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## BIBLICAL TEXTS IN THE BAROQUE ARTISTIC CULTURE OF KYIV

*An investigation was carried out into the biblical texts that are part of the 18th-century icons of the Saint Sophia Cathedral iconostasis in Kyiv. The specificity and originality of Kyiv Baroque sacred culture, which was based on the characteristic interaction and intertwining of the Word (liturgical texts) and the Image (icons), manifested itself most vividly in the creation of the iconostases. A comparative analysis of the icons in situ of the basement row and the seat row of the iconostasis was conducted: "Christ Pantocrator", "Mother of God with the Child", "Saint Sophia – Wisdom of God", "Hierarchs of Faith", "St. John the Theologian", "The Most Holy Theotokos – Simeon's Prophecy", "Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews", "Archangel Michael Defeats the Devil", "Sermon of St. Peter in Caesarea (Baptism of the Centurion Cornelius and His Household)", "Seven Angels with Trumpets". The deciphering of the partially faded texts was carried out with special infrared (IR) imaging; lost texts were reconstructed based on the research of relevant literature sources. It has been established that the visual context of the iconostasis incorporates texts from the Gospels, the Epistles, the Letter of James, the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, the Book of Joshua, the prophetic books of Isaiah and Zechariah, the Book of Genesis, the Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, and the Akathist to the Theotokos. By examining the relationship between the visual imagery and the biblical texts, researchers have been able to reconstruct the main idea behind the iconostasis's iconographic program: to bring together the image of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, and the image of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. This research also demonstrates that the texts incorporated into the icons serve not only to preach and educate but also to provide biblical interpretation. A comprehensive examination of the biblical texts present in the iconostasis, with a focus on the cohesive artistic vision, is crucial for enhancing our comprehension of Slavic/Eastern Christian sacred art and its theological significance.*

**Key words:** Kyiv, iconostasis, Baroque, Biblical texts.

### **Рижова Ольга. БІБЛІЙНІ ТЕКСТИ В БАРОКОВІЙ ХУДОЖНІЙ КУЛЬТУРІ КИЄВА**

*У статті публікуються результати досліджень біблійних текстів, що входять до складу ікон іконостасу XVIII ст. Софійського собору в Києві. Специфіка та своєрідність київської барокової сакральної культури, що була заснована на характерній взаємодії і переплетінні Слова (богослужбових текстів) та образу (ікон), найбільш яскраво проявили себе насамперед у створенні іконостасів. Проведено компаративний аналіз ікон in situ цокольного ряду і місцевого ряду іконостасу: «Господь Вседержитель», «Богородиця з Немовлям», «Свята Софія – Премудрість Божа», «Ієрархи віри», «Св. апостол Іоанн Богослов», «Богородиця-Симеонове пророчення», «Послання святого Павла до євреїв», «Архангел Михаїл перемагає диявола», «Проповідь святого Петра в Кесарії (Хрещення сотника Корнилія та його дому)», «Сім янголів із трубами». Прочитання окремих, частково вицвілих текстів стало можливим завдяки спеціальній зйомці в інфрачервоній області спектра; реконструкція втрачених текстів здійснювалася на основі літературних джерел. Встановлено, що візуальний контекст іконостасу містить тексти з Євангелій, Апостольських Послань, Послання Якова, Одкровення Івана Богослова, Книги Ісуса Навина, пророчих книг Ісаї та Захарія, Книги Буття, Псалмів, Приповістей Соломона та Акафісту до Богородиці. Досліджуючи взаємозв'язок між візуальними образами та біблійними текстами, стало можливим реконструювати основну ідею іконографічної програми іконостасу: об'єднання образу Софії Премудрості Божої з образом Діви Марії-Богородиці. Також встановлено, що тексти на цих іконах служать не лише проповіді та навчання, але й тлумаченню біблійного образу. Всебічний аналіз біблійних текстів, присутніх в іконостасі, з акцентом на цілісному художньому баченні, має вирішальне значення для кращого розуміння слов'янського/східнохристиянського сакрального мистецтва та його богословського значення.*

