

Magnificat

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News from the
SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN
Star Route 1, Box 226
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

What Child Is This?

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord;
let us proclaim the present mystery
by which the partition has been broken
and the flaming sword withheld.

Now the cherubim shall let us all come to
the Tree of Life.
As for me, I am returning to the bliss of
Paradise
from which I had been banished by
disobedience.

Behold! The image of the Father and His
unchangeable eternity
has taken the form of a servant.
Without suffering He has come forth to
us from an all-pure Virgin
and yet He has remained unchanged.

He is true God as He was before,
and He has taken on Himself what He
had not been,
becoming man out of His love for all.

Therefore, let us raise our voices in
hymns, singing:
O God, born of a Virgin, have mercy on
us.

(from Christmas Vespers)

The mystery of Christmas lies at the very heart of Christian belief. It's message is wondrously beautiful and comforting, yet also something of a scandal and the source of controversy from the very beginning.

Through the disobedience of sin, humanity has estranged itself from God, and it is unable to break down the wall of separation its sinfulness has erected. Man has disfigured the image of God in which he had been created and excluded himself from the paradise of his original friendship with his Creator. Through his own efforts he is powerless to return. God, therefore, takes the initiative: He becomes human, suffers, dies, and rises from the dead, thereby freeing humanity from its slavery to sin and death, reconciling it to Himself and restoring its original divine image.

That God should become one of His own creatures is profoundly shocking. It upsets the neat little categories we so like to draw; moreover, it seems deeply offensive to our very concept of what God is. Indeed, it was largely for the "blasphemy" of making such an assertion that Jesus was crucified. The illogic of the proposition has caused scandal, even to some of His followers, in every age since.

Early in the fifth century, Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, refused to accord the Virgin Mary the title of *Theotokos*, or Mother of God, which had already enjoyed long use in popular devotion. Mary, he argued, was the mother of Christ's humanity, not His divinity, and, as such, she could at most be called the Mother of Christ. He also said that it was totally improper to say that God was ever two or three years old or, by extension, that a two or three year old child should ever be called God.

We are a community of men embracing the Evangelical Counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict. In our monastic community at Jacob's Falls on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula we devote ourselves to a regular life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

The council of bishops meeting at Ephesus in 431 AD, the third Ecumenical Council, declared to the contrary: **The Word was made flesh** (John 1:14). In Christ divinity and humanity were not in some loose association, but were bound together in one undivided person. Mary had born the Word of God made flesh; she was truly and fittingly to be called the Mother of God.

This unity of the divine and human in the person of Christ has ramifications far beyond titles of respect for His mother. By sharing the poverty of our humanity He offers us a share in the riches of His divinity. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich** (2 Cor. 8:9). Through our union with Christ we share in His glory. **The glory which You have given to Me I have given to them, that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us** (Jn. 17:22-23).

Reflecting on these and similar New Testament texts the Eastern Fathers came to the startling conclusion that if we are truly to **become partakers of the divine nature** (2 Pt. 1:4), we must become, in a certain sense, divine ourselves; we are destined to become by grace what God is by nature. Thus, St. Athanasius (died 373 AD) summed up the purpose of the Christmas mystery in his treatise *On the Incarnation*: "God became human that we might be made God."

This, again, is profoundly shocking to our narrow sensibilities. That men and women, who are flesh and blood and very much of this world, should be enabled to transcend their sinfulness and attain to divinity seems beyond comprehension and beyond all propriety.

Yet, such is the love and the mercy of God. So great is God's *philanthropia*, or love for mankind, that numerous Eastern writers - and a few from the West, as well - have speculated that, even if Mankind had not fallen, God would still have assumed the human condition out of sheer love. The incarnation should be seen as part of God's plan from the beginning and not merely a remedy for the Fall.

But, as it is, Man has fallen, and the Incarnation is not only an act of love but also an

act of salvation. In His person, both divine and human in nature, Christ Jesus has shown the true image of God in which we were created. By the saving events of His life, death, and resurrection He has set that image once again within our reach.

Christ, true God and true man, of one essence with the Father, unites the things of this world with the things of heaven. Having assumed a material body He has rendered all matter holy and returned the whole of creation to its original state of goodness. Thus, His Church has never hesitated to employ the things of this world in its worship and sacraments. As Christ once used the material flesh and blood of His body to effect for all time our salvation, so now, through the agency of His Church, material things - water, oil, bread, wine, human touch - can render that salvation present to us.

