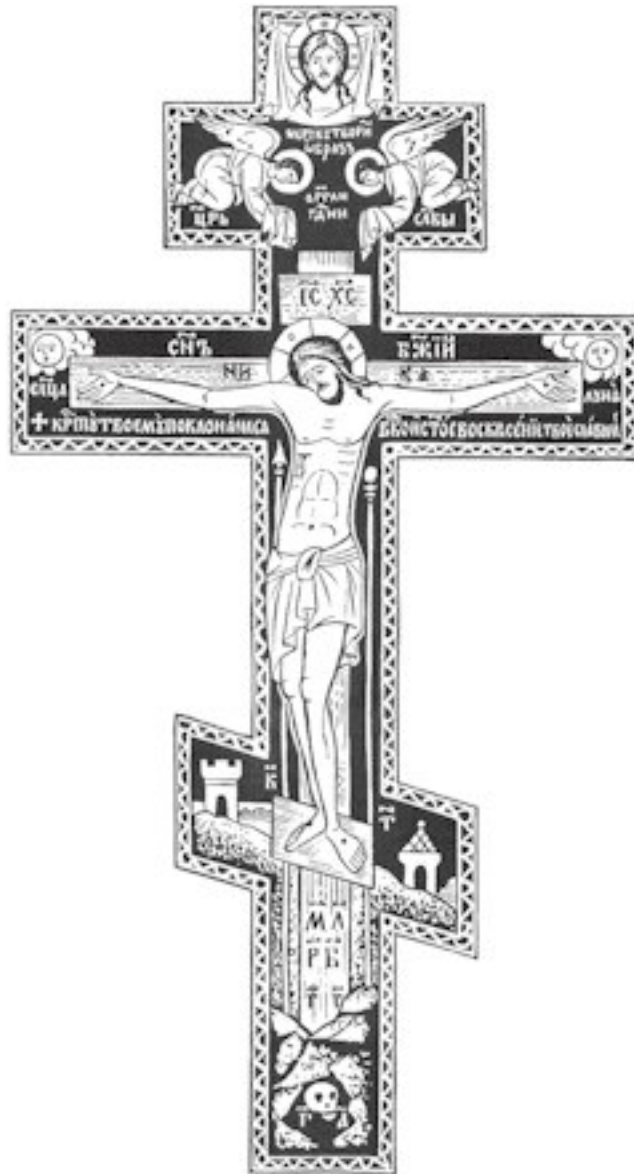


The Image



The Explanation:

On the Cross is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Note that He does not wear a crown of thorns, and that His feet are nailed with two nails. Behind the body of Christ, on either side, are a lance (which pierced Him) and a sponge (which was soaked with gall and offered to Christ to drink) on a pole made of reed or cane. On the body of Christ is depicted blood and water flowing forth from His side. Below the feet of Christ are four Slavonic letters meaning: "The place of the skull became Paradise". Hidden in a cave under the earth is 'the skull of Adam'. We are thus reminded that Adam our forefather lost Paradise through the tree from which he wrongly partook; Christ is the new Adam, bringing us Salvation and Paradise through the tree of the Cross. The city of Jerusalem is depicted in the background, for He was crucified outside the city walls.

The Top Bar



The Explanation:

The top bar is the title-board which Pilate ordered to be hung in mockery over Christ's head on the Cross. On this board was inscribed: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (abbreviated to the Greek initials 'INBI' or the Latin initials 'INRI' in the Western tradition). This is replaced with the Christian inscription: "King of Glory" – below the knees of the angels. On the title-board is inscribed the initials 'IC XC', being the first and last letters of Christ's name in Greek. In addition, just above Christ's arms we see the inscription: 'NIKA', which in Greek means: "He conquers" or "He is victorious." Frequently, we see these last two inscriptions together: 'IC XC NIKA', meaning: "Jesus Christ is victorious" (over death and sin).

The Middle Bar



The Explanation:

The middle bar is that on which the Lord's hands were nailed. On either top corner we see the depiction of the sun (left) and the moon (right), for "The sun hid its light, and the moon turned to blood." (Joel 2:31) The inscription: "Son of God" is placed on both sides of Christ's head, and below His arms we read the inscription: "Before Thy Cross we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection, we glorify". The halo of Christ is inscribed with three Greek letters meaning "The Being" or "He Who Is", to remind us that Christ is the same God Who identified Himself with those words to Moses in the Old Law.

The Bottom Bar



The Explanation:

The slanted bottom bar is the foot-rest. There is some question of whether it was actually on the Cross of Christ, but it is acknowledged to be a necessary attribute of the Cross, worthy of veneration and prophetically alluded to in the words [Let us] worship the footstool of His feet... (Ps. 98:5).

In prayers for the Ninth Hour, the Church likens the Cross to a type of balance of righteousness:

"Between two thieves Thy Cross did prove to be a balance of righteousness: wherefore one of them was dragged down to Hades by the weight of his blasphemy whereas the other was lightened of his transgressions unto the comprehension of theology. O Christ God, glory to Thee."

The meaning of this prayer is as follows: the Cross of Christ stood for a scale of justice between the two thieves: for one of them sank in to hell, dragged down by his blasphemous words; and the other, the wise thief, ascended into heaven, because of his repentance. The church fathers attempted to render tangible the thought of the unfaithful thief going to hell for his blasphemy through the just judgement of God (*the lower end of the bar*), and of the wise thief going to heaven for his repentance and his praise of God (*the upper end*).

Copied from <http://www.churchofthenativity.net/explain/crsmain.html>

*The Question & Answer below are reproduced from the webpage of the
Orthodox Church in America: www.oca.org
The author is Father John Matusiak.*

QUESTION:

Could you explain the symbolism of the [shape of] the Orthodox Cross?

ANSWER:

The significance of the three-bar cross is a simple one. The short bar on the top represents the sign that was placed on the cross which read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (in Latin the initials are "INRI"). The middle bar -- the longest -- is the bar upon which Our Lord's arms were stretched and nailed. The bottom bar is the footrest which supported Our Lord's body.

While many people popularly refer to this cross as a "Russian" cross, it actually predates the Christianization of Russia in 988 AD, although generally, in earlier depictions of the Crucifixion, the bottom bar is horizontal rather than angled. Very early depictions of the crucifixion, even those originating in Egypt, generally portray the triple bar cross. In certain parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the triple bar cross with a slanted footrest indicates that a given church is an Orthodox one, while a triple bar cross with a horizontal footrest indicates that a given church is a Byzantine Rite, or Greek Catholic, one.

Various reasons have been given for slanting the bottom bar. There is one tradition which states that, at the moment of His death, Our Lord's foot slipped and the footrest tilted. A highly symbolic interpretation states that the slanted bar refers to the thief crucified on Our Lord's right side -- the "Wise Thief" who repented -- who went to heaven and to the unrepentant thief crucified on Christ's left side who did not. Another explanation is that the slant is an attempt to depict that the footrest slanted downward, toward the viewer, albeit in a two, rather than three, dimensional form.

