 16th century, egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood, on loan from a private collection, Canberra

**Hello! My name is Mary, and this is my son, Jesus Christ, Son of God.**

Haere mai (welcome) to an exhibition of Christian icons – some of them are more than 500 years old! Have you heard of the word icon?

**Talk in a small group** about who or what you think an icon is.



Use this guide to explore the wonderful world of icons – you will find some questions and activities to complete as you journey through the exhibition *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*.

To the right is a list of the meanings of the **words** that you will see in **purple** throughout the worksheet.

# Word list

<b>crucifixion</b>	killing someone by tying or nailing their feet and wrists to a cross
<b>egg tempera</b>	a type of paint made by mixing egg yolk and coloured powder
<b>endurance</b>	the ability to continue in difficult situations
<b>divinity</b>	holiness, the quality of being god-like
<b>fasting</b>	going without food for a set period of time
<b>grief</b>	intense sadness you feel when someone special dies
<b>guardian</b>	a person who protects something
<b>martyr</b>	someone who is willing to die for their beliefs
<b>masterpiece</b>	a person's finest piece of work
<b>miraculous</b>	wonderful or amazing, like a miracle
<b>prayer</b>	a conversation with a god
<b>qualities</b>	something that describes something or part of someone's personality. For example, strong, wise
<b>resurrection</b>	coming back to life after being dead
<b>sacred</b>	things that are holy and connected to a god
<b>saint</b>	a person who is believed to be especially holy and close to God
<b>symbol</b>	an object or picture that represents something else
<b>threshold</b>	an entrance. In this exhibition, it means the entrance to heaven
<b>wisdom</b>	knowing or understanding things, which can help a person make good decisions
<b>worshipper</b>	someone who honours and is devoted to a god

In this exhibition you will see lots of symbols like crosses and special colours.

Where else do we see and use **symbols**? Clue: think about road signs and emojis!

---

**Draw** 1–3 **symbols** you know and **ask a friend** to guess what they mean.



---

In this exhibition you will also see lots of gold!

Why gold, do you think? What does gold make you think of, remember, or feel?

**Talk in pairs:** who owns or has seen something gold?



---

**Christianity is a religion.**  
**What other religions do you know?**

**Think** about what religion means to you. You may like to **share your thoughts** with a friend or in a small group.



---

*Processional Cross, Ethiopia, 20th century, cast silver alloy, on loan from a private collection, Melbourne*

# What is *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World* about?

**Christianity** is the world's most widespread religion. It is based on the life, death, and teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who lived over 2,000 years ago and who is considered the Son of God.

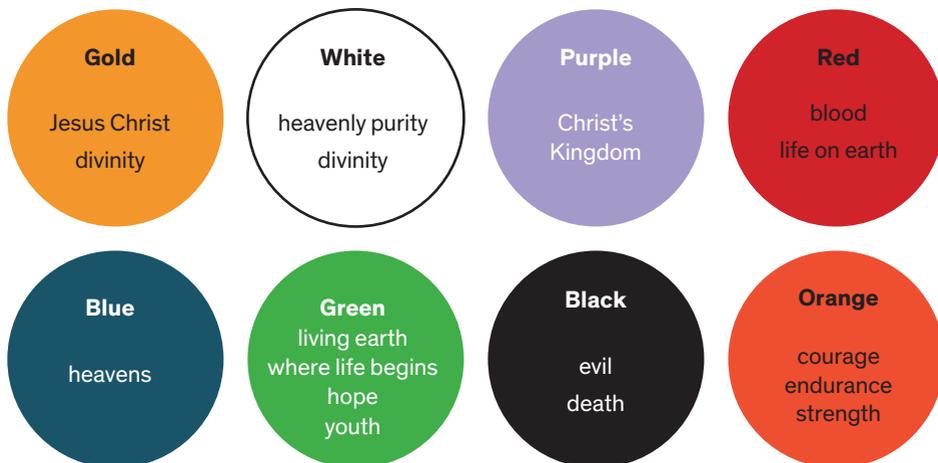
In Orthodox Christianity, icons are **sacred** works of art that provide inspiration and connect the **worshipper** with the spiritual world.

Icons are considered a form of **prayer** rather than art, and artists who 'write' (not paint) icons are called iconographers.

The colours seen in icons have been carefully chosen to **symbolise** ideas and meanings – use the coloured circles below to help you understand more about colours in icons!

Be excited to encounter over 100 **masterpieces** of icons written with **egg tempera** and gold on wood or made with metal throughout this exhibition!

## The meaning of colours in icons



# Welcome to the exhibition *Heavenly Beings: Icons of the Orthodox Christian World*

## 1. Thresholds



Onoufrios of Neokastro, *Royal Doors with the Annunciation*,  
Albania or northern Greece, 16th century, gesso on canvas  
over wood, on loan from a private collection, London

You have entered a dark room with holy music playing in the background. Can you **find** the large, door-shaped icon?

---

**Describe** the figure on the left: What is he wearing? What are some colours you can see? Is he a human? What makes you think that? **Write** down your thoughts below.



