

St. Elias the Prophet Church

A Catholic Church in the Orthodox Tradition

10193 Heritage Rd. Brampton

Iconological Analysis
Part of the course requirements of
ORTHODOX ICONOLOGY: ICONOGRAPHY IN
WORSHIP

Course Number: TRH2111HF

Orthodox/ Eastern Christian Studies at Trinity College

By Neil Kazen
January 10, 2010



In rural Brampton, just on the outskirts of Toronto, built in 1995, the parish church of St. Elias the Prophet rises high on the Peel Plain above the Credit River Valley. Though this building was built in 1995, the parish community was started in 1976.

A wooden structure of heavy timbers (Douglas Fir), it is sheathed in Western red cedar. It has been constructed according to an architectural style known as “Boyko”, derived from western Ukraine.

The 3 sections (altar, sanctuary, and narthex) are each topped with a dome or cupola.

According to Byzantine liturgical typology, the dome is an image of the heavens.

The narthex is the world fallen after the sin of Adam, the Sanctuary is the world redeemed following the Passion and Resurrection of Christ Jesus, and the Altar is the World to Come, an image of the New Jerusalem.

The cupolas on the church of St. Elias are in the 17th century Cossack style.

It is one the only 2 Boyko churches that have 5 cupolas rather than the usual 3 (the other being St. George's in Drohobych, Ukraine).

Steeped in the Byzantine Ukrainian tradition of wooden architecture, St. Elias Church was designed on the principle that architectural form should follow liturgical function.

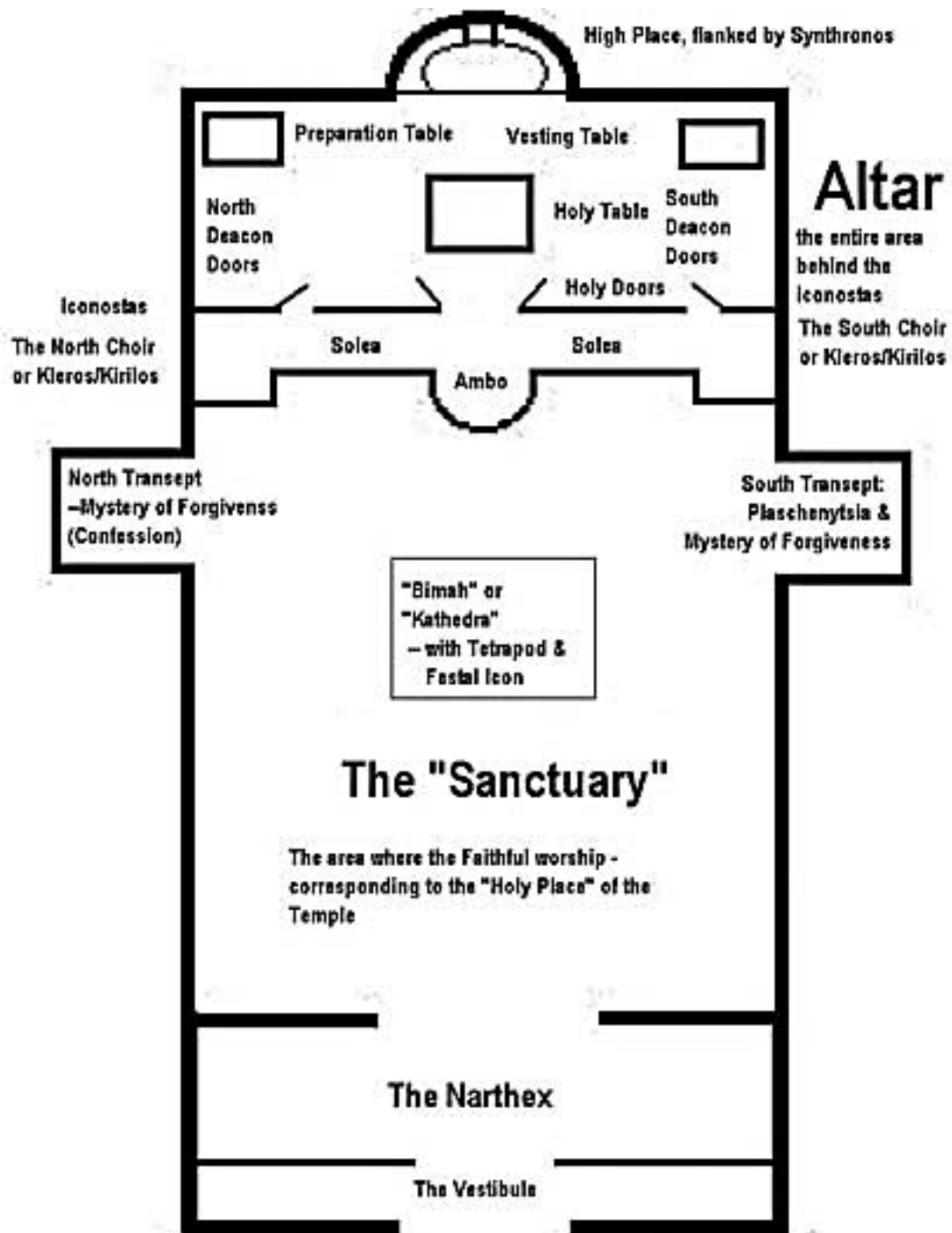
Each space within the church has been designed in order to enable full and complete celebration of the sacramental Mysteries facilitating the active participation of the entire assembly.

