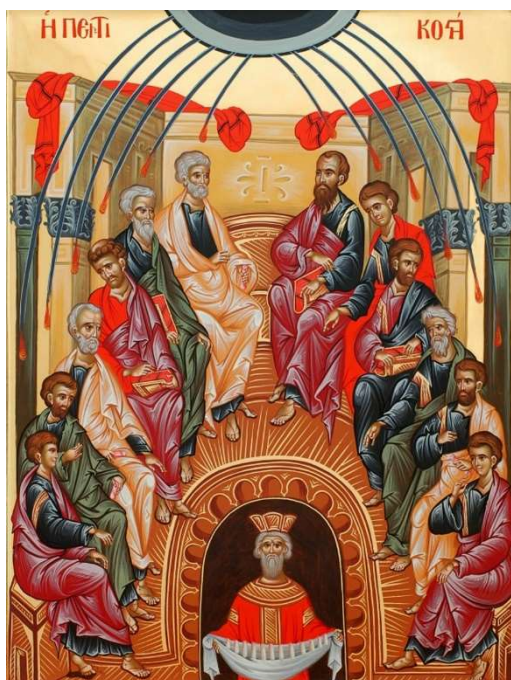


THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – FEAST OF PENTECOST

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Obrázok 1: Icon of the descent of the Holy Spirit - Pentecost.

The feast of Pentecost-Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles is an event which links the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is an event, which marks the beginning of the missionary activity of the Church of Christ. The descent of the Holy Spirit is the end of an entire process of the economy of salvation, and some call this event as the day of the “birth” of the Church of Christ, because from this day onwards the apostles were keen on spreading the message of the Gospel, the message of Christ as Saviour and the number of believers had begun to increase. The Church

however does not have a beginning, it exists in God as a community of Persons of the Holy Trinity, that is, it is a community to which we have been invited through the redemptory activity of Jesus Christ the Son of God. As a community of God and the human being, the Church exists from the period of paradise, and since the human being has left this community, God through the work of his Son, has completed the work of salvation through the establishment of a new community, the community of Christ that is the New Testament Church.

This feast is also called the Holy Pentecost, because it happened on the fiftieth day from Pascha and also during the day of the Jewish Old Testament Pentecost-the feast of Summer. The Pentecost is also a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Joel: And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: (Joel 2:28). The Old Testament feast of Pentecost was the commemoration of the acceptance of the Law through Moses-the Sinai Covenant, including the Decalogue.

The event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles is described by saint Lukas in the Acts of the Apostles: And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. (Acts 2:1-13). After the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, the Holy Mother, the apostles, the myro-oil bearing women and the other disciples of Christ returned to Jerusalem with great joy, where according to Tradition, they often prayed together and visited the Jerusalem Church. In the vicinity of the

house of the apostle John the Theologian, where the Most Pure Mary lived, there was also the building of the Zion-court, which was the first Christian church and where the disciples met for communal prayers. On the tenth day after the Ascension of Christ on heaven, as usually, the disciples of Christ gathered together with the Mother of God and they gathered in this Zion-court. It was the third period (nine hours to midday), where all of a sudden a great sound was heard from heaven and as if a fierce wind had filled the house. Then tongues of fire appeared, which descended on each one of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and they started to glorify God with different tongues, which they did not know previously. Thus they could teach the Gospel to all nations until the end of the earth. On the day of the Pentecost, the Church of Christ began to function in fullness and on Earth the Kingdom of heaven was being built.

Already in the sixth century, the event of Pentecost served as an occasion to write an icon, the main purpose of which was to commemorate this feast, that is the Descent of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, which was promised by the Saviour himself. However, an Orthodox icon has a much more important role than to commemorate an event, or a particular saint, it aims to bring a person to the possibility of attaining the Holy Spirit, it teaches the human being to see the Divine and the eternal. The character of an Orthodox icon, its symbolism, colours, and lines are the result of an experience in the Church from a spiritual celebration of feasts.

The icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in the first instance should bring the human person towards the unity of the one Church of Christ. This can be seen in the composition of the twelve apostles, which are placed into an oval form and who face each other. Often among the first two top apostles the Mother of God is located (especially in icons from the sixteenth century), which appears as the fulfilment of the composition- since through her to earth came the builder of the Church Jesus Christ. On many icons she is not depicted (even though she was undoubtedly present at the event), so that the icon of the feast would express the notion, that the top position belongs only to the Head of the Church to Jesus Christ. That is why usually an empty throne is depicted. An

interesting feature of this composition is, that the icon does not contain those apostles who belong to the so called twelve, but the apostle Paul is there also, who after this had persecuted the Christians for some years to come, and also there are the Evangelists Lucas and Mark depicted there, who did not belong to the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. On first glance, this extraordinary thing seems to be contradictory to history, but we must not forget the timelessness of the icon. The God fearing iconographers had written on the icon, the figure of the apostle Paul in reverence to his missionary activity, through which he had brought many believers to the Church and through the laying of hands had consecrated many bishops. Together with the apostle Peter they occupy the top position in the composition of the twelve apostles. On the left side, under the



