

THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LORD



NOW, MASTER,
YOU CAN DISMISS YOUR SERVANT
IN PEACE;
ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.
FOR MY EYES HAVE WITNESSED
YOUR SALVATION,
WHICH YOU HAVE PREPARED IN
THE PRESENCE OF ALL PEOPLES:
A LIGHT FOR REVELATION
TO THE GENTILES,
THE GLORY OF YOUR PEOPLE,
ISRAEL.
CANTICLE OF SIMEON
LUKE 2:29 - 32

This is the hymn which Simeon uttered when he received the Child Jesus in his arms in the temple. He had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he beheld the “Anointed of the Lord.” (Lk 2: 26) The Icon of the Encounter of Our Lord is a pictorial rendering of this Gospel event.

The event takes place in the Temple of Jerusalem, in front of the gate of the altar. Immediately flanking the gates are, on the right, the aged Prophet Simeon holding the Christ Child in his covered arms; and, on the left, a small group including the Mother of God, the Holy Joseph, and the Prophetess Anna. Simeon is the most important person in the Icon. In the imagery of this event, he represents all that was good, all that was God-seeking in the Old Testament community. Encountering the Incarnate Word of God present in the Infant Jesus, the Old Testament people - personified by Simeon - reached their fulfillment. Thus completed, it can recognize the dawn of a new age, the Age of Redemption, and see the close of its own era.

The Icon shows the Infant Jesus seated in the arms of St. Simeon as if on a throne. Simeon’s hands are covered with his garment as a sign of reverence. Jesus is clothed in a short robe or tunic. The Mother of God is depicted with her left hand covered in a gesture of offering, having just given her Son to Simeon. Next to her is Joseph, carrying in the folds of his cloak the sacrifices of purification as prescribed for the poor in the Book of Leviticus: “two turtle doves or two young pigeons; one for holocaust and the other for a sin offering.” (Lev. 12: 8) The last figure is the image of the Prophetess Anna, also introduced in the Gospel of St. Luke (2: 36-38) announcing to all creation that the Child to Whom she is pointing, now presented in the Temple, is the Creator of Heaven and of Earth. For us, the Icon is a call to discover Christ, to meet Him, and accept Him as our Lord and Savior.

THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LORD

HAIL, O FULL OF GRACE,
VIRGIN AND MOTHER OF GOD,

FROM YOU HAS ARISEN

THE SUN OF JUSTICE, CHRIST OUR GOD,
ENLIGHTENING THOSE
WHO DWELL IN DARKNESS.

YOU TOO, O JUST ELDER SIMEON,
REJOICE FOR YOU CARRIED IN YOUR ARMS
THE REDEEMER OF OUR SOULS,
WHO GRANTS US RESURRECTION.

TROPARION OF THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LORD

O CHRIST OUR GOD,
WHO THROUGH YOUR BIRTH
HAVE SANCTIFIED THE VIRGINAL WOMB
AND HAVE BLESSED THE ARMS OF SYMEON,
YOU HAVE COME TODAY TO SAVE US!
WHEN WARS PREVAIL,
KEEP YOUR PEOPLE IN PEACE
AND STRENGTHEN OUR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES
IN EVERY GOOD DEED,
FOR YOU ALONE ARE THE LOVER OF MANKIND.

KONTAKION OF THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF SAINT SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM

Our lighted candles are a sign of the divine splendor of the one who comes to expel the dark shadows of evil and to make the whole universe radiant with the brilliance of his eternal light. Our candles also show how bright our souls should be when we go to meet Christ.

The Mother of God, the most pure Virgin, carried the true light in her arms and brought him to those who lay in darkness. We too should carry a light for all to see and reflect the radiance of the true light as we hasten to meet him.

The light has come and has shone upon a world enveloped in shadows; the Dayspring from on high has visited us and given light to those who lived in darkness. This, then, is our feast, and we join in procession with lighted candles to reveal the light that has shone upon us and the glory that is yet to come to us through him. So let us hasten all together to meet our God.

The true light has come, the light that enlightens every man who is born into this world. Let all of us, my brethren, be enlightened and made radiant by this light. Let all of us share in its splendor, and be so filled with it that no one remains in the darkness. Let us be shining ourselves as we go together to meet and to receive with the aged Simeon the light whose brilliance is eternal.

Rejoicing with Simeon, let us sing a hymn of thanksgiving to God, the Father of the light, who sent the true light to dispel the darkness and to give us all a share in his splendor. Through Simeon's eyes we too have seen the salvation of God which he prepared for all the nations and revealed as the glory of the new Israel, which is ourselves. As Simeon was released from the bonds of this life when he had seen Christ, so we too were at once freed from our old state of sinfulness.

By faith we, too embraced, Christ, the salvation of God the Father, as he came to us from Bethlehem. Gentiles before, we have now become the people of God. Our eyes have seen God incarnate, and because we have seen him present among us and have mentally received him into our arms, we are called the new Israel. Never shall we forget this presence; every year we keep a feast in his honor.

THE ENCOUNTER OF OUR LORD

JESUS IS RECEIVED AT THE TEMPLE

Saint Simeon and Saint Anna were in the Temple when Jesus was brought there 40 days after His birth. When Saint Simeon held Jesus, he knew Jesus was the Savior for which the Jewish people had been waiting. He said, "Now my eyes have seen the light." He knew that Jesus was the Light of the world and the Savior of all humanity.

The troparion for this feast praises the Theotokos for giving us "the Sun of Justice, Christ our God, shining upon those who are in darkness." The troparion celebrates Simeon who held Jesus, "Who has given us Resurrection." On this feast day, we are honoring the Theotokos for giving us Jesus, Simeon for recognizing Jesus, and Jesus Christ for granting us eternal life.

Read Luke 2:25-38. Then read the troparion of the Feast of the Encounter of Our Lord from your Church's prayer book. Why are the Theotokos and Saint Simeon honored in this feast day's troparion? (The Theotokos brought Jesus into the world; she brought light into the darkness and Saint Simeon recognized Jesus as the Light when he saw Him.)

