



أيقونة مريم العذراء الأرحب من السَّمَاوَات (the Platytera) **Icon of the Virgin Mary: Broader than the heavens (the Platytera)**

شفيعة الجالية العربية في الكنيسة الكاثوليكية في مملكة البحرين Patron of the Arabic Community in the Catholic Church, Kingdom of Bahrain



The iconography of the Virgin Mary **Broader than The heavens: The Platytera**

Patron of the Arabic Community
in the Catholic Church in
The Kingdom of Bahrain

Meaning of the icon

An icon, in truth, is an image, but an image that is not exclusively terrestrial. A theandric image, partly celestial and partly terrestrial. It is mixed, as indicated by the Greek word theandric, which is composed of the words Theos, which means God, and Aner, which means man.

The icon is the complete and pure image of man in all his terrestrial and celestial dimensions. The icon is a window to heaven, speaking about the supernatural truth, through form and tangible matter.

The 7 basic elements of the icon

We start from the bottom and work our way up.

The sea, the two boats, the oval circle, Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Lord Jesus, the Virgin Mary more spacious than the heavens, the sky sparkling with 59 stars.



[1] The sea:

Symbolizes the turbulent world, the world of evil where there is fear of storms of temptation. The Lord Jesus has called us to pass through him as apostles of peace.

We are confident that He is always with us wherever we are, remembering his saying to us: 'Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid' (Matthew 14:27).



[2] The two boats:

Symbolize the history, culture, and geography of the Kingdom of Bahrain, being a distinct island in the Arabian Gulf. The boats remind us of the work of the first apostles, as fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who left their nets and followed the Lord.

– Sails: symbolize the flag of the Kingdom of Bahrain in its white and red colors.



[3] The red oval shape:

Symbolizes the endless cycle of life, an indication of the mystery of the eternal, living and holy God.

Figure (1): symbolizes the Passover of

the Lord risen from the dead and our spiritual birth, when we enter the circle.

Figure (2): symbolizes the mirror of justice, which reflects to us the glory of God revealed to us through the Lord Jesus, our mother the Virgin Mary, and the Church. We are called, by constantly standing in front of this mirror, to reflect in our Christian commitment the truth of what we believe in, during our lives.



[4] Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral

Serves as the seat of the Apostolic Vicar of Northern Arabia.

– It is the rock that the Lord Jesus raised up; The torrent of rain and sand will not sweep it away, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

– It is the pivotal location of the Diocese of the Northern Arabia, which symbolizes the unity of believers through their union with the bishop.

The architecture of the cathedral

resembles that of a tent, alluding to the "tent of meeting" or tabernacle in which the presence of God was manifested among His people, when they were crossing the Sinai desert for forty years. From it we discover the spirituality of the Shekhinah (The Indwelling Presence of God) and wandering.

– It also symbolizes the barn of Christ, where the community of believers – the mystical body of Christ – gather.

The entrance to the cathedral: it is the barn door. Light comes out of it because Jesus is the 'door' and 'light of the

world.” He who goes in and out finds pasture.

The dome of the cathedral: Its color symbolizes the pearls of Bahrain, with its special distinction on the Arabian Peninsula level. Above it is the cross, like a beacon that guides those in the depths of the sea to the salvation achieved through the Lord Jesus and through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

Palm trees: symbolize the characteristics of the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is known as the homeland of a million palm trees.

Palm fronds symbolize the martyrdom of the martyrs.

– Found at the entrance to the cathedral, to remind us of the entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Day.

– The psalmist says: ‘The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.’”



[5] The Lord Jesus:

The position of the Lord in the icon indicates that He is the First.

– **Head shape:** shows that the Lord Jesus is a young boy with wisdom, grace, and standing. It is He who gave us salvation and introduced us to God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

– **Clothing:** The white color represents Jesus’ divine identity. While the gold tinged with brown symbolizes human nature that is enveloped in his divine glory. The colors of Christ’s clothes indicate his two perfect natures: the divine and the human.

– **The right hand:** Through it, the Lord Jesus bestows his blessing on his church and on the world. The hand and fingers position spell out His name according to the Greek language, and at the same time indicate that He is true God and true man.

– **The left hand:** indicates that he is the one sent from God the Father.

• It carries the message of salvation and peace. • It is the message that he delivered to his church, and it is a deposit of faith to bear witness to him in this world. • Every person who turns to the Lord Jesus receives from him a special call to holiness, which serves as a special message for him in this temporal life.

– **The halo:** Circular & contains a cross.

• The circular shape means infinite, • As for the cross, it indicates that salvation was achieved and completed through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

– **The writing in the halo:** O W N are Greek letters found on the cross and in the circular halo depict that He is ‘the Being,’ just as Moses recognized Him in the burning bush.

– **Writing outside the circle:** IC XC, abbreviation of the name of Jesus Christ; God and Lord Redeemer.

– **The full meaning of the writing:** Jesus Christ, The Being who is God.



[6] The Virgin Mary: known as Platytera ton Ouranon, is placed in the dome of the main church.

– **The Face:** The eyes show complete reverence, a sign of the Virgin Mary's constant absorption in contemplation, watching, and prayer.

- Nose: appears long because it inhales the sweet scent of the kingdom.

- Mouth: small, indicating silence.

– **Body position:** indicates that Mary is more spacious than the heavens. She is always in a prayer position.

– **The hands:** indicate that she is the fervent intercessor, and all her requests are accepted by the Holy Trinity.

Through the position of her hands, she receives all her children, joining them to her son Jesus.

She is the port of salvation in which we find relief from the dangers of the raging sea.

– **Clothing:** The blue color symbolizes creation, her human identity, and her being absolute pure and sinless.

The wine-red color symbolizes divine glory, through the merits of the One whom she carried in her womb and made her more spacious than the heavens.

– **The three stars on the head and shoulders:** indicate the virginity of the

Mary before, during and after birth-giving.

– **Writing:** MP ΘΥ is an abbreviation for 'Mary, Mother of God.'



[7] The sky sparkling with stars:

Symbolizes the Rosary, which gives the light of the Gospel to the darkness of our world, so we know hope.

– **6 big stars:** symbolize the number of rosary beads of the Our Father in the Rosary = 1 + 5.

– **53 little stars:** symbolize the number of Rosary beads = 3 + 50.

- It reminds us of the importance of getting to know the Lord Jesus, our Savior, by following the example of our Virgin Mother, Mary.

- Remind the Arabic community of the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Bahrain of its feast, which coincides with the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

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The Icon of the Arab Community was written on the occasion of its First Anniversary on October 7th, 2023 by the Iconographer Joseph El Massry, Lebanon