

# Sacred Russian Castings



Metal Icons & Crosses from the  
11<sup>th</sup> c. to the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

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Down the pathways of history, the cross has long been recognized as a symbol of the Christian faith. But this was not always so. For the first 400 years after the death of Jesus, Christians were routinely persecuted,

even put to death so the faithful were forced to practice their beliefs covertly. This utmost need for secrecy called early Christians to devise and adopt obscure symbols to identify themselves- a “hidden language” that employed common images such as a fish, dove or anchor as markers for the faithful.

Only with the fourth century conversion of the Roman Empire, Constantine I- and his decree that it become the Empire’s official faith- were Christians at last able to come forth from underground, practicing their faith in public and using such overtly identifying symbols as the cross.

Tradition tells that Constantine, whose own mother was a devout Christian, had a powerful vision of leading his armies to victory

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would later finance an excursion, led by his mother, for the purpose of recovering the true Cross from Moslem-occupied Jerusalem. And as Christianity reached out across the centuries that followed, use of the cross became widespread in both church and home.

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In 988 A.D., Prince Vladimir of Kiev brought Christianity to Russia’s loosely-knit pagan tribes, employing the new faith as a strategy for uniting the tribes in a common defense against invading hordes. Embracing the faith of Constantine, Vladimir established Eastern Orthodoxy as Russia’s official religion and encouraged its heavy use of Christian images in the form of painted icons and crosses.

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With the passing of time, the Russian Church would come to depict the crucifixion using many artistic variants. Crosses themselves were to play an increasingly visible role in religious rites

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and ceremonies, with hand-held blessing crosses and larger, processional pieces having a significant place in the Orthodox liturgy.



Small crosses of brass or silver were given to infants at the time of baptism and were often worn for a lifetime. Larger, more elaborate crosses of metal or wood were worn by the clergy. Cast brass crosses adorned every Orthodox

Russian family's "beautiful corner"- the place in each home given over to spiritual devotions.

Over time as well, there emerged sharp distinctions between the Latin and Orthodox crosses. In the standard Russian cross, the figure of Christ is positioned serenely, without the crown of thorns. The feet are nailed separately. The arms are outstretched perpendicular to the body and the body's weight is largely supported by the legs.

In contrast, the Latin cross most often depicts Jesus with a crown of thorns, an anguished countenance and the body's weight painfully borne by arms suspended from the horizontal bar of the cross.

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Another distinguishing mark of the Russian cross is the foot support, which is usually tilted upward, toward the right side. This positioning is thought to suggest the choice of a life that leads either to Heaven or Hell.

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More dramatic still is the appearance of Adam's skull at the base of many Russian crosses. This representation follows a tradition that Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, was also the burial site of Adam.

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The Russian crosses in this exhibit span some 900 years. Both individually and collectively, they demonstrate Christians' long-held belief of Christ's death as a pathway for their own life's journey to salvation.

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Cast metal icons and crosses were inexpensive, durable and portable objects of veneration. Small crosses of brass or silver were given to infants at the time of baptism and were often worn for a lifetime.

In the middle of the seventeenth century a great split occurred in the Russian Orthodox Church over changes made to the liturgy. This resulted in large factions breaking away from the state sponsored church. A group known as the “Old Believers” favored the use of metal icons and set up workshops throughout the countryside devoted to the production of these religious items.

Despite a decree by Peter the Great in 1723 that forbade the production and sale of cast metal icons, they continued being made until the late nineteenth century.

M *Sacred Russian Castings* chronicles the history of the Russian Church through these holy objects.

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s: 250 brass and enameled icons, pectoral, processional and wall mounted crosses; painted icon panels with inserted metal crosses. (Small pectoral crosses are mounted together in three hanging panels.)



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## 125 crosses include the following:

- Assorted cast metal and enameled crosses, blessing crosses and priests' crosses.
- Small pectoral crosses mounted in 3 framed hanging panels.
- Painted icons with inset metal crosses.
- Wall mounted crosses.

## 125 metal icons include the following subjects:

### *Mother of God*

The Nativity of the Mother of God  
 The Annunciation  
 The Protection of the Mother of God  
 The "Joy of All Who Suffer" Mother of God  
 The "Kazan" Mother of God  
 The "Smolensk" Mother of God

The "Tikhvin" Mother of God  
 The "Three-Handed" Mother of God  
 The Mother of God of the Passion  
 The Mother of God of the Sign  
 The Virgin of the Burning Bush

### *Christ*

The Nativity of Christ  
 The Image "Not Made By Hands"  
 Christ Angel of the Blessed Silence  
 Christ Pantocrator  
 Savior of Smolensk  
 The Resurrection  
 The Resurrection and Descent into Hell  
 Christ Blessing the Communion  
 Mother, Do Not Weep for Me

### *Other icon subjects*

Old Testament Trinity  
 Deisis  
 Extended Deisis  
 Deisis with Saints  
 Twelve Principle Feast Days

### *Angels and Saints*

Angel of the Great Council  
 Archangel Michael  
 Saint Antipas  
 Holy Demetrius of Thessalonika  
 The Fiery Ascent of Elijah the Prophet  
 Saint George  
 Saints Julitta and Cyricus (Kirik)  
 Saint John the Theologian  
 Saint John the Forerunner (Baptist)  
 Saint Martyr Nikita Defeating the Demon  
 Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker

Saint Nephon  
 Saint Nicholas of Zaraisk  
 Saint Nicholas of Mozhaik  
 Saint Paraskeva  
 Saint Varus  
 Saint Boris and Saint Gleb  
 Saint Zosima and Saint Savvatii  
 Saints George, Antipas and Blasios  
 Saints Florus, Laurus and Antipas  
 Saints John, Kosmas and Damian  
 The Three Hierarchs