**Ключові слова:** Київ, іконостас, бароко, біблійні тексти.

**Introduction.** The specific character and originality of Kyiv's Baroque sacred artistic culture, which was based on the characteristic interaction and interpenetration of Word (biblical and liturgical texts) and Image (icons), was most vividly manifested primarily in the creation of iconostases. The 18th-century Baroque iconostases of Kyiv, with their intricate tapestry of biblical and liturgical texts, represent a remarkable discovery, a profound revelation, and a unique phenomenon. They stand as a testament to the richness and depth of Eastern Christian Orthodox artistic tradition.

In Kyiv, four iconostases from the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra have survived in their original locations. These include the iconostasis of the Holy Trinity Gate Church (1734–1735), the iconostasis of the All Saints Church above the Economic Gate (1741–1745), and the iconostases of two cave churches in the Far Caves: the iconostasis of St. Theodosius of the Caves (1761–1762) and the iconostasis of the Nativity of Christ (1802–1803); it is also important to highlight the iconostasis of the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, which dates back to 1731–1754 and was created for the Metropolitan Cathedral [1, c. 104–388].

Drawing inspiration from a 17th-century Greek prototype, Kyiv's iconostases evolved into imposing architectural structures. They featured distinct divisions and were embellished with a variety of intricately shaped icons, carved cartouches, and lavish gilded relief carvings. Beyond their Baroque aesthetics, Kyiv's iconostases possessed a distinctive characteristic that sets them apart from those found in other Eastern Christian regions: a pronounced didactic and dogmatic function, clearly articulated and reinforced visually and verbally through the Word. These aspects were extremely important and were conceived by the authors of theological programs, together with the images, not only as complementing the images but also as an independent conceptual corpus. The diverse range of ideas and subtle shades of meaning, communicated through the incorporation of texts into the visual and architectural material of the iconostases, makes Kyiv's iconostases a remarkable phenomenon worthy of study.

For the study, the main iconostasis of the oldest cathedral in Kyiv was chosen, which became a symbol of the revival of the Kyiv Metropolis in 1743. The iconostasis of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv was built through the efforts of two Metropolitans of Kyiv: Raphael Zaborovsky (†1747), who began the construction, and Timothy Shcherbatsky (†1767), who completed it after Zaborovsky's death [2, c. 69]. Unfortunately, the grandiose ensemble lost part of its multi-tiered structure during its existence, particularly the festive, apostolic, and prophetic tiers. Currently, the iconostasis is a pre-altar barrier: the socle and deesis tiers have been preserved. However, the well-conceived and visually holistic image of the iconostasis has not lost its main theological, liturgical, and decorative functions, even in fragments.

Comparing F. Solntsev's drawing [3, c. 23], which depicts the iconostasis before its reconstruction, with the surviving icons and fragments of decorative elements, along with a correct reading of the texts and an examination of the connections between the inscriptions and the images, makes it possible to reconstruct and interpret the monumental and multi-layered symbolic “text” of the iconostasis.

**Materials and methods.** The author conducted an on-site examination of the icons in situ. The reading of individual, partially faded texts was made possible by special infrared photography (IR photography, by O. Honchar and O. Ryzhova); the restoration of lost texts was carried out based on literary sources.

**Discussion.** In the symbolic program of the iconostasis of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, several themes prevail, but the semantic core is four icons of the local tier – “Christ Pantocrator”, “Mother of God with the Child”, “Saint Sophia – Wisdom of God”, “Hierarchs of Faith” – in which its main plot-thematic line is visually revealed: the convergence of the image of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, with the image of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [2, c. 49–51].

