

St Giles' Aintree

Advent 2025

Icons: What, Why & How?

Pictures, Palettes & Prayer (and readings).



Christ the Good Shepherd or Lamb of God. Can you spot it in St Giles?

This little booklet is a springboard for St Giles' Advent study in 2025.

It contains an overview of the selected saints for this Advent course. There are many more; but the idea is that we can help each other & not get overwhelmed by choice!

All iconography has been selected for their relation to the Christmas story, as we prepare ourselves over Advent.

Each page gives an overview of the icon or saint; some Bible verses or background on each person; some suggested colours & some examples for you to draw from for your own "writing".

Finally, there is a prayer that will begin our sessions; a prayer to bless ourselves in this spiritual practice; and finally a short blessing of finished icons at the end of our Advent Course.

Our input will last 10 minutes at the beginning. We will then pray, and continue our work. Tea & Coffee is available throughout the session for you to help yourself and quiet music will be played for around 40 minutes. Finally, we will end with a prayer until next week.

Week 1 – 26th November – Overview & Materials

Week 2 – 3rd December - Theology & Tradition

Week 3 – 10th December - Make No Graven Image? How Do Icons Work?

Week 4 – 17th December - Endings & Blessings

Pictures we will use together:

Christ Emmanuel

Immanuel or Emmanuel is a Hebrew name that appears in the Book of Isaiah (7:14) as a sign that God will protect the House of David. The Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 1:22–23) interprets this as a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah and the fulfilment of Scripture in the person of Jesus. Immanuel "God with us" is one of the "symbolic names" used by Isaiah.

This type of iconography of Christ appears no later than the sixth century AD. Icons of this type depict Christ in the form of a child, but with the features of an adult, an intellectually and spiritually mature man. Such a depiction of Christ was a response to the Nestorian heresy of the fifth century that denied the divine nature of Jesus Christ until his baptism. The high forehead signifies the wisdom and depth of knowledge that Christ had as the Son of God in Luke 2:40 & Luke 2:46-50. The clear gaze and face of Emanuel amplify this impression of the Word in the image from John 8:12. The under garment is golden-yellow in colour with gold edging around the neck and a sign of priestly power. Gold and yellow symbolize God's glory and supernatural light, and these colours, together with the short hair show the origin of the Son of God. The colour blue is used for the background of the icon. It confirms the mystery of God's Word incarnated among people and transcending all earthly things (Genesis 1. 1-3 & John 1. 1-14).

Scripture to reflect on:

Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14; 1 Timothy 3:16

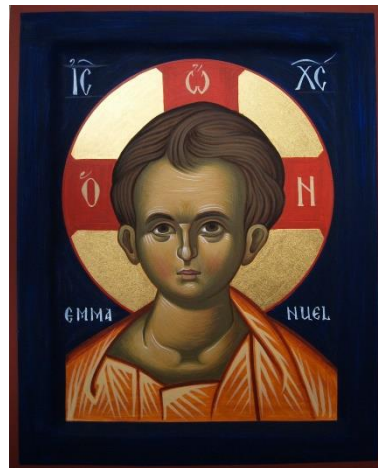
Colours

Background: Storm Blue

Cloak: Red Ochre

Band Over Waist: Red Ochre

Under Robe: Gold Ochre



Christ Pantocrator (Ruler of All)

On the halo are the Greek letter that mean "He Who Is".

Christ Pantocrator is one of the most common images in Orthodox iconography.

"Pantocrator" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title El Shaddai, meaning "all powerful." Looser translations are "Ruler of all" or "Sustainer of all." This attribution to Jesus was important given the Christological controversies that tore the early church. The Christ Pantocrator icons were symbols of the Nicene verdict that Christ was co-equal and co-eternal with God. The Christ Pantocrator icons are also called Christ the Teacher. In both icons Jesus is holding a book, sometimes open. Jesus is also making a gesture. The Christ Pantocrator icons are also called Christ the Teacher. In both icons Jesus is holding a book, sometimes open. Jesus is also making a gesture. Orators in the ancient Greco-Roman world used hand gestures to communicate with listeners. Jesus' hand gesture declares he has something important to say & in Byzantine art and theology, this gesture also indicates a blessing; specifically a divine blessing of mercy.

Technically, if the book is closed it is a Christ Pantocrator icon. Christ the Teacher icons have the book open & generally show a text from the gospel or Revelation.

