

of the *Canticle of Canticles*, " I am black but beautiful." The darkness is ascribed to various conditions, of which its age is primary. During its existence it was hidden for safekeeping in many places which were far from ideal for the storage of works of art; furthermore, countless candles were burned before it, causing it to be almost constantly embraced by smoke. Additionally, it was handled innumerable times, resulting in unintentional abuse.

Without the frame, the painting is approximately 19 inches high by about 13 inches wide and is almost a half inch thick. A cloth stretched across the back depicts scenes and designs representing the history of the painting and some of the miracles performed through the intercession of the Madonna.

The miracles attributed to Our Lady of Czestochowa are numerous and spectacular. The original accounts of these cures and miracles are preserved in the archives of the Pauline Fathers at Jasna Gora.

Papal recognition of the miraculous image was made by Pope Clement XI in 1717. The crown given to the image by the Pope was used in the first official coronation of the painting, but this symbol of Our Lady's Queenship, unfortunately, was stolen in 1909. The crown was replaced by one of gold encrusted with jewels, a gift of Pope Pius X.

Among the most distinguished visitors to the shrine can be counted Jan Casimir, King of Poland, who journeyed there in 1656. After placing his crown at the foot of the Virgin's altar he vowed, "I, Jan Casimir, King of Poland, take thee as Queen and Patroness of my kingdom; I put my people and my army under your protection..." May 3, the day on which this vow was made, was designated by Pope Pius XI as the feast of Mary under the title "Queen of Poland."

In modern times, Pope John Paul II, a native son of Poland, prayed before the Madonna during his historic visit in 1979, several months after his election to the Chair of Peter. The Pope made another visit to Our Lady of Czestochowa in 1983 and again in 1991.

**(excerpted from Miraculous Images of Our Lady)*



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Our Lady of Czestochowa

Czestochowa, Poland

Date Unknown

Feast Day: May 3rd



**O Mary, our dear Lady of Czestochowa,
look graciously upon your children in this troubled and sinful world,
embrace us all in your loving and Motherly protection.
Protect our young from Godless ways;
assist our dear ones grown old with age to prepare for their journey home;
shield our defenseless unborn from the horrors of abortion,
and be our strength against all sin.
Spare your children from all hatred, discrimination and war.
Fill our hearts, our homes and our world with that peace and
love which comes only from your Son, whom you so tenderly embrace.
O, Queen and Mother, be our comfort and strength!
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.**

Our Lady of Czestochowa

*The origin of this miraculous image is unknown, but a charming legend has prevailed through the ages. It reveals that after the Crucifixion, when Our Lady moved to the home of St. John, she took with her a few personal belongings—among which was a table built by the Redeemer in the workshop of St. Joseph. When pious virgins of Jerusalem prevailed upon St. Luke to paint a portrait of the Mother of God, it was the top of this table that was used to memorialize her image. While applying his brush and paints, St. Luke listened carefully as the Mother of Jesus spoke of the life of her Son, facts which the Evangelist later recorded in his Gospel.

Legend also tells us that the painting remained in and around Jerusalem until it was discovered by St. Helena in the fourth century. Together with other sacred relics, the painting was transported to Constantinople where her son, Emperor Constantine the Great, erected a church for its enthronement.

The portrait of Mother and Child was revered by the people, but not so by the Saracen tribes who besieged the city. History records that during the siege the senators and citizens carried the precious image in procession through the streets and around the dikes. The Saracens are said to have been frightened by what they saw and fled in dismay.

Later, during the dreadful reign of Emperor Izauryr, who was embittered against holy objects and destroyed many by fire, the image was saved by his wife, the Empress Irene. She displayed remarkable cunning by hiding it in the palace of the Emperor—the very place where Our Lady's enemies would never think of searching for it.

The portrait remained in Constantinople for 500 years, until it became part of several dowries and eventually found its way to Russia and the region of Russia that later became Poland.

After the portrait came into the possession of Polish prince St. Ladislaus in the fifteenth century, it was installed in a special chamber of his castle at Belz. Soon afterward, when the castle was besieged by the Tartars, an enemy arrow entered the chapel through a window and struck the painting, inflicting a scar on the throat of the Blessed Virgin. The injury remains to this day, despite several attempts through the years to repair it.

Chroniclers tell us that St. Ladislaus determined to save the image from the repeated invasions of the Tartars by taking it to the more secure city of Opala, his birthplace. This journey took him through Czestochowa, where he decided to rest for the night. During this brief pause in their journey, the image was taken to Jasna Gora (meaning "bright hill"). There it was placed in a small wooden church named for the Assumption. The following morning, after the portrait was carefully replaced in its wagon, the horses refused to move. Accepting this as a heavenly sign that the portrait was to remain in Czestochowa, St. Ladislaus had the image solemnly returned to the Church of the Assumption. This occurred on August 26, 1382, a day still observed as the feast day of the painting. Since it was St. Ladislaus' wish to have the portrait guarded by the holiest of men, he ordered the building of a church and monastery for the Pauline Fathers, who have devoutly ensured the security of their charge for the last six centuries.

Having escaped the rampage of Emperor Izauryr, and damaged by a Tartar's arrow in the area of the Blessed Virgin's throat, the portrait was next placed in peril by the Hussites who embraced extravagant heresies. They invaded the monastery of the Pauline Fathers in 1430 and plundered the richly decorated sanctuary. Among the items stolen was the portrait of Our Lady. After placing it in a wagon the Hussites proceeded only a short distance before the horses refused to move. Recalling that a similar incident had occurred to Prince Ladislaus some 50 years before—and realizing that the portrait was the cause—the heretics threw it to the ground. It broke into three pieces. One of the robbers drew his sword, struck the image and inflicted two deep gashes. While preparing to inflict a third gash, he fell to the ground and writhed in agony until his death.

The two slashes on the cheek of the Blessed Virgin, together with the previous injury to the throat, have always reappeared—despite repeated attempts to repair them.

The portrait again faced danger in the year 1655. At that time 12,000 Swedes confronted the 300 men who were guarding the sanctuary. Though vastly outnumbered, Our Lady's defenders were successful in bitterly defeating the enemy. The following year, the Holy Virgin was acclaimed Queen of Poland.

Closer to our own time, on September 14, 1920, when the Russian army assembled at the River Vistula and prepared to invade Warsaw, the people had recourse to Our Lady. It is recorded that the following day, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Russian army quickly withdrew after the Image of Our Lady appeared in the clouds over the city. In Polish history this victory is known as the Miracle at the Vistula.

Unlike the Russian army, which failed to take the city, the Germans proved more successful in invading and capturing Poland. After they had claimed the city of Warsaw, one of Hitler's orders was the suspension of all pilgrimages. In a demonstration of love for Our Lady and their confidence in her protection, a half million Poles secretly journeyed to the sanctuary in defiance of Hitler's orders. Following the liberation of the nation in 1945, a million and a half people expressed their gratitude to the Madonna by praying before the miraculous image.

Twenty—eight years after the Russians' first attempt at capturing the city, they successfully took control of the entire nation in 1948. During that year more than 800,000 brave people pilgrimaged to the sanctuary on the feast of the Assumption, one of the three feast days of the portrait, even though they passed under the gaze of Communist soldiers who routinely patrolled the streets. Today, the people continue to honor their beloved portrait of the Madonna and Child, especially on August 26, the day that has been reserved for its celebration since the time of Prince Ladislaus.

Because of the dark coloration of the Madonna's face and hands, the image has been affectionately called the Black Madonna, a phrase reminiscent