In the icon “*Christ Pantocrator*”, the Savior is presented in the iconographic type of Lord Almighty. The Savior's right hand is folded in a gesture of nominal blessing in front of his

chest; in his left hand, Christ holds an open Gospel. The text on the spread of the book is a fragment from Christ's sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20): «ДѢХЪ ГДЕНЬ НА МНѢ, ЕГОЖЕ РАДИ ПОМАЗА МЯ, БЛГОВѢСТІТИ НИЦЫМЪ ПОСЛА МЯ, ИСЦѢЛИТИ СОКРШЕНІА СРЦЕМЪ, ПРОПОВѢДАТИ ПЛКНЕННЫМЪ ѠПШЕНІЕ, ИСЦѢПИТИ ПРОЗРѢНІЕ: ѠПШТИТИ СОКРШЕНІА ВО ѠРАДѢ: ПРОПОВѢДАТИ ЛѢТО ГДНЕ ПРІАТНО.» (Luke 4:18-19).

The Lord's sermon in the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath day is commemorated on the first of September (O.S.), when the beginning of the ecclesiastical indiction is celebrated. This testifies to the beginning of a New Time, the Lord's Time as an epoch, and the reign of the one true King – Christ himself. Since the beginning of the new ecclesiastical year is announced by priests at the behest of the high priest, this Gospel text also testifies to the priestly anointing of Christ.

Given that Saint Sophia Cathedral served as the main cathedral for the Kyiv Metropolis until the early 20th century, and was the site of episcopal ordinations, it is reasonable to suggest that this specific Gospel passage was chosen to emphasize the theme of grace bestowed upon those in priestly and episcopal service. The figurative “surroundings” of the Savior's icon support this assertion: above the icon is a cartouche with the inscription «АЗЪ ЕСМЪ СВѢТЪ МІРУ:» (John 8:12), the mosaic image of Christ the Priest, located at the top of the eastern transverse arch, and a piece of cloth over the Savior's belt, which also belongs to the attributes of episcopal and liturgical vestments. Thus, Christ is here the anointed one or the Messiah in the exclusive meaning of this word that is, having all kinds of anointing prophetic, royal and of the high priest.

In the icon “Mother of God with the Child”, the Mother of God is presented in the iconographic type of Hodegetria. She holds the Infant Christ on her left hand and prayerfully points to Him with her right hand. The Christ Child rests on the left hand of the Virgin Mary. With two fingers He blesses; with His left hand He holds an open book. On the spread of the book is an inscription – lines from the

Revelation of St. John the Theologian (Rev. 1:8): «АЗЪ ЕСМЪ АЛФА И ОМЕГА».

The inclusion of verses from the Book of Revelation in the “Mother of God with the Child” icon adds another layer of thematic meaning, highlighting the divine nature and pre-eternal existence of the Infant Christ. The inscription from Psalm 44:10 in the cartouche above the icon: «Предста Царіца одеснѣю Тебѣ» interprets the Mother of God as the Church; see St. Athanasius the Great: “The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gilded garments. The queen is the Church, adorned as a bride for the great King, and standing at the right hand signifies the honor she will be granted in the age to come, and her multicolored garments represent faith, hope, and love. But she also has another, most radiant garment – Christ himself”.

Time has unfortunately erased the inscriptions on the “*Holy Sophia, Wisdom of God*” icon that explained the symbolism of the composition's elements. These lost inscriptions, which include text on the scrolls, the archangels' attributes, and the medallions' symbols, are crucial for understanding the icon's complex and unique iconographic program. Therefore, to properly understand the nuances of iconography and artistic features, we turned to the work of Metropolitan Eugene (Bolkhovitinov) “Description of the Kyiv Sophia Cathedral and the Kyiv Diocese” (1825), where the original is described in detail [2, c. 49–51].

