



FOURTH STUDY

THE APPARITION  
OF THE THEOTOKOS  
TO ST. SERAPHIM  
OF SAROV



FROM THE ICON STUDIO OF THE  
MONASTERY OF STS. CYPRIAN AND JUSTINA,  
FILI, ATTICA

2007



The Holy Icon  
 (See in [high resolution](#))



## The Apparition of the *Theotokos* to St. Seraphim of Sarov

**T**he Holy Icon depicting the “Apparition of the *Theotokos* to our Holy Father, St. Seraphim of Sarov” was painted, by the Grace of God, in the Icon Studio of the Monastery of the Holy Martyrs Cyprian and Justina, in Fili, Attica, in the summer of 2007, with the sororal assistance of the Icon Studio of the Convent of the Holy Angels, in Aphidnai, Attica.

With the painting of this new composition we had in view the following two sacred goals:

a. to show forth the Protectress of our Monastery, St. Justina the Virgin, as one of the virgins in close company with our Lady, the *Theotokos* and Ever-Virgin Mary;



b. the offering of the Icon as a gift from our Brotherhood to our Most Reverend spiritual Father and Abbot, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, on the occasion of his NAMEDAY (October 2, 2007).



## Description of the composition and the methods underlying its Iconographic rendition

**A**ccording to the narrative of this apparition, the Most Holy *Theotokos*, having in her company two Angels, the Venerable Forerunner [St. John the Baptist], St. John the Theologian, and twelve holy virgins—Anysia, Pelagia, Makrina, Catherine, Irene, Barbara, Thekla, Marina, Justina, Evpraxia, Dorothea, and Juliana—, visited St. Seraphim and the Nun Evpraxia.

A fairly lengthy conversation took place between the *Panagia* and St. Seraphim, on the one hand, and between the women Saints and the Nun Evpraxia (from the Diveyevo Convent), on the other.

\* \* \*

a. Our Lady, the *Theotokos* is placed in the central vertical axis of the composition, on a slightly larger scale than the other figures, in order to indicate her loftiness and all-holiness.

She likewise constitutes the center of the transversal axes created by the faces of the Saints in her company.



The *Panagia's* garments are deeper in color than those of the others, so as to set her off as the *focal point* of the entire composition.

Moreover, the greater distinction in the degrees of brightness (contrast) between the *Theotokos'* dark mantle and the bright garments of the Holy Angels standing next to her accentuates the aforementioned centrality and majesty of her holy figure.

This choice of colors is the practical result of schooling in the holy Iconographic tradition of Orthodoxy.

One frequently sees this same approach in important ancient and contemporary Icons, and in particular in the exquisite Icon of the Ascension of our Savior, by Theophanes of Crete, which, indeed, was the main source of inspiration for our choice of colors.



The Ascension,  
by Theophanes  
of Crete.  
1545

b. The Holy Angels, as well as all of the other Saints in the sacred company, are turned towards the *Panagia*, with the exception of St. Justina, who is turned in conversation towards the kneeling Nun Evpraxia.

This is in accordance with the narration of the apparition, which relates that the Nun spoke with all of the women Saints, who gave her accounts of their martyrdoms.

St. Seraphim and his Nun have been painted kneeling, in a display of piety and awe before the Mother of God.

The Saint is wearing an *Epitrachelion* as a sign of his Priesthood, and he is turned towards the *Panagia* in a corresponding attitude of conversation with her.

The Nun, in the same attitude, and in a spot symmetrical to the Saint, is speaking with St. Justina.

The remaining members of the company stand either in a position of prayerful intercession (e.g., the Venerable Forerunner, St. John the Theologian), or in a position of simple participation in the events.

The Holy Martyrs bear the Cross of their Martyrdom. They all have a star or precious stone on their foreheads, as a symbol of virginity in Christ.

The Ever-Virgin Mary, in accordance with Iconographic tradition, is adorned with three stars—one on her forehead and two on her shoulders; for she was a “Virgin before, during, and after giving birth.”

On a second level, behind the company of Saints, one sees the Monastery of Sarov (buildings), and also the wilderness (wooded mountains) with the ascetic hut of St. Seraphim.

The Lord, in Glory, blesses the events from on high and sends down His Grace: the common Grace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

c. The golden background, which symbolizes the presence and Grace of God, encompasses all things and draws them towards God (St. Dionysios the Areopagite).

The choice, elaboration, and distribution of the colors was made in order to demonstrate precisely this—that is, the Eucharistic and doxological return of all things, inspired by Divine yearning, to their Creator and Fashioner and their reunion with Him through deification by Grace in Christ.\*

October 2, 2007  
+ Sts. Cyprian and Justina



\* (See also the following Iconological Studies posted on our website:

[“The Holy Icon of All Saints: An Attempt at a New Approach”](#)  
[in Greek], and

[“Two Icons of Our Venerable Mother Mary of Egypt.”](#))





To the Word Who deviseth all things,  
the Giver of every good gift  
and our God,  
be glory, dominion, honor, and thanksgiving,  
unto the ages!  
Amen.