

Iconographer hopes to make her church a centre for sacred art

IT'S a way that people have worshipped God for centuries – and Jackie Hunt believes it can help you too.

Painting and contemplating icons that show Jesus, the Virgin Mary, one of the apostles or saints is usually thought of as an Orthodox tradition. But Anglicans have always done it too.

Jackie, from St Peter's Church, Soberton, had studied art at university, and collected icons at home. But it wasn't until she signed up for a course in 2012 that she started painting them herself.

Now she's planning some sessions to help you learn how to paint icons in the traditional style, and using traditional materials.

"I'm an Anglican, but I enjoy Orthodox services, and I've always been fascinated by the history of how different strands of Christianity split," she said.

"We used to have a rich heritage of icons in this country. During the Reformation, most church art was destroyed, but we know from looking at surviving psalters and illustrated books that we too had a rich heritage of icon painting."

Jackie had struggled with her faith in her 20s, and called herself an atheist at one point. She lived in Swanmore and her children went to the C of E primary school there before she and Adrian moved to Soberton.

"I think I over-analysed things, and didn't trust myself to get close to God," she said. "But I discovered that painting icons was a great way to express faith. Icons



Jackie Hunt in her studio at the bottom of her Soberton garden

up along with seven others. We've learnt about the theology behind it, as well as the techniques involved.

"Now I am painting icons for myself and for others. Before I start, I always pray, and try to get to know something about the person I'm painting. It's a time when you can contemplate, reflect and draw nearer to the saint or person that you are painting."

"I like to paint in a Byzantine

style. She has also been involved in St Peter's in other ways. She leads St Peter's Rocs, the church's Sunday School, which regularly attracts a dozen or so children, and also served on the PCC and organised children's film club at church. She's a bell-ringer – ringing at Soberton, Swanmore, Shedfield and our cathedral over the past 10 years.

And she also volunteers once a month as a Street Pastor, helping those who have been out in pubs and clubs in the centre of Portsmouth.

She and her colleagues help people to get home safely, hand out flip-flops to those struggling with high heels, and monitor those who have been left on their own or are otherwise vulnerable.

"I've been doing it for four years and it's a really enriching experience," she said. "Every time I go out, I meet some amazing people."

"I often meet students who are concerned about their drunk friends, and the level of their concern is touching. It restores your faith in humanity."

"We always say we are doing what Jesus would have done in a similar situation. And if there is something like a fight happening, we will stand there and pray. We often discover that prayer is very powerful, and that potentially difficult situations are diffused."

Painting icons gave me insight into faith

my faith

Jackie Hunt would have called herself an atheist when she was younger. But learning how to paint icons has helped her to engage with faith. Now she'd like to teach you how to do it!

are like a window into a world that you can't see, and painting them gives you a better understanding of the mystery of faith."

Jackie had painted abstracts in oils since university, and had already worked in egg tempera – which is the long-lasting mixture of pigment and binding agent that enables icons to survive for centuries. She also has previous experience of working with gold in her art.

"One day, I just woke up and felt this calling to paint icons, as if everything I'd been doing before had led up to this," she said.

"An iconographer called Peter Murphy was leading a three-year course in Canterbury, so I signed

style, which is quite stylized and has been used for 1,400 years.

"Every crease of the clothes is significant – it is a way of painting with precision, and every part of the image is symbolic. Preparation of the boards that you paint on takes a long time in itself, so I might have a day of preparing boards, or a whole day of gilding on a series of icons."

Jackie works in a studio at the bottom of her garden, and she opens up her studio each summer so people can see how it's done.

She imports natural pigment from Italy and uses the same 23-carat gold for gilding that would have been used 1,400 years ago.



St Peter's Church, Soberton

Church to host icon courses this summer

JACKIE Hunt will be leading her icon-painting courses at St Peter's Church, Soberton, this summer for those who might be interested in learning how to do it themselves.

They will take place from May 9-13 and from July 25-29. Each course runs from a Monday to a Friday, between 10am and 5pm each day. The £200 fee includes all materials and teaching.

"Painting icons in church is an incredible experience, and I'm also keen for our beautiful churches to be used during the week," she said.

"I have a vision that St Peter's can be a centre for

sacred art, which will attract visitors who wouldn't normally come.

"I just want to spread the joy of icon painting, or of having one in your house. And this should lead into an exhibition in church of the icons that have been created."

Students on her course will learn how to gild using 23-carat gold and how to paint with egg tempera. At the end of the five days, each will be able to take home their own icon of the Virgin Mary.

To reserve your place, please contact Jackie Hunt on jack@swallow2.plus.com or 01489 878141.