It has always been the genius of Byzantine worship to go beyond a bare narration of the event being celebrated. In poetry of venerable age and ravishing beauty the Eastern Church reflects on the many-faceted significance of the Christian mysteries. While commemorating and making present liturgically the events of Christ's human life, it is His divinity that she seeks most to convey.

In awe and gratitude we bow down before the God Who for our sake veils Himself in the tender flesh of the Infant, and we offer Him the one thing we have to give Him for His work of salvation - our humanity.

**O Christ, what shall we offer You
for Your coming on earth in our
humanity for our sake?**

**Every creature that has its being from
You gives thanks to You:
the angels offer hymns of praise, the
heavens give a star;
the Magi present their gifts and the
shepherds, their wonder;
the Earth provides a cave and the
wilderness, a manger.**

As for us, we offer a Virgin Mother.

**O God, Who are from all eternity, have
mercy on us.**

(from Christmas Vespers)

THEOTOKOS

What we give to God, unfailingly God gives back:

When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His Mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

(Jn. 19:26-27)

The churches that have remained faithful to the ancient heritage of the Christian East, in the manner of true beloved disciples of Christ, have always treasured the Lord's precious gift of His mother. In her they have recognized their true mother and have taken her unreservedly into their own homes.

In Byzantine worship Mary is not so much a special object of devotion as an all pervading presence. In every service there are prayers and hymns in her honor, commemorating her unique role in the working of our salvation. But the reverence shown her does not in any way overshadow worship of her Son; the Church knows Mary only in reference to Christ. With few exceptions she is always represented in the presence of Jesus, most often as the Infant she holds with tender affection and to Whom she gestures: indicating for us the Way. Even in services dedicated particularly to her honor, it is her motherhood of Christ that is extolled. Indeed, it is in recognition of just Who her Son is that we call her *Theotokos*, Mother of God.

The bond between mother and child is the strongest human tie imaginable. The child is formed from the very substance of its mother's body, and even after birth depends on her for nourishment. She cares for and protects the child, guides its first faltering steps, and teaches it to speak. The person the child becomes is, in many ways, intimately and decisively formed by its mother.

Mary stands in that relationship to the Man, Jesus Christ, Who is God. She is our most intimate link with Him, the source of what we have in common with Him: humanity, a human nature in a human body. By virtue of the

Incarnation, or enfleshment, of the Word of God, we esteem Mary above all other creatures.

The Eastern Church tends to apprehend the Incarnation - and the other Mysteries of the faith, as well - not in and of itself, which is incomprehensible to our limited human minds, but in the human events that surround it. Reflecting upon the fact that God the Word took flesh and came forth from the body of a woman, and that this same woman bathed, fondled, and caressed Him, held Him in her lap, and nursed Him at her breast, we cannot but wonder at the unsurpassed honor God has already bestowed on her. It is truly fitting that we should always be mindful of her when worshipping her Son.

Like the beloved disciple, we see her as our mother, not in the biological sense as she was to Christ Jesus, but in the nurturing and formative sense of model and guide. Mary is for us the foremost example of what it means to be Christian.

A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts that You sucked!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

(Lk. 11:27-28)

These verses from St. Luke's Gospel - along with the episode of Mary and Martha from the preceding chapter - are always read during the various Marian feasts in the Byzantine calendar. Mary is important to us as a model not so much in her biological relation to Christ, which remains eternally unique to her, but in her openness and fidelity to the will of God.

Mary's total and loving co-operation with God's plan, even when she found it incomprehensible (cf. Lk. 1:26-38), brought about the necessary condition for our salvation. Through our own hearing and keeping of God's word it will be brought to fulfillment. Like the other Mary, we must rest at the Lord's feet and listen to His teaching; like His mother, we must place ourselves in total service of His will and, in the way allotted to us, manifest Christ to the world.

Truly fitting is it to sing your praises,

O Theotokos:

the ever blessed and completely sinless one,

and the mother of our God!

You are more honorable than the Cherubim!

Beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim!

In virginity, you bore the Word of God;

O Mother of God, we extol you!



