

*Jonah*, by Lyuba Yatskiv

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [June 17, 2020](#) issue



(Used by permission of Lyuba Yatskiv)

Few biblical narratives deal with separation from God and from others in so vivid a way as the story of Jonah in the belly of the great fish, depicted in this wood panel painting by Lyuba Yatskiv. Yatskiv belongs to a circle of Ukrainian Greek Catholic artists from the city of Lviv in western Ukraine who are revitalizing the ancient art of icon making. They create their holy images using traditional techniques in a style that resonates with modern viewers. An anxiety-ridden Jonah dominates this claustrophobic, cruciform composition, but he is framed by depictions of liberation. Story boxes below show the reluctant prophet thrown into the mouth of the sea creature, his prayer for rescue, and his ultimate deliverance to take up the mission he was once eager to evade. Christ compared his Passion with Jonah's three-day ordeal; visual vignettes at the top illustrate the crucifixion, entombment, and descent into hell. Yatskiv reminds us that the story of Jonah is a tale of return to right relationship with God. The prophet's fetal crouch suggests the elderly do have the chance to return to the womb and be born again. *Jonah* is an artwork about

isolation, endured with hope—a fitting icon for this new era of lockdown and social distancing.