---

**Describe** the figure on the right: What is she wearing? What are some colours you can see? Look at her face – how do you think she is feeling? What makes you think that? **Write** down your thoughts below.



---

What do you think they are saying to each other?

**Imagine** their conversation and **share your ideas** with a friend.



## Story

In this scene, the angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary that she will become the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

## 2. Guardians: Angels, Saints & Martyrs



*Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker*, Russia, 16th century, egg tempera and gesso on linen over wood, on loan from the Art Gallery of Ballarat, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by John McCarthy in memory of Edwin and Margot McCarthy, 2017

Walk slowly around this room full of guardians.

Can you spot this man somewhere at the back of the room?

---

In pairs, copy the man's hand gestures.

What do you think he is doing with his hands?



Write down which colour or colours you think stand out the most.

Why do you think the iconographer chose these colours?

Use the 'Meaning of colours in icons' guide to help you.



---

## Story

This is Saint Nicholas, who was a Christian leader in the ancient city of Myra. He is well known for his generosity, kindness, and for **miraculously** saving many poor and unhappy people. His deeply wrinkled forehead shows that he has a lot of **wisdom**.



**Draw** a picture of someone you know who has the same qualities (generous and kind) as Saint Nicholas!

## 3. Christ

### This room has lots of shiny gold icons!

Can you **find** an icon that shows a woman holding a big piece of cloth?  
In **pairs, talk about** why you think it's hanging in a glass case.  
Where would you place this icon in your house? Why?



### Story

While Jesus Christ walked to his **crucifixion**, his face dripped with sweat and blood from carrying a very heavy cross and wearing a crown of thorns. Saint Veronica offered a cloth to help him. After Jesus wiped his face, an image of it appeared on the cloth. It remained there for hundreds of years!

## 4. Mary, the Mother of God



Workshop of Nikolaos Tzafouris, *Pietà*, Crete, circa 1500, egg tempera, gold leaf and gesso on wood, on loan from a private collection, Canberra

We love our mums and so did Jesus Christ! In this room, you will see many loving icons of the Virgin Mary and her son, Jesus. There is one icon that looks different. Can you **see** it? How is it different?

---

**Look** at this icon carefully.  
What do you think is happening?

**Write** 3 words to describe the feelings expressed in this icon.



1.

2.

3.

---

**Think** of someone you love and **write** 3 words to describe them.



1.

2.

3.

---

## Story

In this scene, the dead body of Jesus Christ has just been removed from the cross after his **crucifixion**. You can see the Virgin Mary holding her son and looking at him in **grief**.

## 5. Festival Icons



*Nativity of the Mother of God (detail), Greece, circa 1500, egg tempera and gold leaf and gesso on wood, on loan from a private collection Canberra*

There are lots of special days in Christianity that celebrate the lives of Jesus, Mary and **devoted saints**. These special days often involve **fasting** and prayer before people come together for a big parade or a feast!

What are some of your favourite celebrations?  
How do you and your whānau (family) celebrate them?

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**Look** at this icon. What makes you think that this is a celebration?  
**Write** down some clues.



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Who can you see in this icon? How do you know who they are?  
**Write** down your answer.



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What do you notice about the frame? What do you think it's made from?  
What does it remind you of? **Talk in pairs** to share your answers.



## Story

Jesus Christ was **miraculously resurrected** three days after he was **crucified**. His friends and **worshippers** were amazed! This icon celebrates his resurrection. After Jesus completed all the work he wanted to do, he returned to **heaven** to live with his Father (God).

## 6. Holy Journeys



*Proskenetarion or Pilgrim's Memento of the Holy Sepulchre within the City of Jerusalem (detail), Palestine, circa 1795, egg tempera on canvas, collection Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), Hobart, Australia*

## Congratulations! You have made it to the end of your journey through *Heavenly Beings*!

Think of all the people, stories and places that you have discovered! Can you find the giant icon that shows all the events that happened in Jesus's life?

---

How many different stories can you see in this icon? Which part of the icon is your favourite? Why? **Write** your answers.



---

How do you think the iconographer felt when they finished making this icon?  
How long do you think it took them to make it?  
What do you think they might have found difficult when making it?

**Talk in pairs** to share your answers!





# H E A V E N L Y B E I N G S

Icons *of the* Christian  
Orthodox World

## Follow-up activity

We hope you enjoyed learning about icons from the Orthodox Christian World.

Now it's your turn to create an icon about something special to you! **Choose** a special person you know or a celebration you have enjoyed and **make an icon of it**. In your icon, you need to include:

- at least 1 **symbol**
- at least 2 colours with meanings
- hand gestures and clothing to tell us about the person or celebration

You might want to create a hand-sized icon or a large icon that shows lots of different people or events. You could make it on a piece of paper, wood or fabric.

We would love to see your amazing creations!  
**Share** your images with: [education@aucklandartgallery.com](mailto:education@aucklandartgallery.com)

Have fun!



Plan your icon

*Mother of God and Saint Joseph with the  
Archangels Gabriel and Michael (detail)*, Crete with  
Ethiopian additions, 16th century, egg tempera,  
gold leaf and gesso on linen over wood, on loan  
from a private collection, Canberra



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