

KURSK-ROOT ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, PROTECTRESS OF THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA



On 8 September, 1295, on the day of the Nativity of the Most-Holy Mother of God, a small force of hunters from Rylsk came to hunt at the Tuskora river, 27 versts from Kursk. One of the hunters, an honorable and pious man, seeking prey in the woods, found a small icon lying face down on the root of a tree. He had barely lifted it to inspect it when the spot upon which the icon lay burst out with a strong spring of pure water. The icon turned out to be of the type referred to as the "Sign" of the Mother of God. The hunter who found the icon knew that this was no ordinary occurrence. He called his companions and together they built a small wooden chapel, into which they placed this icon. The residents of Rylsk, hearing of the newly-appeared icon of the Mother of God, began to visit it for veneration, and many miracles began to appear from it.

In 1385 the Kursk region was again swept by the Tatars. They tried to burn down the chapel and its Icon, but the wooden structure would not burn. The priest who lived by the chapel, Fr. Bogolep, explained to them that the reason for this miracle was the Icon itself. The incensed Tatars hacked the Icon in half and tossed the pieces in different directions, then burned the chapel.

They took the priest prisoner and was forced to tend to Tatar flocks. Some time later he was ransomed by emissaries of the Muscovite Grand Duke who were on their way to the Golden Horde, and he returned to the place where the chapel had stood. After a long search, while praying and fasting, he found both halves of the holy Icon, placed them side by side, and they grew together seamlessly, exhibiting only something "like dew".

In 1676 the holy Icon traveled to the Don River for blessing the Don Cossack troops. In 1684 Tsars Ivan and Petr Alekseevich sent a copy of this Icon with the order that it accompany Orthodox troops into battle. In 1687 the holy Icon was sent to the "Great Army." In 1689 copies of the holy Icon were given to the armies in the Crimean campaign. In 1812 a copy of the holy Icon was sent to Prince Kutuzov and the battling troops. Before his icon St. Seraphim of Sarov prayed and was healed.

On the night of 7-8 March, 1898, conspirator revolutionaries-atheists tried to blow up the Miracle-working Icon with a hellish bomb, but the Lord Jesus Christ glorified His Most-Pure Mother yet more, for despite the terrifying destruction in the cathedral surrounding the Icon, it remained untouched.

On 12 April 1918, the holy Icon was stolen from the cathedral of the Monastery of the Sign of the Mother of God and stripped of its ornamentation, but on 2 May it was found and returned to its place.

Finally, in 1919, while accompanying Bishop Feofan of Kursk and Oboyan' and some monks of the Monastery of the Sign, the holy Icon crossed the border to the neighborly Serbia. In 1920 it again, at the behest of General Wrangel, visited Russia at the Crimea and remained there until the final evacuation of the Russian Army in the first days of November, 1920. The holy Icon returned to Serbia, where it remained until 1944, when, together with the Synod of Bishops, it went abroad, to Munich (Bavaria) with Metropolitan Anastassy. In 1951 Metropolitan Anastassy moved from Munich to America. Since 1957 the Icon had resided in the main cathedral dedicated to it in the Synod of Bishops in New York. The holy Icon regularly travels to all the dioceses of the Russian diaspora