“[...] the cathedral icon of Saint Sophia in Kyiv depicts, beneath a canopy upheld by seven pillars, the Mother of God standing upon a crescent moon, which rests on a cloud; beneath the cloud is an ambo with six steps. Upon the breast of the Mother of God, within the medallion adorning the front of her phelonion, is shown the Savior seated, clad in a white chiton with a golden cloak draped over the left shoulder, blessing with His right hand and holding a globus cruciger in His left. Along the cornice of the canopy runs an inscription in majuscule script with the aforementioned words of Solomon: Η ΣΟΦΙΑ ΩΚΟΔΟΜΗΣΕΝ ΕΑΥΤΗ ΟΙΚΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΥΠΗΡΕΙΣΕ ΣΤΥΛΟΥΣ ΕΠΤΑ. Above the canopy, at its summit, God the Father

is depicted within rays, inclining and bestowing a blessing. From His mouth, along the rays, are inscribed to the right the words of David (Psalm 74:4): *I have established*, and to the left: *its pillars*. Below God the Father, above the summit of the canopy, the Holy Spirit is depicted amid radiant clouds, encircled by luminous rays, which extend downward and rest upon the head of the Mother of God. On either side of God the Father, above the canopy, are seven winged angels: on the right, *Michael* holding a flaming sword, *Uriel* with a downward-pointing lightning bolt, and *Raphael* bearing an alabaster vessel of myrrh; on the left, *Gabriel* with a lily branch in his hand, *Selaphiel* with prayer beads, *Jegudiel* with a royal crown, and *Barachiel* holding a cluster of flowers upon a white cloth. Before the Mother of God, upon the steps of the ambo, stand the Patriarchs and Prophets. On the right, on the third step from the top – formed of clouds and situated beneath the feet of the Theotokos – stands the *Prophet Moses*, holding in both hands the double tablets; with the finger of his right hand he points to the inscription upon them: *Rejoice, O tablet of God, upon which the Word of God was inscribed by the finger of the Father*. On the fourth step stands *Aaron*, vested in the mitre and garments of the Old Testament high priesthood; in his right hand he holds the rod that budded, while with his left he points to the steps beneath the feet of the Mother of God. On the sixth step stands *David*, wearing a royal crown and a mantle with an ermine collar and lining, holding in both hands the Ark of the Covenant. On the left side, from the cloud beneath the feet of the Mother of God, on the third step opposite *Moses*, stands the *Prophet Isaiah*, bearing a scroll upon his left shoulder and supporting it with his left hand; with his right he points to the inscription on the scroll: *Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel*. On the fourth step, opposite *Aaron*, stands *Jeremiah*, holding a scroll in his right hand and gesturing to the side with his left. On the fifth step is *Ezekiel*, holding in his hands the closed gate. On the sixth step is *Daniel*, with a stone in his hands. On the lower steps, the first bears the inscription *Faith*, and on either side of this word: *her*

*ascent by seven steps*. On the second step is *Hope*, on the third *Love*, on the fourth *Purity*, on the fifth *Humility*, on the sixth *Grace*, and on the seventh – formed of clouds beneath the feet of the Mother of God – *Glory*. On all seven pillars of the canopy, beneath the capitals of the Corinthian order, are emblems set within circular medallions. On the outermost pillar to the right of the Mother of God is depicted a book in the form of a scroll, from which seven seals are suspended; above it is the inscription: 1. *The gift of wisdom*, and below it: *I saw a book sealed with seven seals*. On the second pillar is the emblem of a seven-branched candlestick; above it is the inscription: 2. *The gift of understanding*, and below: *I beheld a golden candlestick, with seven lamps upon it*. On the third pillar, the one nearest to the Mother of God, is the emblem of seven eyes; above them is the inscription: 3. *The gift of counsel*, and below: *Upon a single stone are seven eyes*. On the fourth pillar, nearest the left side, is the emblem of seven trumpets; above them is the inscription: 4. *The gift of fortitude*, and below: *Seven trumpets for the fall of Jericho*. On the fifth pillar is a right hand surrounded by seven stars; above it is the inscription: 5. *The gift of knowledge*, and below: *In His right hand, seven stars*. On the sixth pillar are seven fiery censers, with the inscription above: 6. *The gift of piety*, and below: *Seven golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*. On the seventh pillar is a cluster of fiery lightning bolts, with the inscription above: 7. *The gift of the fear of God*, and below: *The seven thunders uttered their voices.*”

