

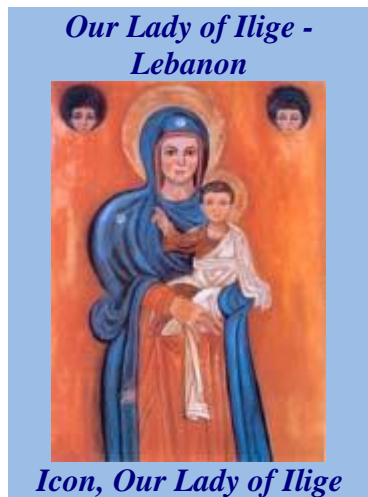


Icon, Our Lady of Ilige, Lebanon



Our Lady of Ilige (Elige), Or the Patriarchal Maronite Icon

HISTORY and ICONOGRAPHY



This Icon date more than 1000 years ago, and was the Maronite Patriarch personal Icon. This Icon traveled with the Patriarch to all the places he runs to inside Lebanon from the Mamluks and from all the Maronites' enemies.

It is known that this Icon also named the Icon of Our Lady of Ilige where the Patriarchal resident was within the village of Mayfouq for more than 500 years long. This Icon is considered highly sacred within the Maronites.

The Church of Our Lady of Ilige is located in the village of Mayfouq in the district of Jbeil. It was built at the site of a former pagan temple, and parts of that structure are still visible in the Church building.

The word Ilige is derived from the name of the temple which was to honor the god of depth. It is claimed that Christians made the site a Church back in Apostolic times, dedicating it to the Mother of God as Our Lady of Ilige. From the 12th to the mid- 15th century this Church was the refuge, shelter and home of our Maronite Patriarchs.

The original icon of Our Lady of Ilige was actually buried under ten layers of paint in subsequent attempts to fix, improve, or adjust the icon over the centuries. As a result, the icon was covered over, only to be discovered in the restoration undertaken in the 1980's. To the surprise of the Carmelite nuns assigned to the restoration, layer after layer was uncovered to reveal the original, an icon of Syriac Maronite art dating to the 10th century. It is one of our oldest preserved icons which belonged to the Patriarchs. We do not have many pieces of our art from the early centuries due to wars, persecutions and the destruction of Churches over time. The discovery of this icon is a blessing and gift to the Maronites, as it preserves the unique style of Syriac Maronite art form.

This beautiful icon, also known as Our Lady of the Maronites, depicts the Virgin Mother supporting on her lap, the Child of her womb, Jesus Christ (a favorite theme of St. Ephrem.) It was discovered at the Patriarchal Church of Ilige, Lebanon and is dated around the 10th Century. After uncovering several diverse pictorial layers, this icon has been revealed and marks an historic event in the history of Syro-Maronite iconography. This painting continues the tradition initiated by the RABBULA manuscript of the 6th Century.

The antiquity and authenticity of this icon seem to be supported and verified by the following elements: the colors of Mary's robes (deep blue) and Christ's (deep purple) are faithful to the Syriac tradition dating to the 6th Century. Blue (sky tone) signifies divinity, and purple (kingly) signifies royalty. The halos of both figures are a simple wide band (gold) typical of Syriac iconography and free of Byzantine influence, namely a cross in Christ's halo and lettering for the "Mother of God" in the Lady's. The profession of faith made by the symbolic form of blessing of Jesus' right hand, i.e. three fingers joined (to signify the three Persons in one God), and the index and other finger (signify that Christ is God and man.) What is not visible in His left hand is the typical scroll which Jesus holds (refers to Isaiah in the Old Testament and Revelations in the New Testament) Moreover, the Lady's right hand declares the same Chalcedonian formula of faith - the duality of Christ's natures - divine and human. As is typical in Syriac icons, the Virgin Mother's hair is completely concealed and covered by the headband worn in the Semitic culture. The two star-like symbols on Mary's head and shoulder represent her enduring virginity before and after Christ's birth. According to St. Ephrem, "the First Eve by her 'hearing' of the serpent gave the world death; the Second Eve, by her 'hearing' of the angel gave the world LIFE."

The facial features of both figures (Syriac Orient) reveal the delicate, gentle and transparent divine presence. Art of the Latin West depicts the faces mostly human, while that of the Byzantine East, mostly divine.

...Mother of God... Generations of heaven and earth join to say Blessed are you, ark of Mysteries Blessed are you, altar of the First Fruit Blessed are you, fertile valley. Blessed are you, bright sunrise. Blessed are you, joy of motherhood. We petition you, O Christ, through the prayers of Your holy Mother, renew the face of the earth which You created out of love for us. Where there is death and decay, restore life; where there is famine and suffering, bring relief; where the earth is parched and unyielding, provide rain. Bless the fields with grain, the fruit trees with blossoms and the bushes with new growth. Restore the work of Your hands, so that earth and all that is on it may worship You now and forever. Sedro,

"Our Lady of the Seeds" - Maronite

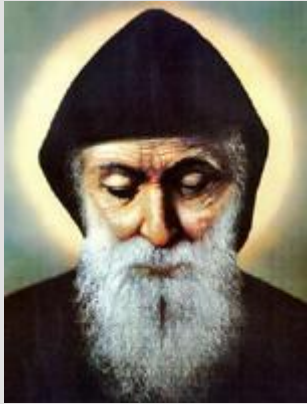


*Our Lady of Ilige
Lebanon*

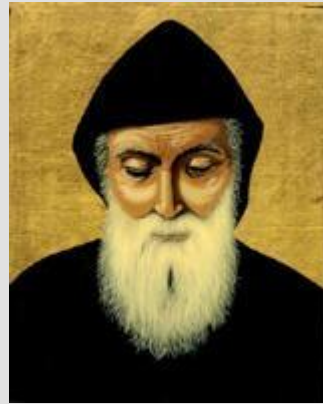
*Saint Charbel Maklouf,
Father of Lebanese order Maronite*



Lebanese Saint



Sharbel Crazy by God



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