The Real Need

It had been a quiet afternoon in early summer, and - unusual for a lone young man - he seemed inclined to talk. He was pleasantly surprised to learn that we were a monastic community in the beginning stages of our growth. He had visited several monasteries in various places around the country and had always found his stays rewarding. He hoped to visit others in the future and was happy to know that there was one growing on the shore of Lake Superior; perhaps he would visit us one day. He congratulated us on our dedication and wished us well in our struggles. "The world needs more monasteries," he said.

Certainly, we agreed with him. We had come here not only for personal fulfillment - although the call to monastic life often does manifest itself as an intensely felt personal need - but also in the conviction that what we were doing would result in a positive benefit for the area and the whole world. But, we were well aware that this was an opinion that the world, itself, rarely shared.

Most people are fairly comfortable with the notion that monasteries were important in the past. The romantic image of the hooded monk in his bare cloister patiently copying books and keeping alive the light of learning and culture through the "dark ages" is familiar to everyone. Few would deny the necessity of the work these men - and women, too, for then as now there were as many, if not more, women monastics as men - had performed. But not many would be willing to admit that there was a crying need for monasteries today.

Yet, in some ways, our own age is one of the darkest the world has ever seen. For all our highly vaunted technological superiority and advancement, certain vital aspects of our culture are on the verge of guttering out. And what is most in need of preservation is the spirit of prayer and of unconditional dedication to God.

Monks totally dedicate themselves to God and incarnate that dedication in the varied aspects of their daily life. They take the Gospel seriously and strive to live the renunciations of wealth, sex, and power that Jesus counsels (cf. Mt. 19: 12, 21, 29; Lk. 9:23; etc.). In their monasteries, they seek to live as the first Christian community in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37), and they organize the rhythms of their day so that they might, in so far as is possible to them, carry out the Biblical injunction to pray constantly (cf. Lk. 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; etc.).

They do not feel themselves better than their fellows - they are well aware of their own sinfulness - but they do withdraw from the press and din of society that they might more effectively seek holiness in silence and peace, among like minded people and surrounded by the beauty and power of God's creation. Theirs is a hidden life, in that it is beyond the gaze of most people, but there is nothing very secret about it, for all of that. It is, quite simply, the Christian life, completely lived, from its roots to its furthest ramifications.

Monks see their life as something infinitely precious, the pearl of great price for which they have given up everything else. As such, they zealously guard it, lest it be corrupted in any way, but they do not hoard it. From the very





At Jacob's Falls we strive to en flesh the Gospel in a family life guided by the Rule of St. Benedict and the Eastern Christian tradition. We spend several hours each day in formal worship and find time for private prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading, as well. For the rest, we labor at the necessary tasks and work for the support of our monastery, frequently pausing to wonder at the numinous beauty our site on the shore of Lake Superior affords us.

beginning monks have extended their customary hospitality to those who have come to them seeking peace and a prayerful atmosphere. Even today, in this most worldly of times, monastery guest houses are often filled to overflowing, and a dwindling corps of monks finds itself hard pressed to meet the needs of the many who come seeking what the world cannot provide...

He gathered up his purchases and left. Our eyes followed him as he climbed into his late model sports car and drove off. In the quiet, we pondered our own small numbers and mused for a moment on this unattached young man who was so enthusiastic about visiting monasteries. We could not but agree with his assertion that the world needed more monasteries, but, in the silence of our heart, we thought: "What is needed rather is more monks!"

Monasteries are not mere collections of buildings, nor are they public service institutions that can be had for a price. Monasteries are loving families of men or women, totally committed to a common evangelical vision which they strive to make incarnate in every aspect of their daily life. As such, they are precious beyond all measure.

Through our newsletter, **Magnificat**, we share aspects of our life with those who wish to hear. Our guest facilities are still very limited, but we are able to accomodate a small number of retreatants during the spring and fall months. For serious aspirants, we can make accomodations at other times, as well.

To men seeking our life and free to make it their own, we always say: "**Come and see!**"

Write:

Brother Peter
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The Holy Endeavor

Entering our twelfth winter of community life by the shore of Lake Superior, we find ourselves abundantly blessed in ways we would not have dreamed even a year ago.