Obrázok 2: Icon of the descent of the Holy Spirit - Pentecost. Russian type.

apostle Peter, there are the two Evangelists Lukas and Mathew and on the right side, underneath the apostle Paul, there is the Evangelist John the Theologian and Mark. The Evangelists hold in their hands a Gospel and the other apostles hold scrolls, which symbolise their later preaching of the Word of God relating to eternal life and also function as a symbol of their ecclesial teaching power, which they received through the *blahodat* of the Holy Spirit. Through the persons of the Evangelists Mark and Luke, all other disciples of Christ are represented and through the figure of the apostle Paul, all

other believers are represented, that is the icon has a mystical depiction of the entire Holy Church. The Apostle Paul also has a book in his hand which is a

symbol of his rich writing production (that is especially his fourteen epistles in the Holy Scripture).

In the bottom part of the icon in the middle we can find a symbolical figure of an elderly person, on a dark (usually black) background, who is dressed in a red royal robe and he has a crown on his head. He represents the “cosmos” that is the entire world. On the earliest forms of the icon, in accordance with the Acts of the Apostles, there are depicted in this area many people, who gathered together with the apostles (Acts 2: 9-11). However this crowd interrupted with the unity of the composition, that is why the crowd was replaced by a symbolical person with a white canvass in his hands, in which are located twelve scrolls symbolising the teaching of the twelve apostles, which enlightened the world. His raised hands symbolise the willingness to accept the Word of God from the apostles. He is an elderly figure because he had aged after the first sin of Adam, and his robe is red, since the world has brought bloody sacrifices to Satan and he has a royal crown because this world was dominated by sin. This figure represents the entire world, which accepts the teaching of Christ, which through the preaching of the apostles is transformed into the Church of Christ. That is the reason why he is dressed into a royal robe and placed in the centre of the bottom part of the icon. The dark background symbolises sin and unfaithfulness, in which the world was drawn.

In the upper part of the icon, part of a circle is depicted, which symbolises heaven from which twelve rays appear (if the Mother of God is depicted on the icon there are thirteen rays). These symbolise the baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire (according to the prophecy of John the Baptist Math. 3:11) and the consecration of the apostles. The fiery tongues are located above all the heads of the apostles, each one received a specific present of the Holy Spirit. On the oldest icons flowers and trees were depicted on the sides, which symbolised the garden of paradise and expressed the hope that the Church of Christ will be a true return to the life of paradise already here on earth. The flowers and trees were later replaced by parts of buildings, so that it would be emphasised that the event happened inside.

The event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of the work of the Holy Trinity—from the will of the Father the Son of God became flesh and came among people, in order to save them and the Holy Spirit descended, to sanctify the work of the Son—the Church, the Church through which we can be saved. That is the reason why this celebration is also called the day of the Holy Trinity, and it is possible to use other icons as well, such as for example the hospitality of Abraham or the Holy Trinity from Andrej Rublev.

Every year when the Liturgy of the feast of Pentecost is celebrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Jerusalem in the area where the event took place earlier on, a great wind and noise appears during the celebration.

SUMMARY

The event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles is described by saint Lukas in the Acts of the Apostles. Already in the sixth century, the event of Pentecost served as an occasion to write an icon, the main purpose of which was to commemorate this feast, that is the Descent of the Holy Spirit. The icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in the first instance should bring the human person towards the unity of the one Church of Christ. This can be seen in the composition of the twelve apostles, which are placed into an oval form and who face each other. In the bottom part of the icon in the middle we can find a symbolical figure of an elderly person, on a dark (usually black) background, who is dressed in a red royal robe and he has a crown on his head. He represents the “cosmos” that is the entire world. On the earliest forms of the icon, in accordance with the Acts of the Apostles, there are depicted in this area many people, who gathered together with the apostles. In the upper part of the icon, part of a circle is depicted, which symbolises heaven from which twelve rays appear. These symbolise the baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

Troparion — Tone 8

Blessed art You O Christ Our God / You have revealed the fishermen as most wise / By sending down upon them the Holy Spirit / Through them You drew the world into Your net / O Lover of Man, Glory to You!

Kontakion — Tone 8

When the most High came down and confused the tongues, / He divided the nations; / But when he distributed the tongues of fire / He called all to unity. / Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-holy Spirit!

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Abstract

In this article we are approaching the orthodox iconographic view of the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit – Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost - Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles is an event which links the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is an event, which marks the beginning of the missionary activity of the Church of Christ. Some call this event as the day of the “birth” of the Church of Christ. The Church however does not have a beginning, it exists in God as a community of Persons of the Holy Trinity, that is, it is a community to which we have been invited through the redemptory activity of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Key words

Jesus Christ, Descent, Pentecost, Iconography, symbolism