

# Magnificat

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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:  
God, born of the Virgin, Have mercy on us.

From Christmas Vespers

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropolis 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.

# Beyond the Crèche

For most pious Christians in our culture the essence of Christmas seems to be centered in the familiar tableau deriving from Medieval Italy and popularized throughout western Europe by the mendicant preaching orders of the late Middle Ages: a figure of the Christ-child, lying in a manger, and surrounded by worshipful images of Mary and Joseph, various shepherds, the Magi, and an assortment of domestic animals. We, ourselves, have such a tableau, donated to us years ago by beloved friends, and we lovingly set it up every year for Christmas – although not in our Chapel. There certainly is no harm in this. Like the Christmas tree, it is traditional and contributes to the atmosphere of the celebration, and it does represent events narrated in the Christmas Gospels. But if we focus on it too narrowly, we run the risk of missing the point entirely.

Christmas is not a birthday party for Baby Jesus. There is, after all, no longer any Baby Jesus lying in the manger, there is only the Risen Lord gloriously reigning at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Nor is Christmas merely a solemn remembrance of the events surrounding His birth as Man. The significance of the Church's feasts lies not so much in recalling events, as in celebrating the mysteries those events, together with the Scriptures pertaining to them, make manifest.

Christmas/Theophany (in the Eastern tradition they actually comprise one feast of twelve days duration) is the celebration of our salvation and of its appearance in the world in the divine and human Person of Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Son and Word of God, consubstantial with the Father, took flesh and became man in the womb of the Virgin Mother for our salvation and for the redemption of the entire

world. This mystery, revealed to the Virgin at the time of the Annunciation (cf. Lk. 1:31-33), is manifested in the tender flesh of the Babe of Bethlehem. At His birth, it is intimated to humble shepherds and wise kings. John the Baptist, who rejoiced at it while still in his mother's womb (cf. Lk. 1:44), has it definitively made known to him by the Father's word and the descent of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 3:21f; Mt.3:16f; Mk. 1:10f) at His baptism in the Jordan. It becomes intimately known to us in celebrating the Feast.

This incarnation of the Word of God for our salvation is the cause of the shepherds' wonder, the Magi's homage, and the Angels' song. It is the cause of our joy as we listen to the Gospel narratives and the prophecies pointing to them, as we sing the mystic chants from ages past and reflect anew on this wondrous gift and what it means for us and for the whole world.

In the Person of Jesus Christ, God has entered and become part of His creation. In His loving condescension, He has become one of us. The relationship between God and Man, between God and the entire Universe, has been radically changed; nothing can ever be the same.

Therefore, as we, who so love this Feast, contemplate the birth of Christ and meditate upon the humility of its circumstances and the marvels that surround it, let us strive to be aware of what it is really all about. Let us thank God for His great and overflowing love manifested in this Holy Child in whom our human nature is wedded to the divine; let us strive to become worthy of this great gift so freely bestowed; let us mindfully join with the whole Church as she sings, together with all the Powers of Heaven, the wonders of God's love.



# The Face of God

**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father** (Jn. 14:9).

The many and profound implications of the Incarnation were not quickly grasped. The shepherds who gazed in wonder and the Magi who bore gifts could have realized only dimly – if at all – that, in the serene face of the Babe at Bethlehem, they were seeing the face of God. Indeed, it was only after the Resurrection – and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – that the Disciples who had lived so closely with Jesus during His earthly ministry began to understand just who He really was. So too, through trial and controversy during the ensuing centuries, the Church's understanding of this mystery, and of what it meant for the life and faith of believers, continued to grow. Thus it was, some seven hundred and fifty years after the Resurrection, that a right understanding of the Incarnation restored the holy images to the Eastern Church and intimately bound them to her life and worship for ages to come.

Imagery seems to have played some part in Christian life and worship from the very beginning – we find crude drawings and religious symbols in the Roman Catacombs and other early Christian sites – but the freedom of the Church in the early Fourth Century brought it into much greater prominence. Great churches were erected, often at Imperial expense, and these came to be elaborately decorated, with religious symbols cut into their stonework and scenes from the Bible covering their vast expanses of wall. In a society that used portraits of the Emperor as a focus for patriotism and political stability, it was perhaps inevitable that individual portraits of Christ and the saints would begin to appear and be used as a focus for prayer.

The Old Testament had been very explicit in forbidding the use of images in worship

(cf. Ex. 20:4). Decorating churches with religious symbols and Biblical scenes might be condoned, particularly because of the role they played in educating the faithful, but praying before images certainly smacked of idolatry.