Our numbers remain stable at fifty percent larger than in years past, we continue to get inquiries from many good potential candidates, and our business, both at the Jampot and through the mail has again shown a healthy rate of growth. But in the area of our relationship with the larger Church the current blessings go beyond all expectations.

Our deepening association with Holy Transfiguration Monastery places us on a track toward the Canonical status which had so long eluded us. Moreover, in the Byzantine Catholic Church we integrate ourselves into a spiritual tradition in which monasticism has played a formative role and whose hierarchy recognizes its value even in these hyperactive and pragmatic times. We thank God humbly for the kindness, recognition, and understanding shown us by all with whom we have conferred during the past year.

Most of all, we thank Him beyond all measure for the splendid manner of worship into which He has led us. Our implementation of the Byzantine Divine Office has brought with it a new enthusiasm and zeal for formal prayer, and a deeper understanding of the Church as a worshipping community. We long for the day when we may have Divine Liturgy here on a regular basis so that our liturgical life may be complete.

We have often asked your prayers in the past, and we know that many of you persevere in prayer on our behalf, as we do for you. The past year has seen many of those prayers - both yours and ours - answered. The Lord has brought us to a good place upon which to build.

Now, build we must, and we again ask your help.

A monastery is not merely buildings, but buildings are, none the less, necessary for its life. Like everyone else, monks must have places in which to live and work. They also must have a

place set aside exclusively for their worship of God, which is their reason for coming together as a monastery in the first place; and this house of worship should be large enough to accommodate a modest number of other worshipers, as well. Likewise, since hospitality to visitors is a prime mark of the monastic life, a house for the many who would like to come is also necessary.

At present, we possess these structures in only a rudimentary fashion. In every area we are woefully lacking.

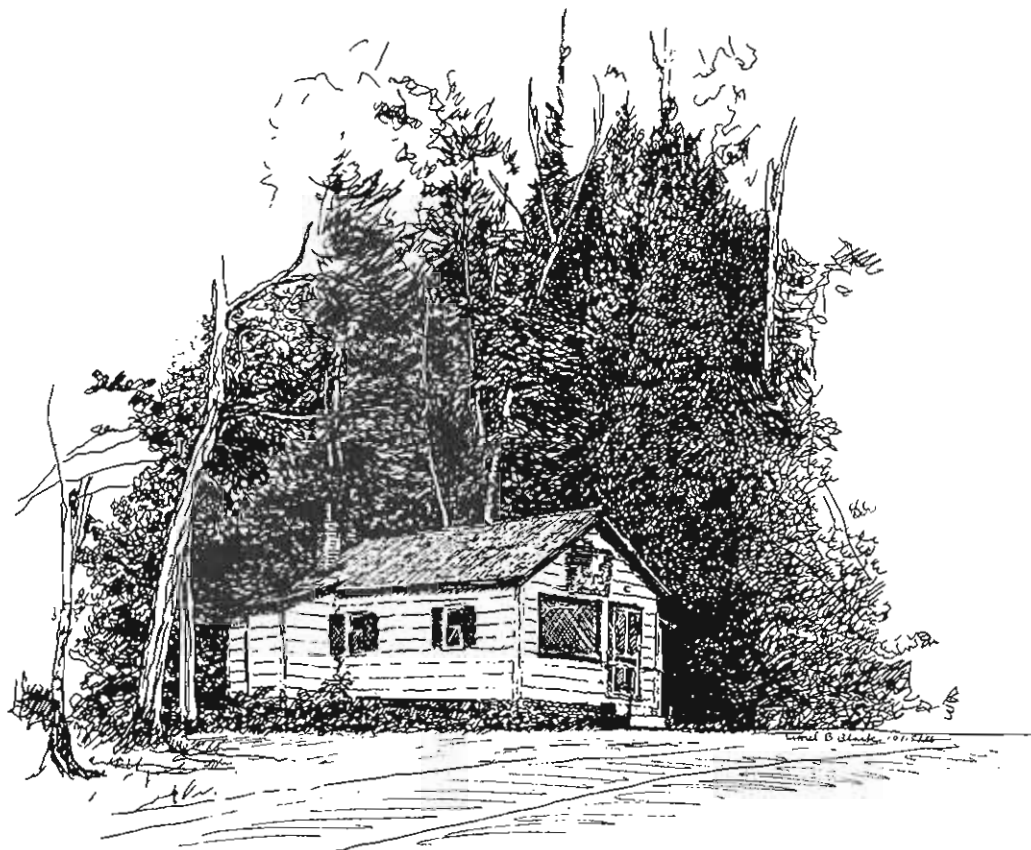
But it is for our worship, the central aspect of our life, that we most feel the need. Our current Chapel, while not without its charms - with the help of many generous people, we have over the years made it into a beautiful little space - shares the same room as our kitchen! It must, as soon as possible, be replaced with a true monastery church, properly arranged and outfitted for the worthy celebration of the Lord's mysteries.