The description of the icon made by Metropolitan Eugene (Bolkhovitinov) and comparison with the original allow us to assert that the following texts were used as literary sources for the creation of the Kyiv version of “Sophia – Wisdom of God”: the Books of Proverbs (Proverbs 9:1), Psalms «ІЗЪ УТВЕРДИХЪ СТОЛПЫ ЕЯ» (Ps. 74:4), prophetic books – the Book of Isaiah: «СЕ, ДѢВА ВО ЧРѢВѢ ПРИЙМЕТЪ И РОДИТЪ СНА, ИНАРЕКУТЪ ИМА ЕМУ ЕМАНУИЛАЪ» (Isa. 7:14), Zechariah «ВИДѢХЪ СВѢЩНИКЪ ЗЛАГЪ ИСВѢТІЛНІИ ВЕРХУ ЕГО» (Zech. 4:2); «НА КАМЕНИ ЕДИНОМЪ СЕДМЬ УЧЕСЪ» (Zech. 3:9); the Book of Revelation:

«ВІДѢ[ХЪ] КНИГѢ ЗАПЕЧАТАНѢ СЕДМІЮ ПЕЧАТІЮ» (Rev. 5:1); «ВРѢЦѢ ДЕСНѢ СЕДМЪ ЗВѢЗѢ:» (Rev. 1:16); «СЕМЪ ФИАЛЫ ЗЛАТИ ПѢНЫ ДИМИДА ГАЖЕ СѢИ МЛТВЫ СѢТЫХЪ» (Rev. 5:8, 8:3); «ГАГЛША СЕМЪ ГРОМОВЪ ГЛАСЫ СВОИМИ.» (Rev. 10:4); the Book of Joshua «СЕДМЪ ТРѢБЪ НАПАДЕНИЕ ЕРИХОНА» (Josh. 6:12), as well as verses from the Akathist to the Theotokos. «РАДѢСЯ СКРИЖАЛѢ ВНЕИЖ ПѢСТОМЪ ѠЧИ НАПИСАСА СЛОВО». The text of the Apocalypse corresponds to the very image of the Theotokos standing on the crescent moon, and the multiple repetitions of the sacred number “7” (Rev. 12:1). The inscription on the cartouche above the icon is a quotation from John 1:14. «СЛОВО ПЛОТЬ ВЪСТЪ».

In the icon “*Hierarchs of Faith*”, the artist created a carefully structured and balanced composition. The space is divided into distinct sections using gentle, semi-circular lines. The upper part features a vibrant blue sky, while the lower part depicts marble steps, symbolizing an ascent. Seven saints, representing the hierarchs of faith, act as intermediaries between the heavenly and earthly realms. The inscription on the cartouche above them is a quote from Matthew 18:19. «ТѢ ЕСМЪ ПОСРЕДѢ ИХЪ»; the Holy Fathers of the Church interpret as a call for unanimity and concord in conciliar prayer.

In the central and highest point of the icon’s sky, a golden Golgotha cross is depicted with four nails at its base. Below Golgotha, there is a wide scroll with an inscription from the catholic epistle of James (James 3:17): «ИЖЕ СВѢШШЕ ПРЕМРОСТЬ ПЕРВѢ ЧТѢ Е. ПОТѢМЪ ЖЕ МІРНА КРОТКА ВЛГО ПОКОРИВА ИСПОЛНЪ МІЛОСТИ И ПЛОДѢВЪ ВЛГІИ НЕСМѢНА И НЕЛИЦЕ МѢРНА».

On the left side of Golgotha, enclosed in a round pink mandorla, there are three golden bishop’s croziers, intertwined in the shape of a triangle. Beneath this image, there is an inscription written in gold: «ТРИ СВАТИТЕЛИ ТРЕМА СВОИМИ ЖЕЗЛАМИ ШИТ ТРОИЦИ ПРОВАТАЯ ПИШѢТЪ ВЪТИ СНАМИ».