The Fathers were of varying opinions on the matter. Most bishops, no doubt, exhibited a pastoral tolerance and saw the growing popular piety as good, a flowering of the faith among the people. While some felt that what was growing and flowering was not the true faith, but superstition and a relapse into idolatry, the veneration of icons continued to spread among the monks and the faithful and began to enter even into the public worship of the Church.

In 726 the Emperor Leo III published an edict declaring religious images to be idols and ordering them all to be removed from the Churches and destroyed. The decree met with resistance among the people, opposition from the Patriarch, and a protest from the Pope in Rome. But the Emperor was steadfast, and the decree was ruthlessly enforced and those who resisted were persecuted violently. Monks in particular were singled out because of their great devotion to the icons, and many monasteries were suppressed or destroyed.

Distant from Constantinople and outside the sway of Imperial power, the West largely escaped the persecution, but it raged on in the East for more than a hundred years. During a brief respite late in the eighth century, about three hundred bishops, with two Papal Legates to represent the Pope, assembled in council at Nicaea. This Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) restored the images to the churches and defined their rightful place in Christian piety, a definition adhered to by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches to this very day:



Holy images remind the faithful of the prototypes they represent; they lift up the minds and hearts of those who behold them with faith, and move them to prayer and veneration. This is not the adoration which is due to God alone, but a relative veneration or respect which ancient custom has accorded to holy things. Honor paid to an image passes to its prototype; one who venerates an image venerates the reality it depicts.

The century of Iconoclastic persecution left an indelible stamp on the Byzantine tradition. The love of religious imagery remains much stronger in the East than in the West, where the persecution had no effect. Moreover, the theological insights formulated by St. John Damascene, St. Theodore the Studite, and others in response to Iconoclasm have enriched our understanding of the effects of our Lord's Incarnation upon our world.

In Christ Jesus, God joined Himself to mankind, for our salvation. He accomplished that salvation through the suffering, death, and resurrection which He could endure only in the flesh since in His Divinity He was incapable of suffering. The material body of Jesus – matter – had become the vehicle of salvation. In Christ Jesus and in the Church which was the continuation of His life on earth – His body, St. Paul had called it (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12f., 27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22f.) – matter could still convey salvation and grace. This was the basis of the Church's entire Sacramental system, of which the proper use of icons was a part.

Jesus Christ was true God and true Man. His two natures, though distinct from one another, could not be separated. His Divinity was perfectly united to His Humanity; His human form gave His Divinity substance, made it visible and palpable. In depicting His human form, something of His Divinity was manifested, as well. The injunctions against religious images in the Old Testament were directed against idolatry (Ex. 20:4f.; 34:17; Deut. 5:7-9; 12:2f.)– which the veneration of images was not – and against attempting to portray Divinity which until the Incarnation had been invisible (cf. Deut. 4:15-18;

In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God.

St. John Damascene:  
On the Divine Images

cf. Ex. 33:20, Deut. 4:12). But in Christ the invisible had become visible; images depicting Him and, by extension, His Blessed Mother and the saints who had some share in His divine life, were permissible and, indeed salutary. They strengthened the faith and reaffirmed the truth of the Incarnation.

The resolution of these events of long ago and far away speak strongly to us today when Christianity is so often presented as merely a personal system of ethics, and so many professional theologians go to great pains to deny the Divinity of Christ and to “demythologize” the truth of His bodily resurrection. Praise God for His guidance of the Church through perilous times, for His continuing preservation of her immemorial beauty, and for His vouchsafing the remembrance of His union with us through the Holy Icons.

# Peace the World Cannot Give

When, in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we were asked how our prayer had changed in recent days, we could only reply: "In essence, not at all. It's more focussed, perhaps, more intense..., but we have always prayed for peace."

**In peace, let us pray to the Lord.**

**For the peace from on high and the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.**

**For peace in the whole world...**

Thrice daily, at Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy, the petitions of the Litany of Peace voice our ardent longing for peace. Peace is invoked upon those assembled for the various services throughout the day; it is requested privately in several of the priest's silent prayers at Divine Liturgy; and again publicly in the Prayer Behind the Ambon at Liturgy's close we pray:

**Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to the priests, to our nation under God, to our government, and to all your people.**

We beg peace for ourselves, for the Church, and for the whole world. Yet we remain painfully aware of just how elusive true peace actually is. Even in the absence of open warfare, we are still surrounded by strife, conflict, and turmoil. The world that rejected Christ, the Prince of Peace, two thousand years ago and rejects Him still has no peace to give.

But peace is essential to our relationship with God. We must be at peace with one another as we gather to worship (cf. Mt.