Scripture to reflect on:

Revelation 1:8; John 1:14

Colours

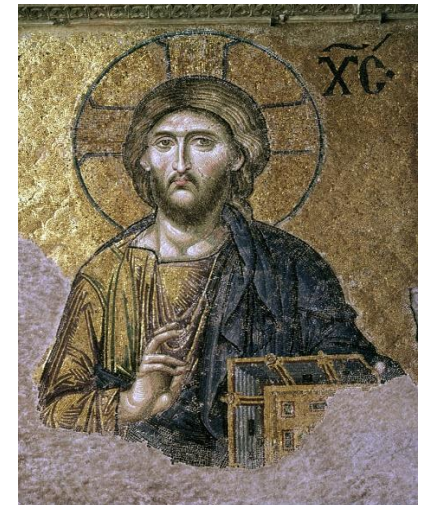
Cloak: Deep Blue with touch of green

Robe: Deep Red with touch of purple

Gospel Pages: Red light

Gospel Cover: Gold with Gems.

This example is a mosaic from Hagia Sophia in Istanbul from 1261.



St Nicholas – Archbishop of Myra (270-343)

St. Nicholas was a 4th-century Greek bishop from modern-day Turkey, revered for his generosity and kindness to the poor. His history includes acts of charity, like secretly providing dowries for three poor sisters, which led to the tradition of leaving gifts for children.

His feast day, December 6, is celebrated in many European countries, and he is the inspiration for figures like Father Christmas.

Born in Patara (present-day Turkey) around 280 AD, Nicholas was the son of wealthy Christian parents who died of an epidemic, leaving him an inheritance he used to help the poor. He became the Bishop of Myra and was imprisoned for his Christian faith during the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian but was later released.

It's widely believed he attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, where he strongly defended the divinity of Christ; even recorded as punching the leader of the Arian faction, Arius, because he was so outraged by his views. Perhaps ironically, or just an out-of-character occurrence, his general generosity led him to be venerated as the patron saint of children, sailors, merchants, and the poor.

Scripture to reflect on:

James 1. 17; Matthew 22: 37-40

Colours

Background – Neutral Gold

Robe – Red Oxide & red highlights

Stole – Light Cream

Stole Stitching – Gold

Cross Main – Deep Red or Black

Cross Inner – Gold or Red

Neckline – Gold With Gems



*Icon by iconographer Irina Bradley
(based in Buckinghamshire)*

Korsun Mother of God

In legend, there was an icon in Ephesus of the Theotokos (which means “God-Bearer”), which was painted by St Luke. In 988, a copy of this icon was transferred from Korsun (modern-day Chersonesus in Crimea) to Kiev by Prince Vladimir. This icon became known as the Korsun Icon; noted for its tenderness and compassion; an iconographic type called Eleusa or Tenderness. The icon is considered wonder-working and has a rich history connected to the Christianisation of Russia.

Mary's face is close to the face of Jesus, and she is often depicted with a sorrowful expression as she contemplates her son's destiny. The stars on Mary's forehead and shoulders are a reference to her being a "temple of the Holy Trinity".

Scripture to reflect on:

Luke 1:28; Luke 1: 38; Genesis 3:15;

Revelation 12:1; Luke 2. 34-5

Colours

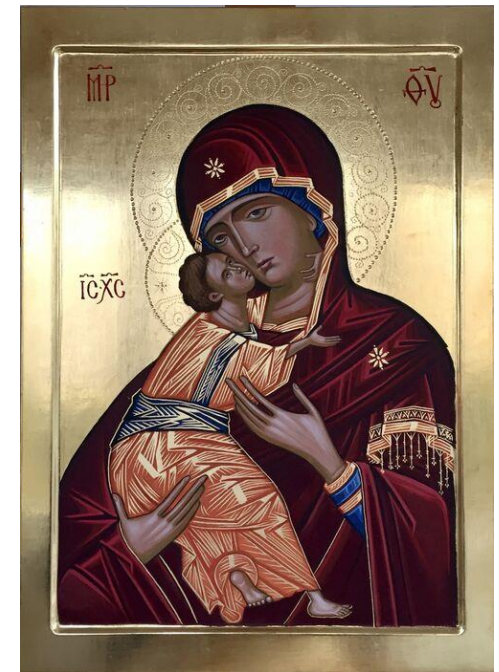
Theotokos Head Covering – Dark Red

Inside of Head Covering – Pale Green

Robe – Dark Red

Embroidery & stars – Dark Red

Christ Child's Shirt – Light Red.



*Icon by Iconographer Peter Murphy
(grew up in Leeds & Liverpool)*

Archangel Gabriel

Gabriel means “strength of God” or “Strong Man” or “Messenger of God”.

