

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kh. Jocelyn Abyad

St. John Chrysostom



This month's icon features St. John Chrysostom. He is a very important saint for our Byzantine Tradition- he is recognized as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs of the Church, he wrote the Divine Liturgy that we pray each Sunday, and his homilies continue to inspire us nearly 2,000 years after he spoke them. Though small in stature- he was only about five feet tall- his impact on the Church is huge!

St. John was born in the year 347 AD in Antioch and was trained to be a lawyer under the most prestigious teacher of his time, Libanius. When he was baptized at the age of 23, he decided to use all that he had learned in the service of Christ's Church instead of pursuing a secular career. He sought out a monastic life of solitude, but his inspiring sermons excited so many people, they took him by force and made him the Patriarch of Constantinople in the year 396 AD. In fact, the people loved his homilies so much that they gave him the name we know him by! "Chrysostom" means "golden mouthed" in Greek. They felt his words were as valuable as gold!

As Patriarch, St. John's homilies continued to garner an enormous amount of attention. He was known for criticizing excessive wealth & opulent living. The Empress at the time took these homilies as a personal offense, and along with other noblemen, set out to exile St. John as an enemy of the state. This exile did not deter the saint from continuing to write letters to the Church to encourage and instruct his flock.

If we take a look at the icon today, we can see St. John in his Bishop's vestments, specifically, the omophorion around his shoulders. He holds his right hand out in priestly blessing and in his left hand holds the Gospel book, the main tool that he used in his earthly endeavors. He honors the Holy Word of God by not touching the Gospel with his bare hands.

St. John Chrysostom entered the Heavenly Kingdom in the year 407 AD. His final words were "Glory be to God for all things!" May he intercede for us and may we join in his declaration, giving glory to God for all things!