5:23-24), and peace must enfold our personal prayer. God will hear the prayers we offer in anxiety and turmoil, but will we hear His answer? The Liturgy bids us to "lay aside all earthly cares, so that we may welcome the King of All..." God comes to us in many ways each day. In the midst of all the noise around and within us, do we even notice?

The Christian, therefore, to the extent possible in his circumstances, should surround himself with peace and maintain peace within. How the world militates against this! A thousand cares and distractions pull at us and a constant din shatters our concentration. It has always been this way; monks have always felt the need to withdraw from the world.

The monastery seeks to be an island of peace amidst the churning waters of the world's stormy sea. At Jacob's Falls, despite the exigencies of our work and the early stage of our monastic life, we work toward realizing the ideal. We have no television and as a rule we do listen to radio; we receive no daily newspapers, although we do subscribe to some religious monthlies and weeklies that keep us abreast of matters that concern the faith; we do not engage in frivolous correspondence nor in idle conversation among ourselves. We strive to focus on prayer and contemplation, and the Lord has always let us know what is necessary and at the proper time.

May He always give us the means to maintain and increase the peace of this holy monastery that we, in turn, may continue without hindrance or distraction to invoke His peace upon you and upon the whole

Glory to God in the highest  
and peace on earth.

Today Bethlehem receives the One  
who at all times sits with the Father.

Today the angels  
sing the praises of the newborn Infant.

Glory to God in the Highest,  
and on earth, peace and good will to all.

From Matins of Christmas

# Building Towards Peace

Maintaining an inner peace is always a challenge. Temptation and distraction tug at our minds and hearts, seeking to pull them off center, to distort their focus, to divert them from the tasks at hand. This is obviously true in the fast lane of worldly life. The trials and cares of everyday living can sometimes be overwhelming, and we are simultaneously assailed by waves of unwanted information or enticements toward countless not so innocent diversions.

Monastery walls, be they of actual brick and mortar, or of separation, or of some disciplinary or spiritual restraint, are intended to protect the monk from such assault, so that he might devote himself entirely, body, mind, and soul, to the “higher” life of prayer and contemplation. Such is the ideal. But, as is the case with most ideals, it is more wishful thinking than actuality. Most of our distractions come from within ourselves; the cares and diversions of our own mind are often more than enough to overwhelm us; there is not a wall high enough or strong enough to protect us from the assaults we subject ourselves to.

It is the rare person, indeed, for whom mere seclusion is sufficient to insure recollection and inner peace. Moreover, the demands of survival, even in reduced circumstances, consume their share of time and bring their own set of sometimes overwhelming concerns. The romance of the hermit’s life soon wears thin, and the entire enterprise, more often than not, is doomed to failure.

Life in community has proven, down through the centuries, to be the more successful form of monasticism. With many hands to do the work, each one’s burden is lightened; the brothers are there for one another in times of temptation or trial; the discipline of prayer in common provides a

focus around which to build interior prayer and peace. Strong community life is by far the monk’s best protection from spiritual assault, be it from the world or from within.

Still, the surroundings are important. A quiet location away from society, with exposure to natural beauty and adequate space for an efficient and orderly life, are definite aids in achieving the strong community life that is so important to the monastic endeavor. Alone with his brothers in the quiet cloister or the hushed chapel, the monk may open himself up to God in the silence of his heart and devote his entire being to prayer and fervent intercession for the salvation of his soul and for the whole world.

We are still far from this idyllic picture. At this early stage of our existence, while our numbers are still small and so much is yet to be provided, it is very difficult to achieve a proper balance between prayer and work. Sometimes adjustments have to be made that would be unthinkable in a larger, longer established community. The limits of our facilities do not yet allow a total cloister, and there is often precious little time for private prayer and contemplation.

Over the years we have seen many candidates for our life have their fantasies and illusions shattered by the realities of our existence. They come, give the life a try without much enthusiasm, and, after two or three weeks, are disappointed that they have still found no peace...

We smile, shake our heads, and send them on their way. Not everyone is cut out to be a monk – particularly, it would seem, in this community. Still, we find it a little difficult to understand. We are hardly extraordinary people after all, and we have not found the life so difficult. Besides, it is so much better now than in the beginning.



