

# Magnificat

Volume XIV  
Number 2

News from  
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE  
Courtesy of Poorrock Abbey Publishing  
Society of Saint John  
Star Route 1, Box 226  
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950  
<http://www.societystjohn.com>

Advent  
1998

## Prepare the Feast!

The Churches of the Byzantine tradition begin their preparation for Christmas in mid-November. For the next forty days their ancient discipline prescribes a fast of increasing severity which culminates on Christmas Eve. Along with the many prefestive references to the Nativity that grace the Office and Liturgy, this "Little Lent" helps keep the faithful mindful of the true cause of the coming celebration and of the necessity of spiritual preparedness before all else.

Sadly, even among otherwise zealous Eastern Christians, this fast is largely neglected in this country. Caught up in the frantic rush of physical preparations for family celebrations, or enmeshed in social situations which seize on any occasion for indulgence, most seem to forget the central importance of preparing themselves. This is a loss, not only for those who are neglecting what is a valuable religious heritage and an annual opportunity for spiritual growth, but also for our society in general.

We live in a culture largely devoid of spiritual values and obsessed with premature gratification. In the face of such a deep

problem and the many social ills it brings on, the observance of an ancient fasting discipline would seem a small matter.

Yet, those who are found faithful in small matters are more likely to be faithful in great ones, and our witness in the little things of life can have a strong impact on others. Our society is in desperate need of conversion, and conversion is accomplished in the hearts and minds of individuals, beginning with each of us and those whom our lives touch.

So, as we make our various preparations during these coming weeks, let us keep mindful of the true cause of our celebration. While taking care of the many external requirements of the coming festivities, let us not forget to prepare ourselves on the inside. Observing the pre-Christmas fast brings real benefits. A purposefully disciplined time of approach to the Holy Day will make our ultimate rejoicing all the greater and will help provide a strong Christian witness to our families and friends, alike.

God grant us all a truly blessed Christmas!

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparch of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropoly in the United States of America, which is in union with the Pope of Rome, supreme pastor of the universal Church. We embrace Evangelical poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability of life, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the traditions of the Christian East. In our skete at Jacob's Falls, on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, we devote ourselves to a common life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

# The Twelfth Day

*On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...*

The familiar carol recalls former, happier days, in the history of Western culture, when the celebration of our Lord's coming extended throughout the twelve days between Christmas and Theophany (Epiphany). This prolonged celebration is still found in the Christian East. Indeed, the two feasts are, in fact, celebrations of different instances of the same truth.

Originally there was but one feast, Theophany, on January sixth. The name means the manifestation of God, and the celebration concerned various ways in which God had manifested Himself to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. The feast recalled Jesus' birth, the acknowledgement of His kingship and divinity by the Magi, His baptism in the Jordan by John, and the working of His first miracle at the wedding in Cana. The matter for celebration was not so much the events, themselves, as what they proclaimed to the world about the person of Jesus.

During the Fourth Century, beginning at Rome, but soon spreading to the East, Jesus' birth came to be celebrated separately. This was possibly in response to certain heresies that denied His divinity outright or asserted that His divinity was not innate but was somehow acquired at the time of His baptism, that He was adopted, rather than born, Son of God. In those days, long before the advent of the printing press and general literacy, liturgical celebration and the attendant preaching were the Church's most effective way of spreading and preserving the faith. In any case, concentrating on one illustrative event tended to make the message stronger, and two feasts provided the opportunity to say it twice:

In the person of Jesus, God has become man, and the whole universe can never be the same. In Him our human nature is renewed, and the whole of creation -- which from the beginning God saw was very good -- has become capable of mediating the divine.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the regenerating power of the waters of Baptism. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, a symbolic washing away of past sins as an encouragement to make a new start. Because of the Incarnation, Christian Baptism is a rite of a different sort, a Mystery that brings about what it symbolizes. In its waters our former selves die with Christ and we are born again, living now in the risen Lord, as members of His Body, the Church.

For this reason, the Byzantine tradition continues to consider Theophany, in which it recalls Christ's baptism, the greater of the two feasts. Christmas recalls Christ's birth on earth; Theophany celebrates the effects of His birth. In former times Theophany, because of its association with Christ's own baptism, was a major day for baptizing catechumens; from this derives the Great Blessing of Water that characterizes the feast today.

The water blessed in church which the faithful carry back to their homes; the blessing of springs, rivers, wells, and other sources of water that they may be wholesome and life-giving to all who partake of them; and the blessing of the homes and work places of the faithful, themselves; all serve to unite the various aspects of daily life to the mystery of Christ's incarnation.

