

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kim Fritzges



Our icon this month is The Hospitality of Abraham sometimes known simply as The Trinity. This icon was painted by Saint Andrei (Andrew) Rublev. Saint Andrei is thought to be the greatest master of Iconography of all time with his use of lines and color.

The Hospitality of Abraham icon shows the story in Genesis 18:1-8 where three men were invited by Abraham to rest and eat. In the icon we see three angels, not men, who represent the Holy Trinity. Each of the angels are holding a staff, seated around a table on which in the center is a chalice. The table is symbolic of an altar in a church and the chalice contains a ram's head (which is really hard to see in our photo). In the front of the table is a rectangular box. This is symbolic of the place in the altar where lies the relics of martyrs and saints. The center angel represents Jesus Christ dressed in blue to represent his divinity, the brownish red represents his humanity. The angel to the left represents The Father. He is wearing blue and gold to represent his divinity. The angel on the right is wearing blue, again for divinity, and also green for new life, symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The center angel and the right angel both have their heads inclined to the angel on the left as if in submission to the will of the Father. If you look closely you can see that the angel on the left and the angel in the center both have their right hands in the blessing position with two fingers extended.

There is a building or house behind the angel on the left, The Father, which represents the house of Abraham and also the Father's house; "In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" John 4:3 OSB. Then we see a tree which is symbolic of the Oak of Mamre where tradition has Abraham pitched his tent and entertained his three visitors. This is behind the center angel representing Jesus Christ. The tree can also remind us of Christ's crucifixion on the cross. We see a shingled mountain behind the third angel. Mountains are often symbolic of our daily journey to grow closer to God which we do with the help of the Holy Spirit step by step.

The Hospitality of Abraham icon was written in egg tempera on a wooden panel by Saint Andrei Rublev between 1411 and 1425. It was written by the request of Saint Nikon of Radonezh for the Holy Trinity Monastery outside of Moscow in western Russia.

After being tonsured a monk, Saint Andrei studied iconography under Theophanes the Greek and another monk named Danill Chyorny, who is also known as Daniel the Black as chyorny is Russian for black. Saint Andrei lived the rest of his life at the Andronikov Monastery and fell asleep in the Lord between 1427 and 1430. He was buried at Andronikov Monastery. Saint Andrei was glorified by the Church of Russia in June of 1988. He is commemorated on July 4th.

In 1929 The Hospitality of Abraham icon was moved to the Tretykov Gallery in Moscow. Then in 2023 it was moved to Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral. In 2024 the icon was moved once again and placed in the Old Katholikon of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius in Posad, Russia where it currently resides.

Troparion (Tone 3)
Shining with the rays of divine light,
O venerable Andrew,
You knew Christ the wisdom and power of God.
By means of the image of the Holy Trinity
You preached to all the world the Holy Trinity in unity.
And we, with amazement and joy, cry out to you:
As you have boldness before the Most Holy Trinity
Pray that the Uncreated Light
May illumine our souls!

Kontakion (Tone 2)
Like a trumpet, you clearly sounded the sweetness of
divine hymns,
And were revealed as a brilliant beacon shining on the
world with the light of the Trinity.
Therefore, we all cry to you, venerable Andrew:
"Unceasingly pray for us all."