Conceptual Architect: Mr. Robert Greenberg

Structural Engineers: F.J. Reinders and Associates

St. Elias was the Winner of the Gold Leaf Award in the Institutional Category of the 1997 Brampton Development Design Awards.

The Floor Plan



The Iconology Program

The Iconology program of this church shares common features with other Eastern Churches, but have some distinctive features

The Cupola



On the ceiling over the Sanctuary are painted the icons:

At the highest point is the "Pantokrator": icon of Christ "Ruler of the All" - an icon of consolation proclaiming the ultimate victory of love.

On the next level are icons of Angels - "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven." (Matt 18:10).

These include the Archangels: Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel - plus Cherubim and Six-winged Seraphim.

On this level of the angels are also icons of St. John the Baptist and the holy Godbearer, the Virgin Mary.

St. John the Baptism, who is depicted with angel's wings because St. John is the Messenger of God sent to prepared for the Messiah. And "messenger" in Greek is "angelos". According to the Gospel of St. Mark 1:1-2: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it has been written in the Prophets, 'Behold, I send my Messenger ["angel"] before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."'

The Holy Theotokos (Godbearer): Here Mary is shown "Orans" praying to the Messiah God. She is depicted in the classical "Orans" prayer pose, hands lifted up toward heaven.

Byzantine Christians now pray standing with hands at their sides - though the Orans position of prayer is still retained by the clergy for certain central prayers. BTW: Coptic Christians (from the ancient Egyptian Oriental Orthodox Church) still customarily pray in the Orans position.

Psalm 28:2 "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You for help, When I lift up my hands toward the innermost place of Your sanctuary."

The 3d level of icons in the cupola hovering over the Faithful in the Sanctuary depict the Prophets and Ancestors:

- Samuel, Daniel, Habbakuk, Isaiah, David, Moses, Baruch, Jacob, Malachi, Hosea, Jeremiah, Micah,
- Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and Ansenath, Judah and Tamara, Ruth and Boaz, Elizabeth and Zachary, Joachim and Anna.

On the ceiling at the four corners under the dome

Four more icons of the four Holy Appostles and Evangelists, each writing on his book what would be attributed to him * :

The Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, at the northeast corner. He is looking to his left side at a three branched lightening bolt emanating from three concentric semicircles representing the intervention of the Holy Trinity. He is writing "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God ...". He is not speaking for himself but of what God is speaking to him.

The Apostle and Evangelist Mark, on the southwest corner, writing on his book: "... It is to have no fear";

* Photos are available but couldn't be added now due to lack of time. They will be added later.