On the right side of Golgotha, enclosed in a round pink mandorla, there are four golden bishop’s croziers. Two croziers are crossed diagonally, with the other two placed on either side. Beneath this image, there is an inscription

written in gold: «ЧЕТЫРЕХЪ СВАТИТЕЛЕЙ ЖЕЗЛЫ НАЧИНАЮТ ИМЯ МАРИИ ТОЩИТЪ ПОТРОИЦИ ЯВЛЯЮТ».

The upper register of the image uses symbols to represent three key themes: the Wisdom of God, which occupies the central axis; the Trinity, depicted on the left; and the Mother of God, shown on the right.

Another register in the sky features seven applied medallions in a golden relief frame; they correlate with both the symbols of the upper register and the figures of the saints. The painted images that were previously placed on the convex “mirrors” of the medallions are now erased; below is according to the text of the article by Yu. Zvezdina [4, с. 130–138].

Under the “burning pillar” medallion, the furthest on the left, stands the holy hierarch Basil the Great. The next two medallions, “Holy Spirit” and “Apostle Paul”, are joined at the bottom by a ribbon; on the ribbon is the inscription: «И ТРОНЪ ВІЗАНТІЙСКІЙ». Below the second medallion stands the figure of Saint Gregory the Theologian, followed by Saint John Chrysostom under the third medallion. The central medallion, which appears to be empty or without a clear image, is positioned above the figure of Saint James, who stands on a central platform or cathedra. A ribbon above Saint James bears an inscription: «Д ЕРСЛИМСКІЙ». Below the fifth medallion, which features a heart with the name of Christ, stands the figure of Saint Ignatius the God-bearer. A ribbon above the saint bears the inscription: «ИТИСѢХІЙСКИЙ». Below the sixth medallion, which depicts the Trinity, stands the figure of Saint Athanasius. Under the seventh medallion, featuring an icon of the Mother of God, is the figure of Saint Cyril. These two medallions on the right are connected by a ribbon at the bottom, which bears an inscription: «В ІЛЕЖАНДРІЙСКІЙ».

While the saints occupy the ambo and the first three steps, the subsequent steps feature inscriptions and symbols.

In the center of the fourth and fifth steps, the inscription «ДВА ХЕРѢВІМА СУТЬ ВЕЛИКІЙ ПЕРВОСТЪЛЪ ИАНТИСѢХІЙСКИЙ» is positioned between two tall golden ripids. This arrangement visually connects the figures of St. James,



of Jerusalem, in the center, is represented by St. James (approx. † 63), the Brother of the Lord, Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem. To his right stands St. Ignatius the God-bearer († 108), who headed (67-107) the See of Antioch. The Church of Alexandria is represented by the figures of Sts. Athanasius the Great († 373) and Cyril of Alexandria († 444).

The compositions of the icons “Hierarchs of Faith” and “Holy Sophia, Wisdom of God”, which are based on dogmatic theology, are the fruit of refined theological thought and iconographic creativity. Extensive commentary inscriptions accompanying the images explain not only their dogmatic basis but also the essence of the pictorial symbolism itself. The Kyiv versions of the images “Sophia, Wisdom of God” and “Hierarchs of Faith” are unique and mark a new era in the icon painting of Kyiv – an era of completely innovative compositions, in which the authors try to incorporate eternal and God-revealed truths, the spiritual experience of faith, and communion with God.

In the icon “*St. John the Theologian*”, we see the image of a beautiful youth standing and leaning on a lectern. An eagle with a quill in its beak is depicted above John’s head, and the apostle himself holds a book lying on the lectern with his right hand and a scroll with his left. The inscriptions on the scroll and the book emphasise the mystical and visionary state of the evangelist: «И четвёртое животное подобно орлу летящему» (Rev. 4:7), «И видяхомъ славу егип[...], славу единороднаго ѿца» (John 1:14).

In the icon “*The Most Holy Theotokos – Simeon’s Prophecy*”, the Virgin’s hands, folded on her chest, are pierced by a sword. A ribbon with an inscription wraps around the blade of the sword «и тебе, самои прониде оружене, въдушю» (Lk. 2:35). The words spoken by Simeon the Righteous in the Gospel of Luke are unanimously understood by theologians as a prophecy of the deep sorrow that the Virgin Mary would experience upon witnessing the crucifixion of Christ.

