



Our Lady of the Sign

The icon of the Theotokos shows the Holy Virgin with her hands raised in prayer and the Lord Jesus in her womb. Because she holds the Creator of all things within her she is described in our Church as “More spacious than the heavens.” The Russians called this icon “of the Sign,” recalling the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the coming of a leader who would deliver Israel from the Assyrians: “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is 7:14). The early Church believed that this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the conception of Lord Jesus, son of the ever-virgin Mary. The Theotokos pregnant with Christ is the definitive sign of God’s love for His creation. The image of Christ in this icon represents Him, not as a fetus, but rather robed in divine glory, and often holding a scroll, symbolic of his role as teacher. His face is depicted as that of an old man, indicating that He is at one and the same time both fully human and fully the eternal God, one of the Trinity. His right hand is raised in blessing. Christ is depicted within a mandorla, an ancient design of two circles coming together and overlapping one another, symbolizing the interactions and interdependence of opposing worlds and forces. The early Church adopted this symbol to describe the coming together of heaven and earth in the Incarnation. This icon has become a “sign” of something else in the modern world: the sanctity of life in the womb. That Christ is depicted in the womb as an adult reminds many that there is no difference in being between an embryo, a fetus, or a neonate. Life is human and sacred from the first moment of conception. This new icon in our sanctuary was written/painted by Eikona Studios (Cleveland, Ohio) in memory of our faithful and longtime cantor, Helen Ternasky.