

## Creative Submission



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### Grain, New Wine and Oil

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I am a Pentecostal who writes icons. For some, this may seem like an oxymoron. Students of Church History will remember the *Iconoclastic Controversy*—a religious and political conflict within the Byzantine Empire from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries over the veneration of icons. It is my personal conviction, however, that through the Western Church’s distancing themselves from this Eastern tradition, a great deal has been lost.

The present icon was completed at Immanuel Benedictine Sisters Monastery in Bethlehem Palestine under the mentorship of Sister Martha, a Melkite nun. The Monastery sits adjacent to a 9-meter high “Separation Wall” constructed by Israel in 2002, separating Bethlehem and Jerusalem. During some of the darkest days in the not-so-holy Holy Land, writing icons with Sr Martha every Saturday morning has been an unexpected time of solitude, prayer, reflection, and grief; it has proven to be a time of clarity where I can hear the voice of Jesus cut through the evil of this present moment. As a Pentecostal, I never imagined that writing an icon could be such an impactful time of prayer. Before each session, we gather in the Melkite chapel and recite the following prayer:

Through the prayer of our holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen, Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee.

O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: Come and dwell in us, and cleanse us of all impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Every student of iconography must first start with Jesus—this is the rule. The significance of this cannot be overstated: there is a face to write. In Jesus, heaven touched earth; there is a face. The second icon should be associated with your name; thus, the present icon is of the Prophet Joel.

The paint is made of natural materials from the earth and mixed with a combination of water, egg yoke and vodka. The gold is from 14k sheets. Writing this icon while so much of the world in Palestine is struck by violence and oppression reminded me that our Lord is not deaf to the cries of the destitute, and that his justice will not tarry for eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s Bio: Joel D. Bornau is a pastor who has served in various capacities throughout the Middle East.





يُوئِيلُ النَّبِيُّ

وَأَعُوْضُ  
لَكُمْ عَنِ  
السَّنِينِ  
الَّتِي  
أَكَلَهَا  
الْجَرَادُ

The Script written on the scroll is Joel 2:25: “I will repay you the years that the locusts have eaten.” It felt meaningful to write the text in Arabic. Most icon texts are written either in Greek or Slavonic, but in honour of the Palestinian Church, who has remained in the Land as a witness since Pentecost, I felt it needed to be in Arabic.

A significant component of iconography is geometry. With a compass, the circles are traced, ensuring the head of the prophet is perfectly centered in the halo. Additionally, the top of the prophet’s shoulders, if traced into a complete circle, would place the centre of the tray, with the grain, new wine and oil, perfectly in the centre. This is also intentional, since any time three items appear in iconography, it is a reference to the Trinity, placing God at the centre.

A challenge with writing icons of the prophets is their lack of distinctive characteristics. Iconography, being a Christian tradition, has typically focused on New Testament figures, leaving the prophets underdeveloped. In the process of discerning how to make the prophet Joel distinguishable, Sr Martha challenged me to read through the Prophecy of Joel and note what stands out. The repeated phrase, “I am sending you grain, new wine, and oil, enough to satisfy you fully,” immediately stood out. During a time of famine, when Gaza is being starved and blockaded, focusing on this promise felt like a prophetic declaration that the present injustice will not go unaccounted for. The promise of God, spoken by the prophets, stands true through generations. Thus, I added the tray, with a humble portion of grain, wine and oil. After proposing the idea, I learned from Sr Martha that this is a component within Orthodox religious life known as the *Artoklasia* tray, which is used in the *Liti*—a service of intercession, often during all night prayer vigils. The grain symbolises the resurrection (Jn 12:24); wine is the blood of Christ; oil symbolises healing (Jas 5:14). Having the tray, aligned in such a way with both the Prophecy of Joel and the Orthodox church did not feel like a coincidence but providence, that God will indeed satisfy those starving in Gaza, either in this life or the next.

The cup is positioned perfectly over the prophet’s heart, as if to symbolise Christ’s Passion and depict the prophet’s heart in alignment with Christ’s, crying out for the oppressed. Lastly, the observant eye will notice a single drop of wine overflowing from the cup, a reference to Psalm 23, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death... *my cup overflows*, surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.”

During such hard and trying times, the icon is meant as a reminder that God is not deaf to the cries of the destitute, and though a humble offering of grain, wine and oil, our God will indeed repay the years that the locusts have eaten.