One of the 4 archangels mentioned obliquely throughout the Bible; Gabriel is the most familiar to us from the Christmas story; attributed with the power to announce God's will to humankind as the messenger of God. He is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Quran.

In the Book of Daniel, Gabriel appears to the prophet Daniel to explain his visions. The archangel also appears in the Book of Enoch and other ancient Jewish writings not preserved in Hebrew. Some of the earliest visual interpretations of Gabriel appeared in 9th-century Byzantine mosaics, often showing him as a full-figured, winged angel facing front on. Early Christian art, including 6th-century mosaics from Ravenna, sometimes depicted Gabriel as a heavenly messenger, or "imperial official," wearing ceremonial robes and sometimes carrying a staff called a labarum.

Orthodox icons often depict Gabriel in a deacon's vestments, signifying his role as a messenger and servant of God. Initially shown as an ordinary man in a tunic, later icons developed more distinct angelic features like wings, halos, and crowns. The use of gold is common, symbolizing holiness and heaven.

Scripture to reflect on:

Daniel 8: 16; Daniel 9: 20-23; Luke 1: 11-20; Luke 1: 26-38.

Colours

Outer Robe – Green / Blue

Under Robe – Dark Burnt Red

Hair Band – Dark Brown and Red

*Close Up of face of an Adrian Hart
Icon of Archangel Gabriel*



St Elizabeth the Righteous, Mother of the Fore-Runner (John the Baptist)

St. Elizabeth the Righteous' story is detailed in the Gospel of Luke. She was a righteous, childless woman of priestly descent who, in old age, miraculously conceived and gave birth to John the Baptist after an angelic visitation to her husband, Zechariah. She is a revered saint in various Christian churches and is also respected in Islam. Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and descended from the priestly lineage of Aaron (Moses' brother). Her husband was Zechariah, a priest who was also considered righteous and blameless. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was in the temple and announced that his wife would give birth to a son who would be great in the sight of the Lord. Zechariah doubted the prophecy due to their advanced age and was struck mute until the birth of their son. Elizabeth became pregnant shortly after, and the angel Gabriel later visited Mary with the news that she would conceive the Son of God. **The Visitation:** When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth's unborn baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognized Mary's blessed state and proclaimed her as the mother of her Lord. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months before returning to Nazareth. Elizabeth gave birth to a son and, on the eighth day, named him John, after writing the name on a tablet (as Zechariah was still unable to speak). Upon writing the name, Zechariah's speech was miraculously restored, and he then prophesied about his son's role as the forerunner of the Messiah (becoming the Benedictus in Luke 1: 68-79).

Scripture to reflect on:

Luke 1: 5-80

Colours

Garment – Colony Blue

Veil – touch of blue mixed with white

Cap - Red & titanium with white (light colour)

Cuffs – as above.

Scroll – Warm White.



Righteous Simeon, the God-Receiver

A just and devout man, he was guided by the Holy Spirit to wait for the "consolation of Israel" and was promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. After taking the infant Jesus in his arms, he blessed the child and gave a prophecy about Jesus' future role as a light for the Gentiles and a sign of contradiction. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon went to the Temple on the 40th day after Jesus' birth to meet the infant Jesus and his parents, Mary and Joseph. Simeon's famous prophecy included the familiar prayer: "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel". He blessed the infant Jesus with the prophetess Anna, his mother Mary, and Joseph, and also prophesied about the difficulties that the child and his mother would face. According to tradition, Simeon was one of the 70 scholars who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, creating the Septuagint translation. A hymn for his feast day reads: "Simeon the Elder is filled with joy today, receiving into his arms the Eternal God as an infant. Begging to be released from the bonds of the flesh he cries: "My eyes have seen the salvation, which You have prepared for all the nations to see!"

Scripture to reflect on:

Luke 2:25-32

Colours

Background – Gold

Simeon

Outer Garment:

Olive Green with highlights of moss green

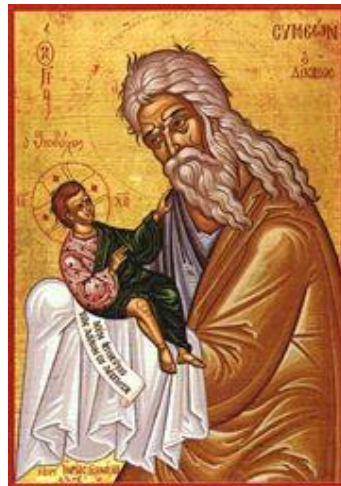
Under garment:

Celedon (Grey-Green; Jade or Dark Mint)

Hair – Grey and white

Christ child

Robes – Gold Oxide with highlights of gold.



