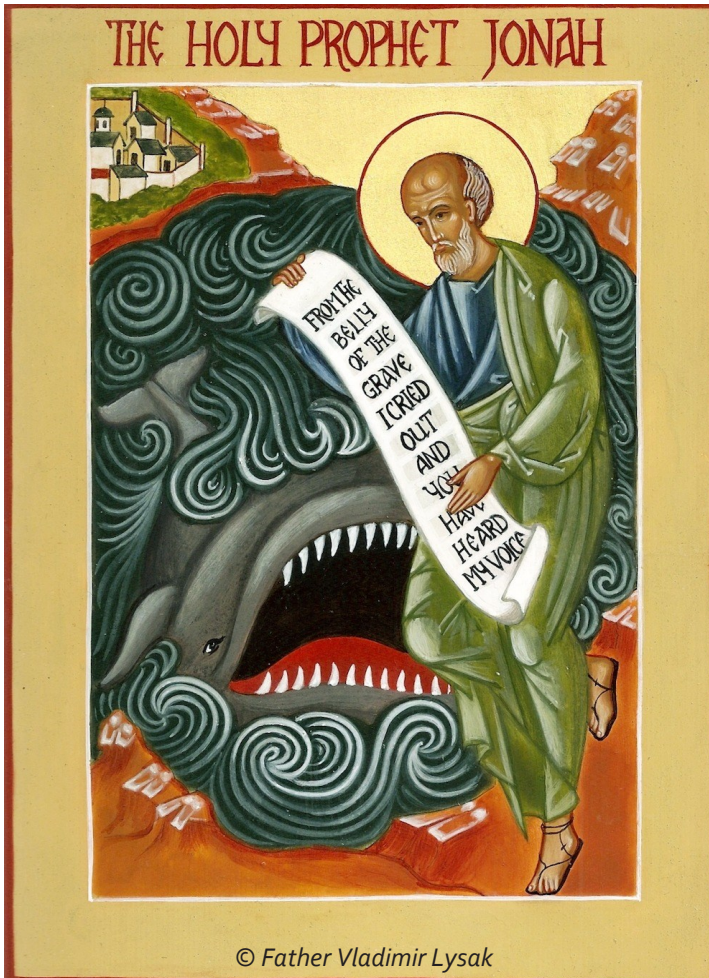


I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kh. Jocelyn Abyad



direction of our Lord, and when we do that, we sin.

I'm sure you've heard the story before. The boat that Jonah was using to run away from God ended up in a terrible storm. All of the passengers thought they were going to drown in the sea! Sin can feel that way for us too. When we refuse to follow God's plan for us, life gets chaotic and scary! In iconography, the sea represents this turmoil. You can see the choppy waves filling the center of the icon.

Jonah told the sailors that it was his fault that God was punishing them and told them to throw him overboard to save themselves. Once he was thrown over, the storm settled for the sailors, but a sea monster (commonly thought to be a whale) swallowed Jonah whole! Jonah spent three days inside the belly of the whale, and it is there that he models for us the way to overcome our sins through repentance. From the belly of the whale, Jonah repented of his disobedience. He told God how sorry he was and vowed to follow His directions from then on. Lucky for us, we don't have to be swallowed by a whale to show our repentance! The Holy Mystery of Confession is available to us to restore our relationship with God and others.

After three days in the belly of the whale, Jonah was spit out upon the shore. We see him in the icon, just out of the mouth of the whale, holding a scroll. In icons, scrolls are like the little dialogue bubbles in cartoons, showing us what the people are saying or thinking. Jonah's scroll shows his repentance. His foot is up because he is now ready to run to do God's will. He immediately goes to Nineveh to give them God's message.

Many years later, as foreshadowed in Jonah's story, Jesus would spend three days in the darkness of a tomb and then rise to overcome the sin and death of the world. He shows us God's will for our lives- to unite ourselves with Him. Through the waters of our baptism, we rise to new life in the Body of Christ. May we remember, like Jonah, to always follow God's commandments and when we find ourselves off course, lost in the chaos of the choppy waters of life, may we repent and return to God through His Holy Mysteries.

Icons are such a beautiful teaching tool of our Church! Every color, person, building and detail has meaning and rich theology woven into it. This month's icon is no exception and is one of the oldest images in Christianity. Entitled "The Holy Prophet Jonah," this icon shares the story of Jonah, an Old Testament prophet whose story foreshadows our Lord's death and resurrection and our own struggles with sin and repentance.

Long ago, God asked Jonah to go to the town of Nineveh and tell them to repent of their evil ways. You can see Nineveh in the top left corner of the icon. The trouble is, Jonah didn't want to listen to God and go to Nineveh. In fact, he jumped on a boat heading the opposite direction. I'm sure we all can relate to that! Sometimes, following God is difficult for us to do. We run in the opposite