



## Softener of Evil Hearts

The Immaculate One is depicted with her heart pierced by seven swords—three on either side, and one below. In Sacred Scripture, the number seven usually indicates completeness and fullness. In this case, it is the fullness of that boundless sorrow, pain and “sickness of the heart” experienced by the Theotokos during her earthly life.

The "Softener of Evil Hearts" icon is also known as "Simeon's Prophecy" from Luke's Gospel when the infant Jesus was presented at the Temple: "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also." The icon transforms this prophetic warning into an image showing her not just as the blessed Mother of God but as a woman who would endure unimaginable spiritual anguish watching her Son's ministry and crucifixion unfold.

The seven swords represent the **seven sorrows of Mary**: 1) Simeon's prophecy, 2) the flight into Egypt, 3) losing Jesus in the Temple, 4) meeting him on the road to Calvary, 5) the crucifixion, 6) the descent from the cross, and 7) the burial.

The symmetrical arrangement of the swords creates a mandorla-like pattern around Mary's heart, with her body serving as the axis of suffering that connects heaven and earth. The composition often forms a subtle cross pattern, linking Mary's suffering directly to Christ's passion.

The title suggests that Mary's own heart, pierced by suffering, becomes particularly compassionate toward other hearts that have grown cold or cruel. Her transformed pain becomes a source of healing for others.

*Mariann Kitten, Iconographer*