



The Baptism of Jesus Christ

24" x 30" acrylic on canvas

Icon written by the hand of
Vincent Chesney, KM 2018

Known as a Theophany (Greek: Θεοφάνεια) literally a “divine materialization” like the Transfiguration, the Trinity was shown in glory at Christ’s Baptism. *“It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”* (Mark 1:9-11)

The icon is designed so that the person viewing it has the vantage point of standing in the Jordan, with Our Lord and Savior. He is the focal point, with all energy focused on Him. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, emanates from God the Father’s presence which creates a direct line to His Son. This reminds us of the Baptist’s fondness for quoting scripture: “*‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said*” (John 1:23). Jesus blesses the living waters of the Jordan as well as the viewer. The water itself is alive which reflect Jesus’ teaching in John 4:4-26; John 7: 37-39. Within the blue water are small creatures that reflect Psalm 114: *When Israel went out from Egypt...The sea looked and fled* [referring to the parting of the Red Sea]; *Jordan turned back* [referring to the return to the Promised Land through the Jordan River] and Zechariah 14:8-9. Blue symbolizes heaven in iconography. The water totally envelops the undressed Jesus, foreshadowing His own tomb. *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”* (Rom 6:3-4)

Also receiving a blessing from Christ is John the Baptist, patron of the Order of Malta who wears representative colors. Red symbolizes humanity, blood and therefore martyrdom as well as the Resurrection. White symbolizes purity and divinity. He both steps toward Christ, in obedience to His command to baptize Him, yet bows before his divine cousin in reverent humility. There is a tree below John, which reminds the viewer of the Baptist’s prophesy: *“And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore, every tree which produces not good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire”* (Matt 3:10)

To the left of Jesus are three angels attending to Him. They cover their hands as a sign of respect for Our Savior. The towel is emblazoned with the Maltese Cross, as these angels mystically represent the three associations of the Order of Malta in the United States.

The Order’s coat of arms can be found in the lower corner of the icon, as John baptizes Jesus he provides us with a model of humble service that inspires the Order.

The scene is surrounded by actual gold. This is to emphasize the heavenly nature of icons, which since at least the sixth century have been called ‘windows into heaven’ by multiple Church Fathers.

Paint in this icon was infused with water from the Grotto of Lourdes, France and earth from the Shrine in Champion, Wisconsin both of which are Marian apparition sites where the Order conducts pilgrimages.