

Member Focus

by Patricia A. Baron



Drawing on FAITH

A fine arts degree with emphasis in illustration. Graduation from University of Kansas. Job in the “real” world. Jason Jenicke knew exactly where his life was headed until. . . .

“I never planned to paint for a living, let alone religious art. In fact, I had never painted until 1999 when I took a college-level life drawing class.”

That’s when Jason took his first life-changing step. “My teacher noticed my technique mimicked the Old Masters and suggested I consider switching my emphasis to painting.”

Taking her advice, he enrolled in a beginning art class which he dubs a “nightmare.” “The teacher should have been instructing more advanced students. I was frustrated and questioned my decision, but decided to take one more course.”

An abstract art class taught Jason how paint

works on canvas while another course, copying Old Masters, helped hone his technique. Even at this point, however, concentrating on spiritual art never entered his mind.

But while taking classes at St. Lawrence Catholic Campus Center, he started seeing a spiritual director, Mike Scherschligt. Jason recalls, “Mike was the first person who suggested I consider painting religious art as a livelihood. I just kind of laughed.”

Jason’s involvement at St. Lawrence led to his first commissioned piece, *Visitation*. “The Center’s director, Monsignor Vince Krische, had been waiting for an artist that could paint a piece that welcomed young people into the worship area.”

For six months, Jason worked part-time on the 6 x 4-foot portrait and admits, “I was just learning how to paint and often felt lost. A desire to see it completed, bolstered by lots of prayers and encouragement from family and friends, kept me going.”

For Jason, creating a historically and culturally accurate portrait proved his greatest challenge and biggest frustration since he had never seen the Holy Land. He remedied that situation during a 2005 trip and, as he puts it, “saw the country through the camera’s eye. I thought, ‘Wow, so this is what it looks like!’” Four thousand photos later, painting authentic landscapes is no longer a problem.

The Sermon on the Mount springs to life under Jason Jenicke’s skilled brush strokes.

Photos courtesy of Jason Jenicke.

Jason graduated in 2001 and in early 2002 started his own business, Divine Images. To supplement his income, he worked full-time at Hobby Lobby in the framing department and then as a manager.

While painting only part-time proved frustrating, he did complete *Madonna and Child*, *Coronation*, and *Last Supper*. Jason generously contributed pieces to various fundraisers including the Divine Wine Fest charity auction. "St. Lawrence Center holds an annual fundraiser and I donated the *Madonna and Child* original oil. Bidding got pretty heated until a priest jumped up, pointed repeatedly to his collar, and let everyone know 'he had to have the painting!' Bidding came to a halt."

Embarrassed, the priest later apologized realizing the oil would have brought more if bidding had continued. Father explained the portrait was a "bribe" promised to a young seminarian for completing school and entering the priesthood. He did, he is, and *Madonna and Child* now resides in the newly ordained priest's rectory.

Jason also contributed a limited edition, framed *Last Supper* print for a Support Our Seminarians' benefit. This time, bidding continued uninterrupted and the print sold for \$2,200. A framed black and white *Visitation* charcoal garnered \$2,400 at a St. James Academy fundraiser.

Although his work definitely generated interest, making a living painting still alluded Jason, that is until mid-2005 when an unlikely chain of events began opening doors. Jason describes the circumstances. "John Menghini serves on St. James Academy Board of Regents. He also supports the School of Faith, an area parish program that offers adult catechesis classes taught by St. Lawrence Center staff. Menghini shared with Mike Scherschligt, School of Faith director and my former college spiritual director, about his search for artists to create original artwork to fill 25 niches located throughout the recently constructed Catholic high school.

"Mike quickly responded that he knew just the person and set up a meeting. Ironically, Menghini had just read an article about my artwork in the *Leaven* diocesan newspaper."

At the meeting, Menghini described his artistic vision and asked Jason, "Can you do it?"

Without hesitation, Jason answered yes, but later doubts arose as he grasped the assignment's enormity (art for at least ten niches), and how long it would take while juggling a full-time job.



Voicing this concern, Jason still vividly recalls Menghini's reply, "Sounds like that Hobby Lobby job is getting in your way."

A job offer followed and Jason now works full-time for the School of Faith with a studio in St. James Academy. Already the *Joyful Mysteries*, *Sermon on the Mount*, and *Resurrection* grace the Academy's walls with the *Glorious Mysteries* and *Ascension* nearing completion.

As Jason's faith grew so did his art. "Things began happening when I finally told God 'it's all yours, I'm tired of stressing out.' He's provided far greater things than I could have ever imagined."

Like his parents, Wayne and Gerry, Jason grounds himself with daily Mass and rosary. "Witnessing my parents' lives always assured me that when you work hard and give your life to God good things happen."

Jason anticipates an exciting future. Besides ongoing Academy work, a possibility looms that the School of Faith will contract him out to create artwork for a new church in Silverthorne, Colorado. "It's an exciting opportunity," admits Jason. "Father John Kauffman plans to build the church around artwork depicting the Gospel of John. Before even approaching an architect, he wants to see charcoal concept sketches."

A secure income, with benefits, now allows Jason to create the religious art he so passionately loves. "I'm still adjusting to painting full-time, but I can't imagine doing anything else with my life." ■

Jason, his parents, and four siblings are members of St. Benedict 1685, Kansas City, Kansas. His mother, Gerry, shares that she and her husband met more than 40 years ago while participating in COF activities.

With *Resurrection's* charcoal rendering as reference, Jason adds finishing strokes to the canvas.