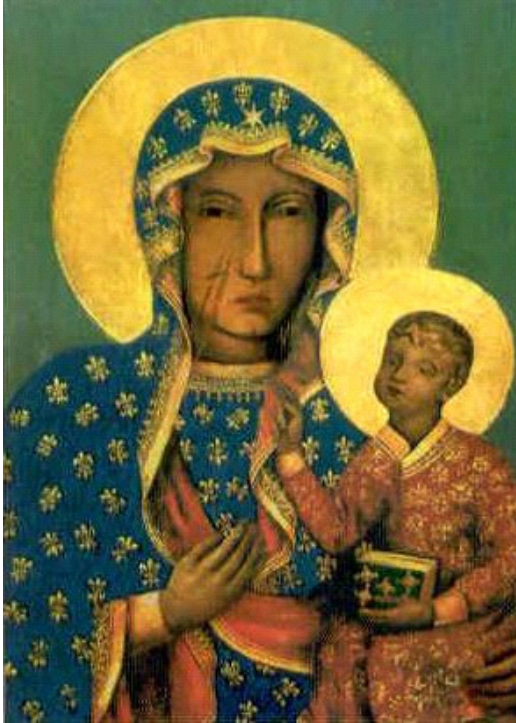


Encounters with Mary

Monday, May 18

7 pm in Church



Our Lady of Częstochowa

The Monastery of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, Poland, is the third-largest Catholic pilgrimage site in the world. Home to the beloved miraculous icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa, the monastery is also the national shrine of Poland and the center of Polish Catholicism.

According to tradition, the icon of Jasna Góra was painted by Luke the Evangelist on a tabletop built by Jesus himself, and the icon was discovered by St. Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine and collector of Christian relics in the Holy Land. The icon was enshrined in Constantinople for 500 years and eventually arrived in Poland in 1382.

In 1430, Hussites (pre-Reformation reformers) attacked the monastery, slashed the Virgin's face with a sword, and left it desecrated in a puddle of blood and mud. When the monks pulled the icon from the mud, a miraculous fountain appeared which they used to clean the painting. The icon was repainted in Krakow, but both the arrow mark and the gashes from the sword were left and remain clearly visible today.

The miracle for which the Black Madonna of Częstochowa is most famous occurred in 1655, when Swedish troops were about to invade Częstochowa. A group of Polish soldiers prayed fervently before the icon for deliverance, and the enemy retreated. As a result, King John Casimir declared Our Lady of Częstochowa "Queen of Poland". She has remained the symbol of religious and political liberty for the Polish people- Walesa wore a lapel pin of Our Lady of Częstochowa when he was leading the outlawed Solidarity movement and donated his 1983 Nobel Peace prize for these efforts the Virgin. Pope John Paul II, a native of Poland, was a fervent devotee of the Virgin Mary and of her icon at Częstochowa. As pope, he made four pilgrimages to pray before the Black Madonna, Pope Benedict XVI visited the shrine on May 26, 2006.