

The Hand of Blessing

Commonly depicted in iconography is the right hand of Jesus raised in a sign of blessing. Since he does what Jesus does, the pastor makes the same gesture during the Liturgy to bless the congregation. This gesture is more than a symbol—it is a holy language. This small gesture preaches, teaches, and proclaims the heavenly reality of Christ’s mercy to his people. It does so in two ways.

1. *It spells out the name of Christ.*

In making this gesture, the fingers of the hand spell the Greek letters *IC XC*. These are the first and last letters of the name IHCOUXRICTOC (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός; “Jesus Christ”). Thus, the hand that blesses in such a manner reproduces the physical name of Jesus and places it upon the people. This is a reminder of the Christian’s status before God as a baptized child of God. For, in Baptism the name of Christ is put upon the Christian. Every subsequent placement of Christ’s name upon the people is a physical reminder of the baptismal reality in which the people now dwell.

2. *It conveys doctrinal truths.*

This gesture also serves as both “mini-teacher” and “mini-creed.” The three uplifted fingers (I, C, and C) depict the unity of God in the Holy Trinity. Additionally, the two fingers that come together (X) depict the Incarnation—the union of two natures (divine and human) in the person of Christ.

