



## The Kardiotissa Greek, 15<sup>th</sup> Century

With the exception of the crucifixion, we rarely see Christ's bare arms and legs in icons, yet in this icon they were prominently exposed. This unusual detail inspired me to ask, why? In my research I discovered that this icon is the *reverse crucifixion* of Christ on the heart of His mother. Kardiotissa means tender, merciful heart and here both hearts of mother and Child are united.

The sacrificial nature of this icon is a mirror of the future, reminding us of the prophecy of Simeon. Christ's raised arms foreshadow His posture on the cross, except in this icon, His divinity is nailed to the body of Mary. "*I therefore call the Mother of God a cross,*" said one of the Church Fathers, "*for the Lord was suspended on her outstretched arms.*"

In the eschatological realm depicted in icons, there is no need for the human construct of space and time, so icons often present multiple events and concepts in non-chronological or systematic order, simultaneously. Witness here the compression of time represented by the dangling sandal - reminding us of the flight into Egypt; the Christ child as infant - reminding us of Christ the King's humble birth; and Mary's body as the locus of the Divine Self-Emptying, where God took human form and became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8).

Fittingly, the underlying geometry of this composition is a heart.

I painted this icon after four tries, during a very difficult time in my life. Every moment I spent with the Kardiotissa brought me peace, a reminder that we may offer our suffering to Mary.

She never gave up. Neither should we.

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