When we first arrived at Jacob's Falls that late summer day some eighteen years ago and began sweeping the flies out of what was to become our Monastery, we had few illusions about what we were facing. We did not know the details of what lay in store, but we knew it would not be easy. The Lord had called us to build a monastery, of that we were certain; how or when it would be accomplished we did not know. As the difficulties mounted during the ensuing months and a very hard winter descended upon us, we tried to keep in mind our final communication with the aged priest who had been so supportive as we prepared to begin the endeavor and who had died just before our own departure from the world: **It is the Lord's work and He will have to do it.**

The Lord's work... The Lord would build the monastery, we had to be the monks; it might take some time, our task was to survive and persevere. We could not see what lay ahead, how we would be able to support ourselves, how we would pay off the land contract in three years, or, indeed, where the next payment was coming from. The Lord would have to see to all of that; meanwhile, we had water to haul, wood to fetch, prayers

to say. With no phone, a non-operable vehicle, and a heavy winter, we got our share of solitude. In the midst of all the trials and anxieties, somehow, there was peace.

We look back on those days now with a certain nostalgia. The trials and difficulties fade from memory, and only the beauty, excitement, and peace of those early days remain. They provided a valuable lesson in trust, and we see them as an important factor in forming the character of this monastery; we sometimes wonder how we might give our newer members a similar experience. But we know that everyone must come on board where we are at the time. As for trials and formative experiences, we know that these, too, the Lord will provide.

Certainly, He continues to provide much else.

The improbable business of picking berries and making jam that we undertook our first summer has grown steadily. After a shaky beginning and several years of consuming most of its return, it has adequately provided for our modest but increasing needs these past twelve or fifteen years. At a crucial turning point in our monastic growth

its surplus was sufficient to provide for the formational travel we, as a community, had to undertake. Despite having been deliberately scaled back twice in the past several years, it continues to do well, provides a bit more than what is strictly necessary, and keeps us very busy.

We also find ourselves surprisingly well known. Thousands of people pass through the doors of our shop each summer; circulation for *Magnificat* is now at about 28,000 thousand copies; and we continue to be written about in the press, most recently in upscale regional and travel magazines. We have done nothing to generate all this, other than do our work and live our life of prayer as best we can. Once, when asked quite seriously who our publicity agent was, we could only point Heavenward.

But it is in the buildings that most people see His Hand most evident. Looking back on it, the growth seems hard to believe. When we arrived in 1983, our Monastery consisted of two rooms comprising some 640 square feet. This more than doubled with the addition of a two-story dormitory building in 1986; three years later the room that now serves as our refectory added 350 square feet to the complex. The following year saw a new kitchen at the Jampot (720 square feet) and an addition and thorough remodeling of one of our guest cabins (200 square feet); a 4800 square foot warehouse came in 1996. Work resumed at the Monastery in 1997 with a kitchen and bath (1200 square feet) and the 2650 square foot basement for areas yet to come. This past winter 1100 square feet of parlor and entry way were added.

Thus, we have seen a ten fold growth at the Monastery

and a slightly greater increase in our work space since our arrival. This has all been far beyond our capacities and means. Certainly the Lord has been doing it. The growth has not been without its attendant trials and frustrations, of course, but we know that we grow from these, too, and we can see the Lord's work here, as well.

Each addition has brought us closer to a complete monastery. Each has, in its own way, brought a greater efficiency and order to our life, made it more possible to accomplish the tasks at hand, and deepened the silence of our cloister. With each one has come a greater awareness of the Lord's guiding hand, a heightened sense of His peace.

The biggest and most important addition is yet to come. The new Church, library, refectory, and dormitory will increase our living and worship space by an additional two thirds and bring our monastic buildings to completion. This will be the fulfillment of a long held dream, the discharging of a task incumbent upon us these past eighteen or more years. Truly, it will be a mercy and a source of peace.



# At Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is, of course an attitude that should be a constant in our lives. God has been generous and merciful to us all in countless ways, and it is incumbent upon us to always and everywhere to express our gratitude for His many blessings. Yet it is, indeed, worthwhile to set aside special times to recall these blessings and to voice our thanks.

It is indicative of the spirit in which our country was founded – and which, hopefully, recent events are leading us to recover – that we have a national holiday devoted especially to giving thanks. May we all celebrate it in a fashion worthy of its intent, each in our own way.

For many this means family gatherings, bringing together those whom circumstances have scattered to share a meal and renew the bonds of kinship and love. This is truly a beautiful thing. We trust

that, even if formal words of thanks are not pronounced, the Lord is pleased with the exercise and renewal of this great blessing. But the holiday, with all its blessings, also brings a certain danger.

Travel has always been dangerous, as we have recently been made so frightfully aware, and for that reason the Church from time long past has invoked the Lord's mercy upon travelers and offered up petitions for their safety and well being in her daily round of prayers. We continue to do so each day; we will be particularly fervent in our intercessions during the coming days and weeks when so many of our friends, patrons, and benefactors are on the road or in the air.

During this holiday season, know that our prayers for your safety go with you. May God protect you, fill you with every blessing, and grant you the fullness of His peace.

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE

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