

“CHRIST OF THE FRONTIER”

BY MELISSA STRICKLER, ARTIST

Immense and majestic, sacred and transforming, my prayer was, when I was creating Christ of the Frontier.

I see Christ in those four descriptive words and also feel they represent the spirit of Wyoming.

Our beloved state is rugged, and weather can be harsh. Over the years, I've had friends and family wonder why we chose to live here, until they came for a visit. They step out of the car, looking up at a clear sky, breathe in the fresh air and breathe out all the busyness of a life spent elsewhere. Suddenly the barren wide open spaces and the wind that tried to blow their car off the road seem almost charming. They have been transformed.

The Rt. Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler commissioned me

to create artwork for his Ordination and Consecration to be held on February 13, 2021. The Bishop-Elect asked for the art to represent Christ on the frontier. We discussed what needed to be included to represent Wyoming, and I then started sketching an image, fusing the holy with the wilderness.

Christ is the heart of the artwork, with God's ever-changing Western Sky in the background. Also included are the Grand Tetons, Bison in the grasslands, Sage with Indian Paint Brush and Eagle feathers –symbolic of connection with the Creator. Wyoming's natural resources are represented by the mining symbol in Christ's nimbus. There's a map of Wyoming in the foreground with the buttes, valleys, mountain ranges, lakes, rivers, roads, cities, and towns. As I collaged the map on the

panel, I imagined traveling those roads, visiting the towns and chatting with its locals. Lastly, in the lower left of the painting, it looks like a building that has seen better days, but this rustic landmark is significant to the Episcopal Church. The building is the Mission House, the oldest standing Episcopal Church in Wyoming. The stories the Mission House could tell if only the logs could talk. I encourage all who travel through the Wind River Indian Reservation to take time to visit this holy ground (Sacajewea Cemetery).

Christ of the Frontier is mixed media, a fusion of oil paint, 23kt gold, wood, paper, and prayers. Just as the Mission House still stands to tell a story of Christ on the frontier, I hope this Contemporary Icon tells a story of Christ with us here in Wyoming, transformed.

The painting symbolizes the Episcopal Church in Wyoming's "frontier" vision of the future – seeing the message of Christ taken to new "frontiers" of our hearts, our minds and our communities.

The painting includes numerous symbols of Wyoming, Native American spirituality and the Episcopal Church in Wyoming:

- Eagle feathers in Jesus' hand - representing holiness, and high honor, and a connection to the Creator.
- Western Sky - reflecting God's amazing daily canvas.
- Wyoming flora of Sage and Indian Paintbrush in Jesus' hand.
- The Grand Tetons Mountain Range.
- Pick and Shovel symbols in the nimbus (halo) – representing industry from Wyoming's natural resources (mining).
- Wyoming State Map (at Jesus' feet) - focusing on mountains, forests, grasslands, prairies, rivers, deserts, cities and towns.
- American Bison - silhouetted on the Wyoming State Flag and a sacred animal in the region.
- Mission House - the oldest standing Episcopal Church in Wyoming, located on the Wind River Reservation (near Sacajewea's gravesite).



Christ of the Frontier, 2021
Mixed media on wood
24 x 30 inches

Christ of the Frontier is an iconographic painting by artist Melissa Strickler of Lander, Wyoming, that was commissioned for the consecration service of The Rt. Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler, the 10th Bishop of Wyoming, at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Laramie. It is now hung in the Diocesan Office in Casper.