We have devoted much time, effort, and expense to design work these past several years, and we are pleased with the results. While some difficulties have still to be resolved, we feel the proposed buildings will be truly worthy of their purposes. We will have drawings for you in our next issue.

Meanwhile, we need your immediate help. The cost of these buildings will not be small, and we plan to begin construction during the coming year. Your gift now is vital for making this timetable possible.

The building of this monastery is no small task, but it is one to which we have devoted the totality of our lives these past eleven years. It is a vast undertaking which holds untold rewards both in this life and the next. We beg you join us in the holy endeavor

The Society of St. John is an Ecclesiastical Corporation in the State of Michigan and is tax exempt under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions toward its survival and growth are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



From the Jampot for the Holidays

The past season was the best the Jampot has ever seen.

Cool, wet days in early summer kept the number of visitors down and business got off to a slower than usual start. But the rainy weather in June and July proved a true blessing in that it resulted in a record breaking berry crop which allowed us to keep the Jampot stocked with more than fifty varieties of our **Poorrock Abbey** preserves through out the summer. The only problem was that we did not have enough counter space to display all the jam at once!

Best of all, conditions were ideal for the **Thimbleberry** for which our area is so justly famous. This unique and highly prized wild cousin of the raspberry has been relatively scarce in recent years due to an infestation by a parasitic wasp and unusually dry summers. While the wasp was still with us, the drought's end resulted in the best thimbleberry crop we have seen in many years. We are pleased to extend its availability to our readers.

This summer saw a major improvement in customer convenience at the Jampot in the form of a new parking area. Work progressed off and on throughout the summer and was complete by Labor Day, just in time for the many mobile homes and tour busses that Autumn brings.

Temperatures remained cool, but the rainfall moderated in midsummer and business resumed its normal busy summer pace. Sales were up substantially in September and October, aided, perhaps, by our new parking lot and a delayed color season, and we finished the season with a modest increase over all.

Now, as the year descends into winter, the season's production is finished, and we stand ready to fill your holiday needs.

The bountiful harvest with which the Lord graced our land this year allows us to offer the following items from our Autumn selection for your personal enjoyment or gift-giving pleasure this Holiday Season

Share the Joy

In the events of the past year we can see nothing but blessings for this little community gathered together in the Lord's name. In a way we could not have foreseen, He has brought abundant fruit from the struggles and frustrations of the preceding ten years. The turning point predicted little more than a year ago has come to pass in a most thorough and astonishing manner.

This is only the beginning; it is no time for self-congratulation or rest. We have lifetimes of work ahead of us in making the vision a reality, and we cannot predict the struggles and suffering that lie ahead. Yet, we feel at this moment a deep and abiding joy. It is a joy we wish to share.

Magnificat is our way of sharing the blessings of our life with you. Our facilities are still meager, and few are able as yet to share in our life through a retreat. Nor is it possible to convey much of what we feel and believe to the many people we meet each summer; the ever increasing crowds allow little time for talk, and

spiritual truths seem not to pass well across a sales counter. So these pages remain our best way of explaining our reasons for the joy that is within us.

Magnificat is our principal organ of outreach, our voice to the world. We do not think of it as journalism, but as ministry, and, as such, it consumes a large part of our time and effort. It has also become expensive; printing and mailing costs loom large in our budget each year.

This issue goes out to more than 17,000 people. We have resisted temptations over the years to cut the list, and each year it grows. We do not know most of the people we reach through this apostolate; less than one in ten respond. But we remain convinced of its importance and are resolved to continue.

To do so, we need your help. We do not accept advertising; your generosity is the only thing that makes this ministry possible.

Please, help us share the joy.

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