



Inv. no. B 426

JOAKIM SKOVGAARD (1856–1933)
JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, 1914
OIL ON CANVAS

133.5 X 140 CM

Joakim Skovgaard grew up in an artistic home with close ties to the Danish pastor and poet N.F.S. Grundtvig and his family and congregation at Vartov in Copenhagen. Although he preferred not to talk about his faith or Christianity in general, Skovgaard never hid the fact that he considered life as an artist a calling.¹ Through art he could express the word of God, and he duly created several works with biblical themes and subjects and carried out many large and extensive commissions for decorative art, including the exquisite frescoes in Viborg Cathedral created over the period 1901 to 1913.

The painting *Jesus in the Synagogue* is a preliminary work made in preparation for the altarpiece *Jesus Preaching in the Synagogue of Nazareth* in Herning Church in Jutland. The subject is a scene from chapter four of the Gospel of Luke where Jesus reads from the book of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in his childhood town of Nazareth. He goes on to tell the congregation that he is the Messiah who will

fulfil all prophecies and set the oppressed free. The assembly praises his words, but when he says that the word of God concerns everyone – and not just the people of Nazareth – they become enraged. They chase Jesus out of the town and try to kill him, but Jesus escapes by disappearing into the crowd.

Skovgaard has depicted the moment when Jesus closes the book and directs his attention to the assembled audience in the synagogue. He is placed in the centre of the picture between two pillars, wearing red robes and with a shining halo around his head, clear symbols of his divinity. The listeners face him with rapt attention, except for one man in the foreground who turns slightly towards us. His facial features correspond to those of Skovgaard's assistant at the time, Niels Larsen Stevns (1864–1941), who also carved the frame of the altarpiece.

¹ *Iben Overgaard, Jane Sandberg and Anne-Mette Villumsen (eds.): Joakim Skovgaard, Skovgaard Museet and Øregaard Museum, Viborg 2006, pp. 49–51.*

Published in:

Arbejder af professor Joakim Skovgaard : udstillede i Den Frie Udstilling fra 20-30. september 1923 og i Stockholm fra 9-31. oktober, Kunstforeningen, København 1923, cat.no. 80;

Joakim Skovgaard - katalog over udstilling arrangeret af Den Frie Udstilling : i anledning af kunstnerens 70-års fødselsdag, november 1926, [København 1926], cat.no. 128;

Erik Zahle: "Billedkunst" in *C.L. Davids Samling. Nogle Studier*, [1], København 1948, p. 209;

C.L. David: *C.L. Davids Samling*, København 1960, p. 29;

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