The Apostle and Evangelist Luke, on the north-west corner, writing on his book: "Forgive and you will be forgiven";

The Apostle and Evangelist Mathew, on the southeast corner, writing on his book: "Love your enemies".

Below the above, are the wooden trusses* of the building which offer a special beauty of their own by adding to the rustic image of the church. That prevented adding icons at that level since that would have required covering the trusses with panels. This presented something unusual, an enigma, was used brilliantly by painting the heavens on the panels behind them *. At each of the four sides under the dome, are icons of Heaven, showing three concentric arcs of circles with three hues of blue representing God. In the upper circle, the upper heaven, there are stars. The positions of stars represent constellations as they appear in the four seasons. While in the lower circles there are three branched lightening bolts representing the intervention of the Holy Trinity reaching down to us.

Above the top arc of heaven, on each of the four sides, are decorative bands with crosses in them. It is the same pattern that we see again in the sanctuary.

In the two corners above each band, there are grapevines referring to Christ being the vine of which we are the branches. The vine is always the image of the fruit of the Kingdom of Heaven, especially in regards to the Precious Blood of Christ.

* Photos are available but couldn't be added now due to lack of time. They will be added later.

The Western Wall



Usually we find an icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos. But here we find an icon based on the 19th chapter of the Book of Revelations: “The Righteous Judge is Coming”.

In the centre zone, we see Christ riding a white horse with three concentric circles with three hues of blue representing God in the background. Above the head of Christ is written: “The Righteous Judge is Coming”. Note that it is in the present-continuous tense. The Exaton is not just present but continuously present. On his side is written: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” which is emphasized by the crown on his head and the stern gaze in his eyes. The word of God is coming forth from the mouth of the Word as represented by the double sided sword in front of his mouth.

There is a movement expressed by his flying cape behind him..

Behind him (to the left) is the Angle of the Appocalypseblowing the trumpet. Under the angel with the trumpet are the Heavenly Hosts (as per Chapter 19 of the Book of Revelations). Behind them are martyrs who were martyred under the ok of the Godless militant atheism. They are both Orthodox and Roman Catholics. From left to right: Joseph Slipi (“the Blind”); Clement Chapsetski the Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev; etc.

Above them are churches: First, the dark one is St. Elias (this church); above it are churches in Kiev.

To the right of Christ there is John the Theologian, kneeling towards Christ, turning his back to the condemned to the right. In front him is his statement: “I, John, ... heard and saw these things:

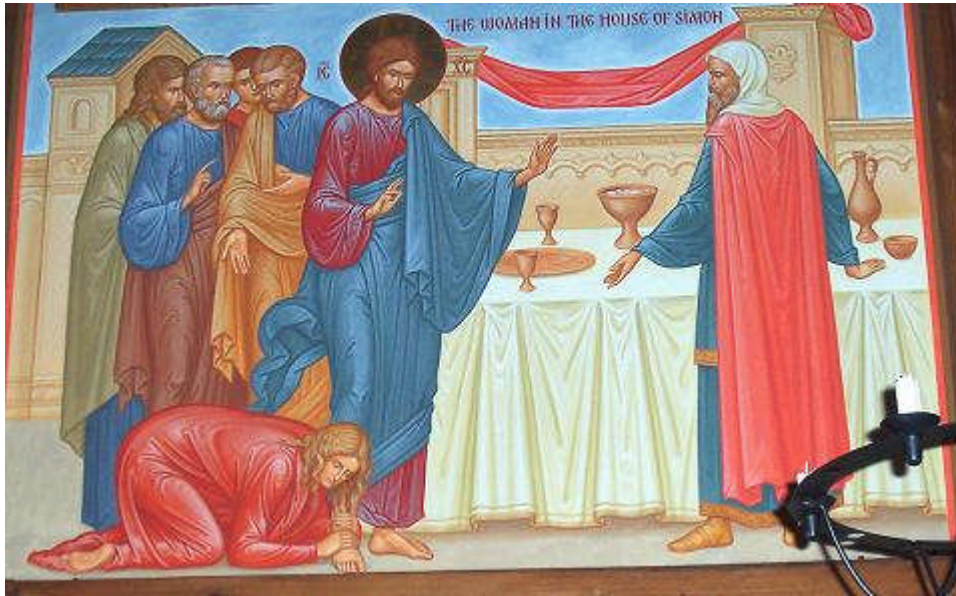
Those who are condemned are swallowed up by the Viathon. Some of them are wearing a variety of head dresses ranging from western miters to eastern turbans. Two angels are poking them into the Viathon’s mouth.