Thus, through her rites, the Church continues to proclaim, in a most visceral manner, the good news of God's coming among us.



## Phase II, Still to Come

This past winter, after numerous delays and setbacks, Phase I of our building program was brought to completion. This has been a cause of great joy for us. The new spaces -- and the alterations they made possible in the older buildings -- have allowed for a more efficient and smoother living of our monastic life of liturgical prayer, meditation, work, and study. In particular, the renovations and changes made to the temporary chapel and sacristy in our oldest buildings have proved a great blessing. Liturgical prayer can now proceed without domestic disruption, and the new iconostasis has, at last, rendered the old schoolhouse a fitting place for the Divine Liturgy, which, through the infinite and astounding mercy of God, we can now begin to celebrate daily. To all those whose help, expertise, and generosity have brought us thus far we are deeply grateful; we remember them daily in our prayers.

But we cannot rest here. While representing a vast improvement over what has gone before, the current situation is in no way a complete solution to our problems. Our building program was conceived to provide a very basic small monastery, equipped with the minimum spaces required for the living of regular monastic life. The space gained by the completion of Phase I of the plan represents slightly less than half of the total. Moreover, the spaces to be completed in Phase II constitute the heart of the monastery.

Principal among these is the new Chapel with its vestibule and sacristy. Encompassing more than 1600 square feet, this represents a threefold increase in the monastery's worship space. It will accommodate twelve monks in its choir and will allow room for about thirty visitors and guests. Its vestibule and public entry will allow easy access for visitors with minimal disruption to the community life.

Many people, on seeing the architect's rendering of the new building in the Jampot this summer and fall, have remarked how beautiful the structure will be. This in itself is very important. A house of worship shelters and provides focus to the most important of all human activities: the praise of God. It is fitting that it should be well made and beautiful, testifying to the importance of its purpose and to the nature of the community that worships there.

Based on a design common to many rustic wooden churches in Western Ukraine, the new Chapel, with its soaring onion dome fulfills this purpose admirably. Its cedar-clad exterior will harmonize well with its natural surroundings and will clearly proclaim the religious heritage of this monastery. While not overly large, its lofty interior will provide a spacious, functional, and inspiring environment for this monastery's daily round of liturgical prayer. With its public entrance and vestibule, separate from the monastic cloister, it should also encourage more people to join us for services or to drop in and spend some quiet moments in prayer. Thus, the new Chapel will be a spiritual resource not only for the monks, but also for local residents and for visitors to our area.

As the new Chapel will enhance the liturgical life of the community, so the new library will provide for the intellectual growth of the monks. In the Holy Rule, St. Benedict often describes the monastery as a school where we learn the love of the Lord. As it turns out, there are many other things to be learned as well, and many of those things can be found in books. Our collection of several thousand volumes is presently boxed up and stored in our warehouse for lack of space elsewhere. With about a thousand square feet devoted to Library and Scriptorium, the new building



*The architect's perspective view is taken from the south-east and prominently illustrates the building's most imposing -- and most important -- feature, the domed chapel with its vestibule in the lower domed wing to the left. To the right of the chapel's apse can be seen the first and second floor library windows on the east face of the structure with one of the dormitory dormers above. The tower provides emergency egress from the upper floors as well as a mount for bells. On the extreme right one can see the low gable of the old one room schoolhouse that currently serves as our chapel.*

will allow for the shelving -- and, therefore, accessibility -- of the monastery's increasing collection of books and provide a quiet haven for the study which also must be an important part of the monastic life.

Also included in the new areas to be completed in Phase II of the plan are a dormitory to accommodate twelve monks, twice the capacity of our present dormitory, and a refectory where the monks may take their meals in silence while listening to appropriate readings. Completion of these new spaces will allow renovation of existing spaces for other

necessary purposes. Thus, with some minor alterations, the current dormitory will become a vestry for the storage of the monks' clothing, and the temporary chapel will be used as a parlor for the reception of visitors and guests who are never lacking at a monastery.

These spaces are not frills; they are vital to the proper functioning of any monastery. We pray we will be able to undertake their construction soon. We beg the Lord Jesus, in His loving providence, raise up the generosity among His holy ones that will make this miracle possible.

# Paying the Price

Some years ago, a priest who was here on retreat described monastic life to us as a perpetual vacation where the big challenge was how to make good use of all the available time. At the time, we wondered which monastery he had ever lived in, and now, from the vantage of many years of eighteen and twenty hour days, the very idea still brings a chuckle. So, too, do the occasional letters we get from people who plan to take up monastic life when they retire...

