

Christian Orthodox icon said to miraculously produce myrrh makes first trip to Inland Northwest



Myrrh appears to seep from the “Miraculous Myrrhstreaming Icon of the Mother of God” at St. John the Baptist Orthodox Christian Church in Post Falls, Sept. 1, 2019. The letter paper-sized icon, which was brought to Idaho for the first time on Sunday, is believed to be a holy miracle and travels around the world.

Thousands of dollars worth of religious artwork, called icons, line the walls of St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church in Post Falls.

But it was a \$20 mass-produced picture of the Virgin Mary said to have been found in a bargain bin in Toronto, Ontario, that brought close to 400 people to the small church Sunday morning, about three times the church’s normal showing.

Nectarios Yangson, the caretaker of the icon, known as the Iveron Icon, told parishioners that he found it in a puddle of floral-smelling oil on a bookshelf in his home in Hawaii. He told them that lab tests later revealed it miraculously produces myrrh, an oily resin that was among the gifts given to Jesus at birth, according to the Bible. Yangson is a deacon at the Holy Theotokos of Iveron Russian Orthodox Church based in Honolulu.

After Yangson's presentation, people waited in line for priests to anoint them with what they enthused was a real-life miracle.

The icon, which has visited more than 1,000 churches since 2007, made its first trip to the Inland Northwest this weekend, an appearance that was years in the making, Yangson and other church officials said.

The Rev. Mark Townsend of St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church said he started writing to Yangson about two years ago after learning that Townsend's wife, Joanna, the church choir director, had an aggressive form of breast cancer.

The couple had heard stories about local parishioners visiting the icon during visits to California and Seattle and coming home healed of various ailments. Yangson told a story about a girl who was cured of painful, head-to-toe sores during a visit of the icon to the United Kingdom.

"I said, 'Would you please consider bringing the icon out to North Idaho?' " Townsend recalled. "She's got quite a track record of helping individuals as they need."

The piece of art purportedly produces so much resin that when it's removed from its protective case, the resin left behind is bottled to send to churches around the world.

Joanna Townsend said friends gave her resin from the icon and she rubbed it on her chest in the shape of a cross each night before bed. Now, she said, she's cancer-free.

"Miracles happen every day, and this is saying stop to look at them," she said.

An icon visit to the Post Falls church was first scheduled in March, but the visit was canceled because the icon determines its own schedule, Mark Townsend said. Then, three weeks ago, the icon said it was time to come to Post Falls, he said.

Between visits to Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church in Spokane and the

Post Falls church on Saturday and Sunday, Mark Townsend estimated close to 1,000 people from as far as British Columbia came to visit the icon.

“A miraculous icon like this, they are not that common,” he said. “It brings with it a great blessing for the entire area.”

Athanasius Spine, of Spokane, said he lived in Russia during the 1990s and witnessed throngs of people who went to see a similar myrrh-streaming icon.

“It had probably 10,000 people going down the streets of St. Petersburg,” he said.

Serban Olaru, of Coeur d’Alene, who grew up in Romania, said miracles like these are hard for people who grew up in Western traditions to reconcile. It was something he had to come to terms with himself as someone who studied so much science to become a dentist.

He said it has forced him to be humble and acknowledge that miracles, which are signs of the presence of God, don’t have to be explained.

“He says, ‘I am with you, I will never leave you,’ ” Olaru said.

Church member Barbara Schaefer said she watched Yangson open the case the icon is kept in and pour myrrh onto the head and down the back of a girl with leukemia who goes to the church.

“It’s this little open window from heaven,” she said. “It’s like God left the window open and she continues to pour out her grace.”

Joanna Townsend was covered in myrrh by Yangson on Saturday.

“All I could do was cry because it was so overwhelming to be in God’s presence,” she said. “It was like being surrounded by God.”

- Source: [spokesman.com](https://www.spokesman.com)