I suggested making the waves around the condemned black instead of light blue.

On the southern wall there are three icons representing males and on the northern wall there are corresponding icons representing females.

Starting from the west end of both walls and moving east:

West end of North wall



“The woman in the house of Simon”

This icon emphasizes hospitality. It shows the dichotomy between trying to keep the letter of the Law (the Pharisee approach) and the inclusiveness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The woman comes into the house and washes the feet of Christ with her tears of repentance.

Simon, in his heart, is saying that if Jesus was really what

He says he is, he should know what sort of woman she is. Of course Jesus knows what a sort of woman she is and that is why he responds to Simon by reminding Simon that he gave him no water to wash his feet (as was the custom there) and did not give him a kiss either. This is an icon about repentance and forgiveness. It shows how Christ includes every one in the Kingdom of Heaven, not through our efforts but by His Grace.

Western of south wall:



“Jesus Saves Peter”

Christ calls Peter to get out of the boat and walk on water like what He was doing. Peter sinks in water for not having enough faith.

This is an icon about faith.

Mid north wall:



“The Banquet at Cana of Galilee”
(title was cut from the photo by mistake)

This is an icon about the Holy Eucharist.

The wedding banquet is about the Heavenly Banquet, the Eucharist, because the Book of Revelation refers to Heaven as being a great wedding feast.

“Feast” is a typical paradigm used by Christ for the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ himself is referred to as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride.

Mid south wall:



“The feeding of the Five Thousand”

We see the distribution of bread and fish.

The bread is about the Holy Eucharist.

We realize that fish, which is not shown in the icon, is multiplying itself as Christ is multiplying himself for all of us. The four letters of “Fish” in Greek, if taken separately, as an

Acronym, can mean “Christ Son of God Savior”.

So, icons of the mid section of both walls are about the Eucharist

East end of north wall:



“The Samaritan Woman”

This icon emphasizes inclusion, not exclusion. The Jews excluded the Samaritans who were close to them in faith, because they were not close enough.

She comes to draw water from the well but He tells her that He can give her living water that if she drinks from she will never die.

The well is shaped as a cross which is also one of the three possible shapes of baptismal fonts.

East end of south wall:



“The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda”

Another baptismal symbol. The pool is shaped as a hexagon, another shape of baptismal fonts *.

Behind Jesus is St. Peter (gray curly hair and beard) and the other disciples. Facing him are the doubters questioning who Jesus is to forgive sins.

Both icons are about baptism. One is shaped like a cross and one is shaped like the six days of the week ending with Friday (the day of crucifixion).

* The third type of baptismal fonts would be the octagonal font, where the eighth day is the day of the Exaton

Eastern Corners, on both sides of the Iconostas

(Photos are available but couldn't be added now due to lack of time. They will be added later)

Icon on the north wall just next to the Iconostas:

Christ raising the daughter of Jariuns the synagogue official.

Icon on the south wall just next to the Iconostas:

Christ raising Lazarus from the dead.

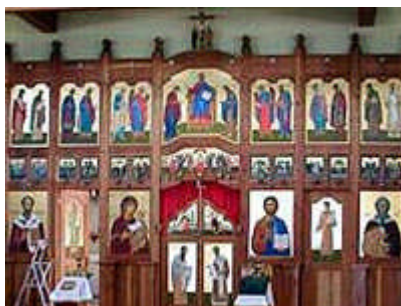
Both icons are about resurrection.

Icon on the east wall, north of the Iconostas:

Appearance of the Lord to Mary Magdalene.

Icon on the east wall, south of the Iconostas:

Appearance of the Lord to the doubting Thomas, and the other disciples.



