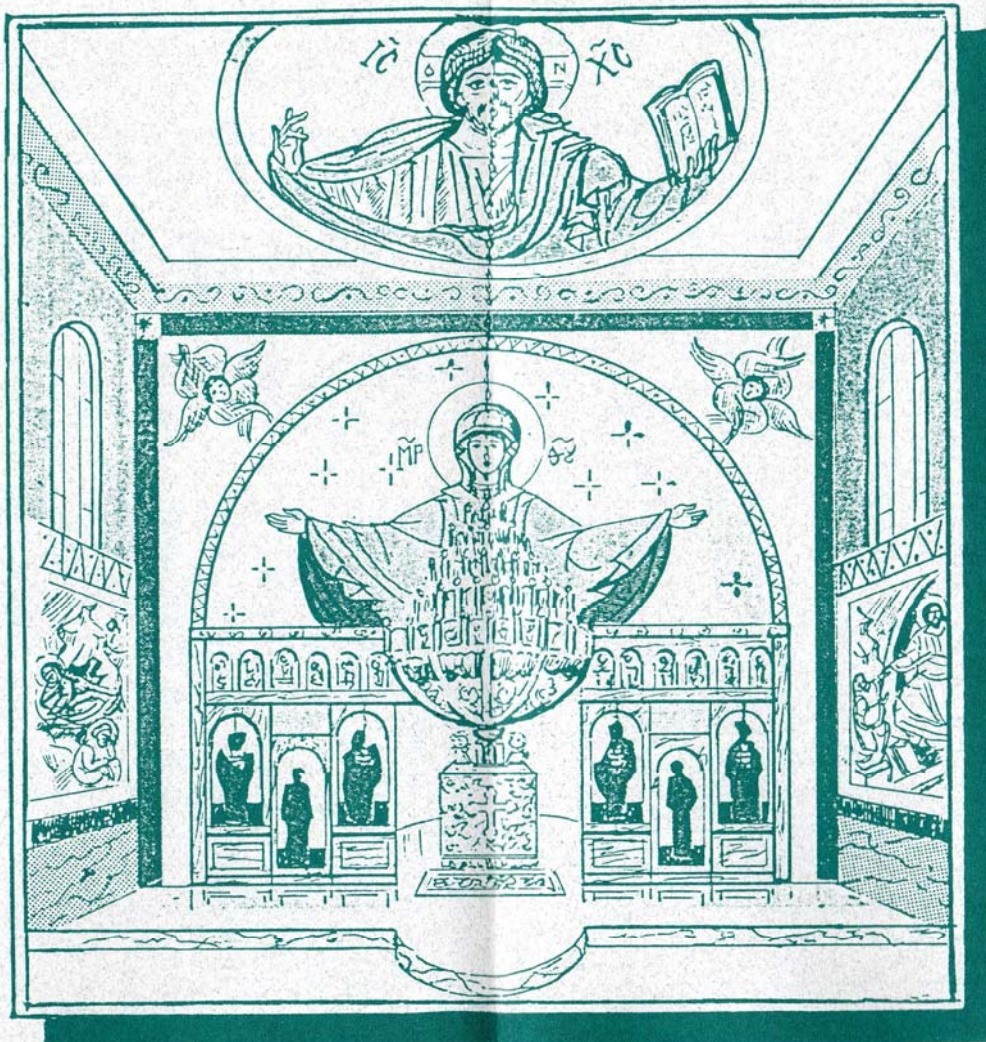


**WELCOME
TO THIS
HOLY
HOUSE**





We learn much about people from being in their homes, and we can learn about the Eastern Christian community by seeing the place where they express their relationship to God and to each other. The church building, then, helps us 'see' the Church. It reveals the very nature and meaning of what the Church is: a communion of God and His people.

- **The Narthex** (Entrance Hall) symbolizes the call to repent, to continually change our ways, to live a new life. It is decorated with icons (images) of the Old Testament prophets who prepared the Jews to encounter God in Jesus Christ. On entering the narthex we recall the need to prepare ourselves to meet the Lord. This is often the place where people are received into the Church through baptism and chrismation and enter into a relationship with God and His people.

- **The Nave** (body of the church) symbolizes the body of believers. Here the people gather for worship. On the walls surrounding them are icons of saints of past ages. This reminds us that we are one with all the believers of every age who make up the Body of Christ.

- **The Holy Place** (altar area) represents the glory of God. The Holy Table at its center represents the throne of God. As such it is covered with rich fabrics, representing the Lord "clothed with majesty" (Psalm 92).

- **Heaven and earth are joined by Jesus Christ.** This is represented in a Byzantine church by the **Icon Screen** which joins the Holy Place to the body of the church. Adorned with images of Christ and those central to the mystery of His coming (the Mother of God, the Forerunner, the

Apostles), the screen reminds us that only through Him do we have access to God.

- **The Pantokrator**, the main icon in a Byzantine church, is that of Christ the All-Powerful which dominates the assembly. It represents Christ as He is now, "seated at the right hand of the Father, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead" (Nicene Creed). This reminds us that Christ is the Head of our Church, the One Who presides at our worship and through Whom we live.

Among the other items seen in a Byzantine church are:

- *Icons* — These images are the distinctive art form of the Christian East. The brightness of their colors is meant to suggest the radiance of the divine life while the simplicity of their lines represents the tranquility of one who rests in God. They are not simply decorations, but proclaim the nature of the Church and the life of grace to which we are called.

- *Icon Stands* — Here icons of special importance to the local community are placed, such as the representations of the holyday scenes. Believers honor the presence or events by kissing these icons and lighting candles before them.

- *Incense* — Perfumed incense is burned during services to recall the cloud which covered the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 13), symbolizing the presence of God. As we see ourselves enveloped in the clouds of incense, we recall that we are in God's presence.

- *The Eternal Light* — This is a lamp kept burning in front of the Holy Place to represent the never-ending presence of God.

- *Ripidia* — These circular images, usually placed on either side of the Holy Table, are inscribed with icons of the cherubim (angels). These have been used since the time of Moses (Exodus 25) and remind us that the Holy Table is truly the throne of God.

The last three items mentioned are drawn from the customs of the Jewish Temple as recorded in the Old Testament. Several other items in Byzantine churches recall the Old Testament as well. Behind the Holy Table we see a *Seven-branched Candlestick*; on the Table is an *Ark* (Exodus 25) in which rests — not the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant — but Christ's Body and Blood of the New Covenant. All these items remind us that the New Covenant of Christ completes and fulfills the Old.

- The unity and mutual love we proclaim in our churches must be expressed in our daily life; otherwise it is only pretense. This is why we have a *Place of Fellowship* (a courtyard or hall) where we can share with people of our community what we have professed before the Holy Altar.

May we all discover in our own lives the Divine Plan for us which our church building expresses in physical form.

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