

## **Holy Mother of Kazan Icon**

### **Brief history of the Kazan Icon**

The original image of Our Lady of Kazan is said to have come to Russia from Constantinople in the 13th century. After the Tatars besieged Kazan and made it the capital of their khanate in 1438, the icon disappeared, and it is not mentioned again until the 16th century, some years after the liberation of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible in 1552.

Kazan was devastated by fire in 1579, and the image thought to have been lost. Hermogones, priest of the Church of St. Nicholas in Kazan, who would later become Metropolitan of Kazan, and venerated Patriarch of Moscow and all of Russia 1606-1612, wrote of the events of the re-emergence of the Holy Mother of Kazan.

He wrote that all believed the icon to have succumbed to the fire that destroyed Kazan. The Virgin appeared in a prophetic dream to a 10-year-old girl named Matrona and told her where to find the precious image again. Matrona, as instructed, told the archbishop of her dream but was not taken seriously. After two more such dreams, on July 8, 1579, the girl and her mother themselves dug up the image, buried under the ashes of a house, where it had been hidden long before to save it from the Tatars. The unearthed icon looked as bright and beautiful as if it were new. The archbishop repented of his unbelief and took the icon to the Church of St. Nicholas, where a blind man was cured that very day. To this day, people pray to the Kazan Mother of God to cure 'illness of the eyes'.

By 1612, Moscow was occupied by Polish invaders and Hermogenes, then Patriarch of Moscow, was imprisoned. From prison, he ordered the Kazan Icon to be brought to Princes Minin and Pozharsky, who were leading resistance to the occupation. The Icon, possibly an original but more likely a copy, was carried before their regiments as they fought to regain the city from the Poles. When the Polish army was finally driven from Moscow in October 1622, the victory was attributed to the intercession of the Mother of God, and the Kazan icon became a focal point for Russian national sentiments. Later that year, when Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich came to the throne, he appointed both July 8 and October 22 as feasts in honour of Our Lady of Kazan.

A small wooden church was built in the Kremlin dedicated to the Holy Mother of Kazan. The Icon was kept there until the church burnt down in 1632. The tsar ordered the construction of a larger brick cathedral to replace it. After its completion in 1638, the icon remained there in Moscow's Kazan Cathedral for nearly two centuries. It was regularly borne in solemn liturgical processions along the city walls as the protectress of Moscow. The intercession of Our Lady of Kazan was successfully invoked against a Swedish invasion in 1709, and again when Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812. To commemorate this latter victory, the Kazan icon was moved to the new Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg in 1821.

By this time, the Icon had achieved immense and widespread popularity in Russia as a protector of the state and its people against foreign invasion. There were nine or ten separate 'miracle working' copies throughout Russia though it is disputed whether any of these are the original Mother of Kazan Icon.

Later, the Kazan Icon was paraded during the Nazi occupation of Leningrad in 1941 to ward off the invading forces.

## **The Holy Mother of Kazan Iconography**

The Icon depicts a half-length (head to shoulders) version of the Theotokos of the Hodegetria (“She who shows the way”) type. The Virgin Mother inclines her head towards the Christ Child. The Saviour looks directly towards us. He is depicted waist length, with his right hand in a gesture of blessing.