The "Iconostas" is literally the "Stand of Icons" that rise up at the front of the Sanctuary.

It has 3 sets of Doors:

1. the Holy Doors;
2. Deacon Door (north);
3. Deacon Door (south).

The "Holy Doors" are the central set of doors. The Holy Doors are used only in specific and solemn liturgical functions.

The "Deacon Doors" are on 2 doors one toward the northern end of the Iconostas and one toward the south end. These are used to facilitate the Clergy have to enter or exit the Altar.

On the Holy Doors are usually icons of the 4 Evangelists: St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John.

In our parish, the Holy Doors depict St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great. These are the Saints whose Liturgies we serve most commonly.

At top of the Holy Doors is the Icon of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), depicting on the left side the Archangel Gabriel bring the Good News to Mary depicted on the right side.

Above the Holy Doors is customarily the Icon of the Lord's Supper, which we call "The Mystical Supper".

NB: The terms "mystical" and "mystery" in Orthodoxy theology refer to what Latin Christians would call "sacramental" and "sacrament", these being the Latin translations of the original Greek words: "mystikos" and "mysterion". (And have very little to do with Agatha Christie or Sherlocke Holmes. On the other hand, Chesterton's "Father Brown".....) For help cf: Glossary.

On the Deacon Doors are usually icons of Deacons. In our Temple, they are St. Ephrem the Syrian (a noted theologian) and St. Roman the Melodist (the celebrated hymnographer). Sometimes Angel icons are written on the Deacon Doors.

The principal icons of the Iconostas are: Christ the Teacher (on the right of the Holy Doors) and, on the left, Mary the holy Godbearer with Jesus in her arms.

The icon on the south end (i.e. the far right) of the Iconostas is usual the patron saint of the parish. In our case: the St. Elias (the Byzantine form of the Prophet Elijah the Tishbite).

On our Iconostas, the icon on the north end is St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia. St. Nicholas attended the Council of Nicea and struggled against the Arian heresy. He is noted for his care for the poor and orphans.

An Iconostas may have many levels of icons.

The 2d level up is always the 12 Great Feast of the Orthodox Church, e.g. Pascha, Pentecost, Theophany, Transfiguration, Palm Sunday, Dormition, Exaltation of the Holy Cross, etc. On the Feast days, the Icon of the Feast is taken down from the Iconostas and Processed out for Veneration at Matins and put on an analoy on the Bema.

On the uppermost level of our Iconostas is a Deisis (the Messiah enthroned) and worshipped by the heavenly court:

- on the north side (from Christ enthroned going left) are: Mary the holy Godbearer, the Archangel Michael, the Apostle Peter, St. Vladimir the Great, Enlightener of Rus', St. Boris the Passion-bearer, St. Anthony of the Pecherska Lavra, and Blessed Nikolai Charnestky (one of the new Martyrs of Ukraine).
- on the south side: St. John the Baptist, the Archangel Gabriel, the Apostle Paul, St. Olga Equal-to-the-Apostles, St. Hlib the Passion-bearer, St. Theodosius of the Pecherska Lavra, and the Confessor Metropolitan Andriy Sheptytsky.

In front of the Iconostas runs a small stage or platform called the Solea. The Solea facilitates such as processions, incensations of the Iconostas, etc. As note earlier, the Solea used to be a platform that connected the Altar to the Ambo - the Ambo which used to be a platform in the centre of the Sanctuary (which area I here call the "Bema").

The entire Iconostas is topped by the icon of the Crucifixion where the holy Theotokos and St. John the Theologian are shown faithfully keeping vigil at the foot of the Cross (Jn. 19:25-27).

The Ambo has now been reduced to a small semi-circular extension of the Solea located in front of the Holy Doors.

In front of the Solea are often placed a series of "veneration icons". These match those on the Iconostas.

They are place here for the convenience of the Faithful, so that they may venerate the Icons of the Iconostas without actually ascending to the solea and becoming somewhat conspicuous en processus and perhaps getting in the way of some rite or ceremonial.