St John the Apostle, Evangelist, Beloved Disciple & Theologian

Patron Saint of Caregivers. St. John the Apostle was one of Jesus' twelve apostles, and a contender for the title "Beloved Disciple". John was the son of Zebedee and the younger brother of James the Great, a fellow apostle. He and his brother were among the first disciples called by Jesus, having previously been followers of John the Baptist. Initially, John and his brother were known for their fiery zeal, earning them the nickname "Sons of Thunder" from Jesus. He was present at the crucifixion and was the only apostle to remain at the foot of the cross. Jesus entrusted John to take care of his mother, Mary, who lived with him until her death (Assumption of Mary). After Mary's death, he conducted missionary work throughout Asia Minor. He was later arrested and, according to tradition, miraculously survived being boiled in oil, after which he was exiled to the island of Patmos. His writings include (by tradition): the Gospel of John, the three epistles (1, 2, and 3 John), and the Book of Revelation, though modern scholars debate the authorship of these texts. He is known as the "Apostle of Love" for his emphasis on love in his writings and is the patron saint of love, loyalty, friendships, and authors. He is believed to have lived to an old age and died of natural causes in Ephesus, after the reign of Emperor Domitian (which ended in 96 AD. His most famous sermon had 5 words: "Dear children, love one another".

Scripture to Reflect On:

John 19: 26-7; 1 John 4:18; John 10:10; 1 John 4:20; John 3:16.

Colours

Background – Gold

Robe – Dark Blue

Wrap (Cloak) – Plum Pink & Violet

Hair – Grey / White

Scroll – Warm White

Angel Robes – Light Red & Pink

Angel Wings – Grey tones



Prayers for starting & blessing icons

A prayer for an iconographer:

Glory to the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

O Thou, who so wonderfully inspired Luke the Evangelist, enlighten my soul and that of thy servant (Name). Guide their hands, that they may reproduce thy features, those of the holy Virgin and all thy saints, for the glory and peace of thy holy church. Spare them from temptations and diabolical imaginations through the intercession of thy most holy Mother, St Luke and all the saints.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, both now and ever & unto the ages of ages. Amen.

A prayer before starting to write an icon:

Enlighten and direct our souls, our hearts and our spirits. Guide the hands of your servants, so that we may worthily [ortray your icon, that of your Holy Mother and all of the saints, for the glory and adornment of your holy Church. Forgive our sins and the sins of those who will venerate these icons, and who, praying devoutly before them, give homage to those whom they represent. Protect them from evil and instruct them with good counsel. This we ask through the prayers of the most holy Theotokos, the Apostle Luke, and all the saints, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

A prayer to bless icons

(must be done with a priest, the iconographer & icon):

All: Holy God, Holy & strong, Holy & immortal, have mercy on us.

Priest: Your saints we venerate as being in your image, O Lord our God. You created us after your own image and likeness; redeemed us from our former corruption of the ancient curse through Jesus Christ, who took on himself the form of a servant and became man. Who, having taken upon Himself our likeness, remade your saints of the first dispensation, and

through Whom also we are refashioned in the image of you blessedness and likeness; so we adore and glorify you as our creator.

Wherefore we pray you, send forth your blessing upon this icon, made in honour and remembrance of your Saint (name); and by the sprinkling of hallowed water, bless and make holy this icon to your glory.

Grant that this sanctification be upon all who venerate this icon of Saint (name) and send up their prayer to you while standing before it. We ask this through the grace, bounty and love of your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed together with your all-holy, good and life-creating Spirit; both now and forever, and unto the ages of ages.

All: Amen.

Priest: Peace be unto all.

All: And unto your spirit.

Priest: Let us bow our heads unto the Lord.

All (facing the cross): To you, O Lord.

Priest (while bowing): For you are He that blesses and sanctifies all things, O Christ our God, and to you we send up glory, together with your Father who is without beginning, and your most-holy, good and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, unto the ages of ages.

All: Amen.

The priest sprinkles the icons in the form of a cross, saying:

Hallowed and blessed is this icon of Saint (name) by the grace of the Holy Spirit, through the sprinkling of holy water, in the name of the Father (+), and of the Son (+), and of the Holy Spirit (+).

All: Amen.

The priest may cense the icons; and venerate the icon with a touch or kiss. The people do the same, as is their preference. When all have prayed, they say:

All: Holy God, Holy & strong, Holy & immortal, have mercy on us.