The icons in the socle row of the main iconostasis’s central section depict scenes from the Old Testament and prefigurements of the

New Testament. These include “The Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews”, “Archangel Michael Defeats the Devil”, “Sermon of the Holy Apostle Peter in Caesarea”, and “Seven Angels with Trumpets”.

In the icon “*Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews*”, the key to the image is the inscription on the scroll: «Повинѣйтесь наставникомъ вашимъ ипокарѣйтесь: тѣи бо дадѣтъ ѡ дѣлахъ вашихъ яко слово возда ти хотѣше» (Hebrews 13:17). These are the words of the Apostle Paul from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which the Church interprets as advice to bishops.

The icon “*Archangel Michael Defeats the Devil*” depicts the scene of the battle between Archangel Michael and the devil-Satan; chapter 12 from the Book of Revelation (Rev. 12) is taken as the verbal primary source. On the ribbon placed below, it is written: «И даны быша женѣ два крыла орла великаго. да паритъ въ пустыню вѣсто свое» (Rev. 12:14).

In the icon “*Sermon of St. Peter in Caesarea (Baptism of the Centurion Cornelius and His Household)*”, the inscription on the ribbon is a quotation from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews: «яко вси оубѣдадѣтъ ма ѿмала да же до велика йхъ» (Hebrews 8:11).

In the icon “*Seven Angels with Trumpets*”, the inscription on the ribbon placed below the image is a quotation from the prophetic Book of Revelation (Apocalypse): «Изыде дымъ кадильный молитвамъ стѣхъ ѿ рѣки аггала предъ вѣа» (Rev. 8:4).

**Results.** The reconstruction of the semantic connections identified the main sacred theme, which is revealed in the unity of image and text: the Orthodox Church’s understanding of the Mother of God.

It has been revealed that the four icons of the local tier in the central part of the main iconostasis: “Hierarchs of Faith”, “Mother of God with the Child”, “Lord Almighty”, “Holy Sophia, Wisdom of God”, are the core of the symbolic text, where the main plot-thematic line is visually revealed: the convergence of the image of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, with the image of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos.

It is noted that in the icon “Christ Pantocrator” the fragment of the Gospel text is intended to especially highlight the theme of the grace of the priesthood and episcopal ministry.

It is indicated that the introduction into the composition “Mother of God with the Child” of lines from the Revelation of St. John the Theologian (Rev. 1:8) creates an additional thematic association, where the divine dignity and pre-existence of the Christ Child are emphasized, and the inscription in the cartouche with the text from the Psalm (Ps. 44:10) interprets the Mother of God as the Church.

It is established that the main themes embodied in the iconographic program of the icon “Hierarchs of Faith” are a reflection of the main dogmas of the Orthodox faith: the dogma of God, One in Three Persons, and the dogma of Christ the Savior, in which the aspect of His birth from the Virgin Mary is especially highlighted.

It has been demonstrated that the visual context of the iconostasis incorporates texts from the Gospels (Lk. 2:35; Jn. 1:14; Matt. 18:19), the Epistles (Heb. 8:11; 13:17), the Epistle of James (Jas. 3:17), the Revelation of St. John the Theologian (Rev. 1:8; 1:16; 4:7; 5:1; 5:8; 8:3; 8:4; 10:4; 12:1), the Book of Joshua (6:12), the prophetic books of Isaiah (8:1; 7:1) and Zechariah (4:2; 3:9), the Book of Genesis (28:12), the Psalms (Ps. 44:10), the Proverbs of Solomon, and the Akathist to the Theotokos.

It has been demonstrated that the texts incorporated into the visual compositions of the icons, in addition to their homiletical and educational functions, also play the role of biblical exegesis.

A detailed analysis of the biblical texts in the icons of the iconostasis, from the point of view of the integrity of the design, allows us to improve the understanding of Slavic/Eastern Christian sacred contexts.

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