Make no mistake about it, monastic life, at least in this monastery, is neither retirement nor vacation. Mostly it is hard work. Our sixty or seventy hours of income earning work each week during the summer, fall, and early winter, added to the four or five hours spent standing at prayer in Chapel each day, exact a heavy toll on our energy and strength. Certainly, falling asleep is never a problem!

Most would find this burden unbearable, yet, for the most part, we carry it joyfully. The price of our life here is very high, both in terms of what we must give up, and of what we must give of ourselves -- everything! We pay it gladly, for what we get in return is beyond all price.

We have found in the life of this tiny monastic community the inestimable treasure, the pearl of great price, for which we give all else: The Kingdom of Heaven, the salvation of our souls.

When we get down to the bottom of it, the monastic life is not an altogether altruistic endeavor. We do not embrace it primarily because we can thereby help others. We can, of course. We firmly believe that through our sacrifices and intercessory prayers we help many, indeed, the whole world, with their various needs; that, through our invocation of the Lord's bountiful mercy, the world is spared of God's just wrath and many are sped

toward salvation. But, if we believe that this is why we are monks, we delude ourselves.

The primary purpose of monastic life, indeed, of all life, is salvation, union with God. We embrace monasticism because we are convinced that this is the way for us to gain that salvation. Through the life of our monastery, God, in His great mercy, extends His infinite love, His divine life, toward us, wretched sinners though we are. In return, we surrender to Him the totality of our being.

This surrender must be total. We can set no conditions, nor can we hold anything back. God offers to us His very life, the greatest possible treasure; in joy we return to Him all we have and are. What we receive in return is infinitely greater than what we can give.

None of this comes instantly, of course. Our total surrender must be ongoing and permanent. We must make it in faith, blindly, with no guarantee as to when or how the gift will come. There are often periods of darkness, moments of anguish amid the general weariness. How paltry they are, when compared with what He endured for us. Just as often, He consoles us with glimpses of His glory, foretastes of the bliss to come. We know that, despite our shortcomings and weakness, He remains faithful to His promise.

For the one called to it, the monastery is the gateway to heaven. The gate is necessarily narrow and the approach difficult, but those who persevere to the end surely gain entry.

For further information on the life of this monastery and the possibility of arranging a visit, men who are free to make the total surrender may write:

Father Basil  
 Holy Transfiguration Skete  
 Star Route 1, Box 226  
 Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

## From the Jampot



Our hot, dry summer turned into a wet, though not overly cool, fall. This season's colors were less fiery than usual. Unusually rich and deep, with antique gold, russet, and burgundy, they were truly spectacular in their own way, particularly on those occasions when the sun broke through. Despite the fairly constant rain, there were many visitors to our area, and Jampot remained busy throughout the season. The first Saturday in October again proved the busiest day of the year, and, by the time of our closing on October seventeenth, the year's sales had shown a modest increase over the year before.

We now stand ready to provide, via mail-order many outstanding items for your holiday enjoyment or gift-giving pleasure.

Our offerings for the holiday season are somewhat more streamlined than in the recent past. The changes reflect an in-depth reassessment of the inherent suitability of certain items for shipment and of our current productive capacity. Inevitably, this will cause some disappointment, which we regret, but we feel the changes are necessary and will result in a more satisfactory mail-order operation in general.

In addition, we have made a number of alterations in shipping procedures and improvements in packaging which will expedite the processing and handling of orders and better assure their safe and timely arrival at their destinations.

We are certain you will find many of the following offerings enticing. We look forward to serving you during this holiday season.



## The Time Draws Near

This year has been one of tremendous progress for this tiny monastery. We have seen the completion and occupancy of the first phase of our major building expansion. We have made improvements to our older buildings that have bettered our prayer life. We have finished another successful season with our business. And we know that yet a greater blessing is on the way.

But we cannot rest, we must continue to grow. It is imperative that we complete the building program as soon as possible. To do this, we must raise some \$500,000.00, a very large sum, indeed, one well beyond our immediate earning capacity.

Praise God! Through our own very hard work this summer and fall, and through the generosity of the nearly five hundred people who responded to our initial fund-raising letter, by late October we have reached nearly

twenty percent of that goal. We thank God for the generosity and favorable conditions that have made this possible.

We have still a very long way to go.

The annual payment on our mortgage is due shortly after the first of the year, some ten weeks hence. To be in a position to continue building in two or three years, we must reduce our indebtedness by half or more at that time. This will require more than double the funds currently on hand. Most of what we garner from this winter's mail-order season will have to be held to provide for our needs during the lean first half of the coming year.

Clearly, we need a miracle.

Through the generosity of His holy ones the Lord has worked such miracles for us in the past. We continue to trust in His loving providence and to wait upon His mercy.

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