

Jacob Wrestling the Angel

Icon of the Prosopon School

Iconographer Vladislav Andrejev, founder of the Prosopon School



This style of art is called an icon, which is derived from the Greek word *eikōn*, which means image. Icons are considered sacred images and used in religious devotion as they are considered “windows to heaven.” Just like an icon on a computer screen takes you into a program, praying with an icon can give you a glimpse of heaven. The task of the iconographer is to make what is tangible into a spiritual reality. This is done through form, color, symbolism and prayer. Along with the scriptures, icons serve as a means through which mankind communicates with God and through which God reveals himself to us. This is why the Eastern Orthodox Church regards the Word (scripture)

and image (icon) as equal and are important in the economy of salvation. An iconographer does not ‘paint’ an icon, even though pigments and brushes are used, but instead ‘writes’ an icon as they are writing truths of the faith in image form.

This icon titled *Jacob Wrestling the Angel* is taken from Genesis 32:23-31. In this story Jacob arose in the night and took his two wives, maidservants and eleven of his children and took them across the ford of the Jabbok. After he had taken them across the water he was left alone. Then a man appeared and wrestled with him until dawn. When the man saw he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob’s hip at its socket. After this the man asked Jacob to let him go as it was daybreak. But Jacob insisted on a blessing first. The man asked what his name was. He answered that it was Jacob. Then the man said “you shall no longer be spoken of as Jacob, but as Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed.”(Gen 32:29) The man as it turns out was an angel. Jacob realized he was wrestling with the Divine when the angel was able to dislocate his hip at its socket. One big blow and he realizes this is no ordinary man, he then boldly asks for a blessing. This story has a deeper meaning for our spiritual lives though, for who does not wrestle with God at certain points of our life. We wrestle when we discerning his will against our own will. God cares enough for us to come down to our level and engage us. He knows our struggles and he knows that we have strong wills. In this icon, it portrays Jacob and the angel wrestling, but it doesn’t appear to be very violent. It almost looks like they are dancing or embracing each other. When we are discerning God’s will in our life, it often goes back and forth between a wrestle and a dance. When our own will is strong and not in the plan of God it is more of a wrestle as we fight to let go, but it becomes a dance when you have embraced God’s will but may not fully understand the direction he wants you to go trying one way or another. He then gently leads us as he gives us his blessing. Yet, he is always embracing us and moving us toward a final conclusion.

At the top right corner we see The Logos, it is a young Jesus Christ. In Iconography he is Emmanuel which means “God with us” as it fitting for this icon. It is just one more symbol that shows how close God is to man.

