

Layers of colour are added across the whole surface of the image, building up the depth and complexity of what is required in the final depiction. Different shades of the same basic colour produce the effect of fabric with the play of light upon its folds.



Parts of the image are left blank until quite late in the creation of the icon, allowing decisions about finer detail such as visible text. Painting faces and hands are left until last. The quality of the light is critical at this stage.

The Christ icon was blessed on June 7th 2015 in memory of the late Barbara Thomson, a generous gift from her family. It hangs to the right of the Medieval arch leading from the St Mary Chapel into the nave.

The finished icon shows the face of Jesus and the open Gospel Book bearing the words from St Matthew's Gospel (11:28). The image of Jesus is serene and compassionate and he gazes out to welcome all who come with their prayers and needs, their sorrows or joys, their anguish or hope, their guilt or their gratitude. His message is clear from the words on the Gospel Book:

'Come to me all who are weary or overburdened and I will give you rest'.

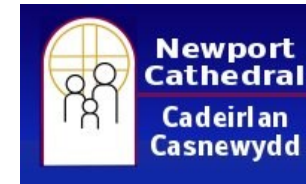


left of the Medieval arch.

The third icon is currently not on display, but in time it should also be possible for visitors to see it. It is in essence a 'Trinity' icon, and it is a copy of an original entitled 'The Hospitality of Abraham' by St Andrei Rublev dating back to about the same period as the arch.



The second icon, formally entitled 'The Mother of God of Vladimir' was a donation to the Cathedral by Bishop Dominic Walker. It, too, was painted *in situ* by Cristinel Pâslaru and is hung to the



The icons



The Welcoming Christ

'Come to me, all who are weary or overburdened and I will give you rest'

Madonna and child

The Cathedral icons, by Cristinel Pâslaru



At the end of April 2015 Cristinel Pâslaru from Iasi in Romania set to work in the Cathedral creating a new piece of religious art. It is an 'icon' of Jesus Christ. Two years later he returned to create a second icon for us - Madonna and Child.

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Icons are a form of religious art with a long history in the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity. Some readers will have seen them when visiting Greece and Cyprus or Russia, perhaps. More than mere pictures, icons are objects of deep devotion, often seen as conveying the spiritual presence of the subjects they depict and bringing those who pray before them into closer contact with what they are beholding. 'Windows into God' is one poetic description. In the past fifty years or so icons have been increasingly adopted as devotional



symbols in Western Christianity, including the Protestant churches which have lacked a tradition of devotional representations since the Reformation.

The fact that icons come from a tradition outside the controversies of the Reformation may have contributed to their adoption by mainline Protestant churches across the world.

Cristi's work holds a special place in regard to the Orthodox understanding of icons as bringing divine light to the one who prays. The faces of those he paints are often described as 'luminous', a quality which suffuses his compositions as a whole. Reports of the quality and beauty of his work in this country and in other parts of Europe has spread by word of mouth.



Those who saw Cristi at work were enthralled not only by the patience and skill of the artist but also by the beauty of the emerging image. Cristi was particularly glad to have been able to get a feel for the Cathedral and its unique atmosphere and ambience during his long hours of work in the building each day. He was clear that painting an icon where it will be installed imparts to the image something of the unique spiritual character of that place and he felt this very strongly in the case of Newport Cathedral. What he has created seems already to 'be at home' in this place amongst this community, so many of whom were delighted to engage with Cristi and to witness his God-given

gift at work as his artistic creation began to emerge.

The creative process

The icons are painted on boards of limewood produced by the monks of Stavnic monastery. The boards are prepared by covering with layers of rabbit-skin glue to seal any pores in the wood. Canvas is then glued into place to stabilise the whole work against cracking and flaking over the following centuries. Next is applied a coat of *gesso*, a white plaster mixed with glue, water and oil. The image to be painted is then sketched so that the painted and gilded areas are clearly distinguished.



A layer of 'size' then covers a layer of red paint which will produce a lustrous and rich finish to the gold overlay. 22-carat gold leaf is then carefully added by hand. What looks a simple procedure is not for the inexperienced hand, given the sheer cost of any mistake. After more than a week of work on the icon, the painting can then begin.